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Contamination Running Deep: Oral Histories of Environmental Racism, Injustice, and Outrage of One Family in a Southern African-American Community

Deborah M. Dean

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CONTAMINATION RUNNING DEEP:
ORAL HISTORIES OF ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM, INJUSTICE, AND OUTRAGE OF ONE
FAMILY IN A SOUTHERN AFRICAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY

BY

DEBORAH M. DEAN

(Under the Direction of Ming Fang He)

ABSTRACT

This is an inquiry into oral histories of five members of my family that are residents of a southern African American community, Hyde Park located in Augusta, Georgia. These members of my family, Eunice Jordan, Sharon Wells, Ernest Jordan, DeWanna Jordan, and Darius Jordan, have endured the environmental contamination and social injustices. These family members are children and grandchildren of Willie and Lillian Wells who moved to Hyde Park in 1950 with the intention of living the "American Dream" and creating a legacy for future generations that began with owning their land and home. Since then the family has learned that they were exposed to toxic chemicals. After a highly publicized flood in October 1990, the residents of Hyde Park were devastated when they found that the toxic chemicals had contaminated the soil and water. My father Ernest Jordan was the first to sue the industrial company that contaminated the community. Ever since then they have been battling with local and state governments to relocate them. Instead of relocating the residents and cleaning up the Hyde Park, local and state governments spent millions of dollars on testing soil and water. To keep a majority black neighborhood in a confined area such as this is a form of oppression.

Theoretically drawing upon the works of Derrick Bell (1992), Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (2001), Gloria Ladson-Billings (2003), and Gloria Ladson-Billings and William F. Tate (2005) on critical race theory and methodologically upon the works of Richard Grele and Studs Terkel (1991), Donald Ritchie (2003), Thomas Charlton, Lois Myers, and Rebecca Sharpless (2006, 2007), Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (2008) on oral history. I explored the oral histories of five African American residents who have been exposed to environmental contaminants and compounded by the feelings of despair and helplessness. I also reflect on my life living in Hyde Park and the turmoil that has affected this community. I entwined songs and poems throughout my dissertation with the intent to connect the oral histories of the community's struggles with individual struggles against racism. These songs and poems aim to capture the emotions of what the residents were feeling as they live with the injustices that have permeated the soil, water, and air that they breathe. Although it has history rooted in the community activism and promise, Hyde Park has been plagued by sickness and uncertainties for their future. It is my hope that by telling the stories of these residents, societal norms will be reexamined and the realities of this community will be exposed. It is also my hope that educators take heed and find innovative methods to educate students that face similar circumstances in our society. Most importantly by acquiring such knowledge we will be able to develop a perception of justice and take a stand against oppressive policies.

INDEX WORDS: Critical race theory, African Americans, Environmental injustice, Environmental racism, Education, Oral history, Communities

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by

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University in
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

STATESBORO, GEORGIA

2011

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DEDICATION

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. --Philippians 4:13 (NKJV).

This has been a storm and the only way I could have made through this is by the strength of God. Through him all things are possible. Thank you for giving me the strength to endure this monumental task that I longed to complete. God you are my rock. The road was long and hard and as always you know you are truly blessed when God places people in your path to help you weather storms. I would like to thank and dedicate my research and work to you because without all your help I would not have accomplished this milestone in my life.

Eunice W. Jordan-My wonderful Mother, thanks for bringing me into this world and giving me the tools and upbringing to care about our future "the children" and their education. Your guidance in my life has always been a light that lead me in the right direction. Mom, without your spiritual and motherly guidance I wouldn't be where I am today. Most of all I would like to say I'm thankful that you "keep" everything... because you have blessed me with an abundance of history and research materials. You will always be the center of my life.

Tracy E. Dean – You have been my biggest supporter since we met. I couldn't have done this without you. Thanks for always being there for me. You are more than husband you are friend and my comforter. I'm thankful to have you by my side to cheerfully support me in all of my endeavors. Your reassurances were always welcomed. I love you and I'm truly grateful that God blessed me with you.

Aaron M. Dean – My world would be so empty without you. I thank God that he blessed me with such a loving son. I want you to always remember that you determine your path in life, no one else. Be blessed and always do what is right. Thank you for sharing your time with my studies; I am all yours, once again.

DeWanna L. Jordan-You know exactly when to call or send inspiration my way. When I'm feeling down you really know how to make me smile and get my mind back in the game. Thank you for your encouragement and your help with my research.

Ernest L. Jordan, Jr. - When I need some words of wisdom or comfort I can count on you to call to cheer me up. Thanks for being here for me when I asked you. Your stories have brought back some old memories of times that I had forgotten. You are the best and may God continue his blessings on you.

Darius L. Jordan - You are one in a million. I thank God for your caring and considerate spirit. It has been an inspiration for me to see you grow into adulthood and now you are giving me advice. Thanks for being there for me Darius.

Samantha R. Jordan - I cannot express the joy I have knowing that Darius has such a wonderful wife and friend. Keep up the great work and press forward.

Sharon D. Wells - The most caring person in the world. Thanks for going above and beyond. You are a true blessing to me and our family. Instead of me asking you for help you came to me and asked to help. I want to say thanks for your love and being my big sister.

Ernest L. Jordan, Sr.-Thank for introducing me to your first love, music. It has been my comforter and therapy since you made your transformation. You may be gone but

the songs that you loved so much fills me with wonderful memories of your passion and your love our family. I just hope I am still making you proud.

Willie and Lillian Wells- I always felt safe and secure at your house and now even in your absence I still have that sense of security. Because of you there is a place in my soul that knows that regardless of what obstacles I face you will always be there to guide me along.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to gracefully and humbly thank Dr. He, for her understanding and support. There were many times when I felt I couldn't go on and you gave me the encouragement to continue with my research from the beginning to the end. During my studies at Georgia Southern you stood out by showing me your passion in education to help me to believe what I was striving to complete. Dr. He, your advice and consistent support enable me to grow and learn as a critical thinker. You made me think outside of the box and I'll be internally grateful for all that you have inspired me to do. Also thank you for your understanding life problems. There will always be obstacles in life and I want to sincerely thank you for your patience and understanding.

Thanks to my committee members Dr. William Ayers, Dr. Mecca Williams-Johnson, and Dr. John Weaver, thank you for your advice and mentorship. The information and advice that you provided will be forever etched in my mind. The wisdom provided truly help me to grow and understand Curriculum Studies. I really appreciate you all taking the time out of your busy schedules to assist me in completing this major goal in my life; also I appreciate your commitment to education. Dr. Maqueta Griswold thank you for your time, encouragement, and support it was well appreciated. May God continue to bless you all.

To my students, thank you for making me laugh when I wanted to cry and for being concerned about my health. I want you to know that you all hold a special place in my heart. Continue to push forward and make your own path; let nothing or no one deter your dream.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	9
LIST OF TABLES.....	12
LIST OF FIGURES.....	13
PROLOGUE.....	14
CHAPTER	
1 AN ORAL HISTORY OF THE EFFECTS OF THE INDUSTRIAL AGE ON AN AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY: INTRODUCTION.....	23
Context of the Study.....	27
Key Research Issues.....	31
Autobiographical Roots of the Inquiry.....	35
Purpose of the Study.....	42
Challenges of the Study.....	46
Significance of Study.....	48
2 MAKING THE CONNECTION BETWEEN RACE, GENDER AND THE ENVIRONMENT: REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	54
Justice for the Environment.....	55
Justice and Society.....	58
Education for All.....	61
Communities of Color.....	65
A Woman’s Work.....	67
Seeing the World through a Women’s Eyes.....	70
A Place in the Environment.....	73

	The Mis-education of Hyde Park.....	75
	Oppression.....	79
3	EXPOSING THE MADNESS OF CONTAMINATION: METHODOLOGY.....	82
	Critical Race Theory.....	83
	Oral History.....	88
	Exemplary Oral History Texts.....	93
	Voices for Justice and Equality.....	98
4	POISONED GROUND: A WITCHES BREW OF RACE, HEALTH, AND THE ENVIRONMENT.....	100
	Poisoned Fruit.....	102
	Strange Fruit.....	114
5	OUR HISTORY: LIVES OF HYDE PARK RESIDENTS BEFORE AND AFTER THE CONTAMINATION.....	116
	Grandparents.....	119
	Eunice Jordan.....	122
	Sharon Wells.....	134
	Ernest Jordan.....	143
	DeWanna Jordan.....	150
	Darius Jordan.....	155
6	EXTENDING BEYOND OPPRESSION: REFLECTION OF INQUIRY.....	163
	EPILOGUE.....	183
	REFERENCES.....	187

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Health Complaints of Hyde Park.....	105
Table 2: Interview Log of participants.....	162

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Map of Hyde Park.....	18
Figure 2: Lawsuit filed against Southern Wood Piedmont.....	20
Figure 3: Protest pictures of residents.....	22
Figure 4: Article on health concerns.....	113
Figure 5: Hyde Park cartoon.....	115
Figure 6: Family tree.....	118
Figure 7: Grandparents.....	119
Figure 8: Eunice W. Jordan.....	122
Figure 9: Pre-K program brochure.....	132
Figure 10: Sharon D. Wells.....	134
Figure 11: Ernest L. Jordan, Jr.	143
Figure 12: DeWanna L. Jordan.....	150
Figure 13: Darius L. Jordan.....	155

PROLOGUE

When I graduated from college in the spring of 1988, there was a heart wrenching absence at the chapel, my grandfather, who once asked "you want to be a dummy?", referring to not going to college to further your education, because he knew that having an education afforded many opportunities in life that blacks were not entitled unless you had an education. I remember going to my grandparent's house and finding myself in the backyard looking at the pee-can and pear trees. The trees that he had tended for so many years...the trees that were absent of the fruit and nuts that we enjoyed. I remember thinking they would be back next year, well; the next year came and again nothing. I just assumed that the reason the pecan trees and the pear trees weren't bearing fruit was that 3 years after my grandfather's untimely death, the trees had stopped giving. I chalked it up to the great mystic force that 3 years after my grandfather's untimely death, the trees had stopped giving because he was no longer here to give. This is how I rationalized the absence of the fruit. But yet I had never been able to rationalize the death of my grandfather from pancreatic cancer. I would have never in my wildest dream thought that the two occurrences were more than just a mystic force or coincidence.

In 1990, it was discovered that toxins from local industry had saturated the soil and stunted the production of trees. The life we once knew in Hyde Park had come to an abrupt halt. Now I had a culprit to both the death of my grandfather, but also to the death of the pecan and pear trees. As I stand in the backyard of my grandparent's property today, I am now a giant towering over the overgrown weeds and grasses,

when it seems that only yesterday the trees were giant figures towering over me. My eyes fill with tears because so many lives have been lost to the toxic contamination in the community and the land that many worked so hard for is labeled as an environmental disaster. Not only is it a disaster, it is a disgrace.

The residents of Hyde Park had fought for so many years to build a community that was filled with hope, that overshadowed the most blatant forms of racism are now filled with another type of racism, environmental. Dr. Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr. coined the phrase "environmental racism" in 1987 to explain why so many communities of color have been victims of policies that have led to life-threatening situations for the residents. Environmental racism is explained as the policy that leads to the placing of hazardous industrial facilities strategically in communities of color Commission on Racial Justice, UCC (1987).

Since the discovery of the contamination, and the realization that racism has reared its ugly head again; I have lost many family and friends that lived in the community from diseases, mostly cancers that were a product of the contamination. Many children have been denied their childhood, not being able to play outside in their yards or play with the other children at the park. The local school board has moved the community school out of the neighborhood and the children are not getting the quality education they are entitled. Also, the elderly residents are left without a legacy of promise to pass to their children and grandchildren. The homes and land that they have worked to have and protect are being destroyed by no fault of theirs. As a human being I care, as a former resident of Hyde Park, I care, as an educator I care. A

community of caring is what I was raised in and a community of caring is needed to make a change in the predicament that the residents are facing. My passion for this study is sparked by the rage I feel in seeing Hyde Park becoming a wasteland and people dying from diseases that could have been prevented. But what most brings tears to my eyes is the absence of children laughing and playing, the absence of future generations who won't have the opportunities I had growing up. Their lives will not be whole and their education will not be fulfilling, they will have to struggle and this is not fair or justified. Ladson-Billings (1994) made this assertion

No challenge has been more daunting than that of improving the academic achievement of African American students. Burdened with a history that includes the denial of education, separate and unequal education, and regulation to unsafe, substandard inner-city schools, the quest for quality education remains an elusive dream for the African American community. (p. ix)

Illustration of events to fight for our lives

When major changes happen in a community and it is life threatening it leads to a chain of events. The pictures below identify the events that shape our fight for social justice. First looking at the map that display all of the potential danger surrounding our community made it unavoidable for some type of contamination to happen. Picture say a thousand words, when you can see the danger it make sense but when you can't see it then you are blindsided by what could happen. Now that I can see the closeness of the factory and realize how this could have happen.

So the community had to band together and fight the power of big business. They had the money and we had the words. My farther Mr. Ernest Jordan was a straight forward man. He always told me as the oldest stand up for what I believe in. He set the example to me by being the one to initiate the Law suit against Southern Wood Piedmont. This law suit started the cry for help and rallies the community together to give them one voice against big business with their big lawyers.

The Southern Wood Piedmont fought back and stated that our accusation were false so, it started another change of events the community picked the company where we knew our voices could be heard, in the street, at big events like the Master and on their Southern Piedmont property. We got the attention of many people however the fight is still not over. Justice is blind and our State, Local and Federal government has proven that if benefit them than they will make the change but if it is a low income neighborhood that don't have big lawyer to help them than they blow them off.

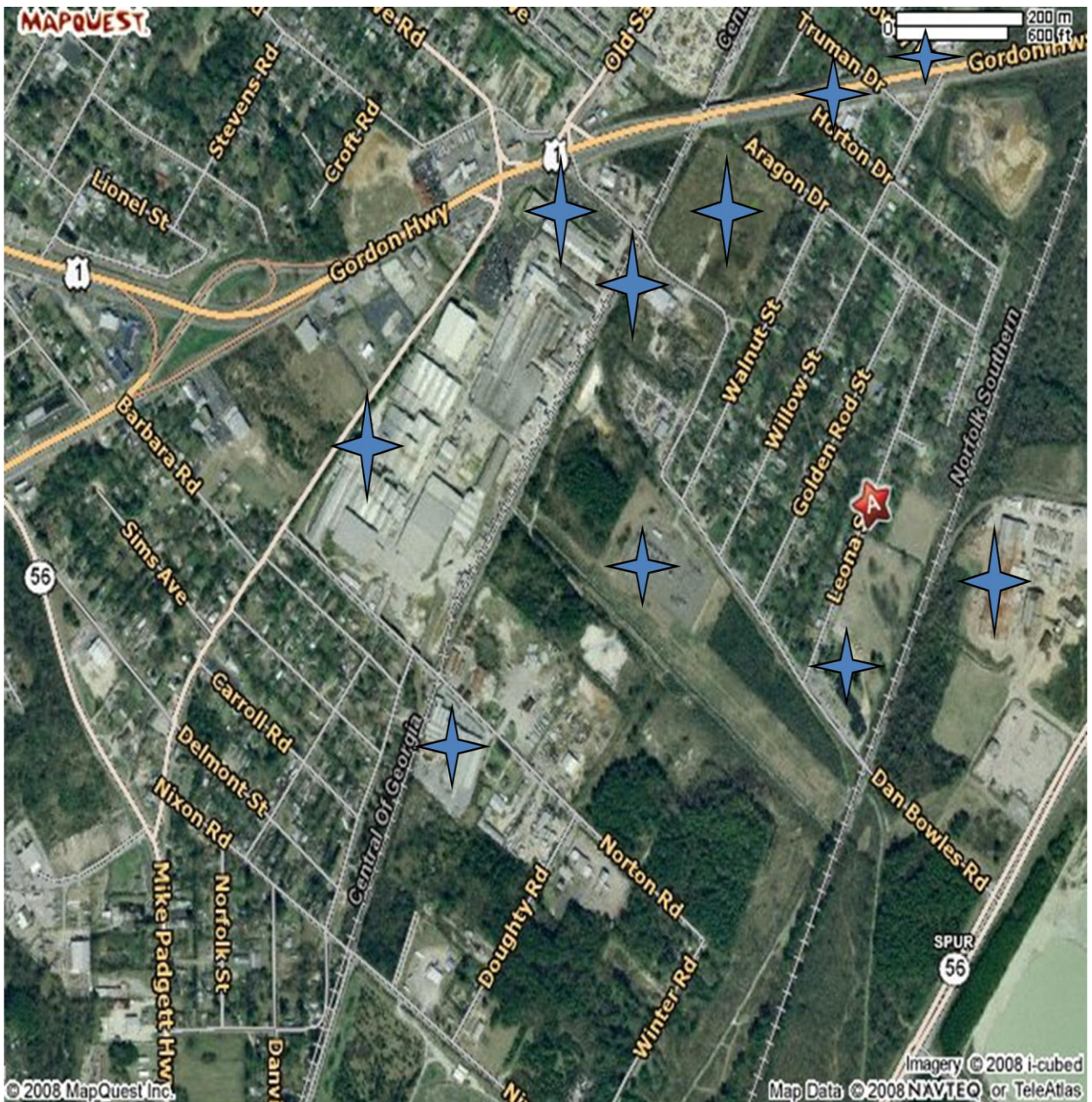


Figure 1. The map shows the community of Hyde Park and its various industrial neighbors. The red star is where my childhood home is located. The blue stars depict the location of the industrial neighbors.

When residents found out about the contamination that Southern Wood Piedmont Company (SWP) had allowed seeping into the soil and groundwater residents were furious. Meetings were organized, the media was alerted and legal representation was sought. Once proof was gathered to substantiate a claim of injustice, many were apprehensive about publically seeking justice, however one was not. My father Ernest L. Jordan, Sr. was the first in a line of many to seek justice for the contamination caused by SWP. The following is a copy of the lawsuit as it was filed in the United District Court of Georgia retrieved from Archival Data.

United States District Court

SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF GEORGIA

R. J. FOREMAN, JR., ET. AL.
ERNEST L. JORDAN, SR., ET. AL.

v.

SOUTHERN WOOD PIEDMONT, ET. AL.

NOTICE

CV-191-063

CASE NUMBER: CV-191-108

TYPE OF CASE:

CIVIL

CRIMINAL

TAKE NOTICE that a proceeding in this case has been set for the place, date, and time set forth below:

PLACE U.S. DISTRICT COURT AUGUSTA, GA.	ROOM NO. COURTROOM #2
DATE AND TIME MAY 13, 1992 2:00 P.M.	

TYPE OF PROCEEDING

HEARING ON PENDING MOTIONS

TAKE NOTICE that the proceeding in this case has been continued as indicated below:

PLACE	DATE AND TIME PREVIOUSLY SCHEDULED	CONTINUED TO, DATE AND TIME

HENRY R. CRUMLEY, JR., CLERK
U.S. MAGISTRATE OR CLERK OF COURT

APRIL 23, 1992
DATE

Rita J. Hildner
BY: DEPUTY CLERK

To:

Harry B. James, III
William R. McCracken
David A. Sapp
Nolan C. Leake

Figure 2. Copy of Hyde Park lawsuit against Southern Wood Piedmont Company

Residents of Hyde Park were not receiving the attention and corporation that they deserved from local government. They wrote letters, made appeals, but not enough was being done to rectify the situation. Since Hyde Park had a history of activism and protest, the community several protest that were aimed at exposing the real Augusta, Georgia to the world. The following is a collage of pictures of residents from their many protests against the government and the chemical companies that were perpetuating social injustices in the city. Many of the protest were occurred during the week of the Masters Golf tournament and others occurred whenever possible so that the city would not forget that Hyde Park was alive and *fighting for their lives*.

HYDE PARK "HOME OF CONTAMINATION"

AUGUSTA, RICHMOND COUNTY, GEORGIA

Mama, Darius and Dewanna
1992 Augusta GA



FIGHTING FOR OUR LIVES!!!

Figure 3. A collage of pictures showing the protests of the Hyde Park residents in Augusta, Georgia

CHAPTER 1

AN ORAL HISTORY OF THE EFFECTS OF THE INDUSTRIAL AGE ON AN AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY

What's Going On?

*Mother, mother
There's too many of you crying
Brother, brother, brother
There's far too many of you dying
You know we've got to find a way
To bring some lovin' here today*

*Father, father
We don't need to escalate
You see, war is not the answer
For only love can conquer hate
You know we've got to find a way
To bring some lovin' here today*

*Picket lines and picket signs
Don't punish me with brutality
Talk to me, so you can see
Oh, what's going on
What's going on*

*Father, father, everybody thinks we're wrong
Oh, but who are they to judge us
Simply because our hair is long
Oh, you know we've got to find a way
To bring some understanding here today*

*Picket lines and picket signs
Don't punish me with brutality
Talk to me
So you can see
What's going on*

*Tell me what's going on
I'll tell you what's going on - Uh*

Right on baby
Right on baby

-Marvin Gaye, 1971

The African American culture is blessed to have so many people who have had the opportunity to reach many with their words. These words have been born out of the emotions of hope, happiness, despair, and concern that they have been able to express through stories, poems, or by song. Many noted African-American's such as Mayo Angelou, Langston Hughes, Marvin Gaye, and many others have used their God given talents to transcend the color-line in order to bring some understanding to society. The African American communities have always been founded on a commitment of caring for others. When Marvin Gaye wrote, *What's Going On*, he was expressing his emotions that he felt because of the troubles and problems in his world and of the world as a whole. The song spoke to the heart of every man, woman, boy, and girl; it asked a simple question, what's going on?

The history of the African American as slaves has been well documented as well as the disregard for our human emotions. Because of this lack of regard, because we were treated like cattle, we had to find a platform through which we could plead for justice and equality. The community in which I lived instilled in me many examples of positive expression of my ancestors. They taught me that in times of despair to look for strength in the poems, songs, and stories so that I could overcome. Attending college and studying the same songs, poems, and stories, I understood the words and emotions that inspired them. As African Americans there burns a passion within our

souls to be able to express ourselves without seeming belligerent to the dominant society, but yet empowering our souls to cause change.

The story of Hyde Park portrayed in this inquiry is my story. I take ownership of it because these are my lived experiences that will unfold on the following pages. The people that I speak of are members of my family and neighbors of the community. Melissa Checker wrote the book *Polluted Promises* from her dissertation project in which she lived in Hyde Park with the residents to record their stories of struggle and activism for a couple of years. Dr Checker produced a socioanthropological study into the lived experiences of the residents of Hyde Park. My story is different from Dr. Checker's because Hyde Park has been a major part of my existence. It is the place I first called home. I have witnessed the triumphs and the disappointment during the prosperous times and since the contamination was revealed. The culture of Hyde Park is part of my being just as unfortunately the contaminants are a part of me. This is my story and life in Hyde Park.

At the onset of the promise of the 20th century, W.E.B. Du Bois asserted that we would face the challenge of overcoming the color-line in our hegemonic society. His assertion was to ensure that Blacks faced the facts that we as a people have been and will continually be subjected to oppressive mindsets of the dominant culture. Those mindsets drawn at the color-line would still find us searching for safe affordable housing; jobs that would provide a decent wage, and be respected as a contributing member of society. Ironically, at the turning point of the environmental movement, Rachel Carson (1962) asserted that the environment was in danger of our hegemonic

society as well. Her assertion was to unmask the perils of irresponsible use of chemicals and their harmful impact on the entire ecosystem. Just as Du Bois voiced his concern for Blacks, Carson voiced her concern for the environment because it too was not being respected for its value to society. She knew that since there was much money to be made by degrading the environment, it needed to be protected and have allies if it was to retain its proper place in the world. Both of these prominent figures were passionate about their beliefs and their fight for justice, yet they hailed from two different social causes; racism and environmental. Even though their studies were at different ends of the educational spectrum, there is for research purposes, a correlation of their works, environmental racism.

The purpose of any type of education is to acquire knowledge and knowledge is the key to enlightenment and freedom from oppression. Environmental racism is as to the environment as malignancy is to the United States, deadly. One might think that the United States after its historical Civil Rights movement would be the last to succumb to such inhumane plights, but it has. Racism has never failed to exist in our society; it has just been transformed and redirected. The blatant "whites only" signs and public lynching's have been replaced by the agonizing realization that "they don't really care about us" as we wonder about our unspoken crime in this world, our race. We have been victims of colonization to where we question our culture, families, and contributions without collectively questioning society. Regardless of what we have been accused of as a people, it is not our industries that lay waste in the environment all for the name of profit. Racism has been linked to environmental planning and has been

found to be a common practice in governmental policies that weave its intricate web through mainstream society, which includes the high exposure to health risk in minorities. Unfortunately, minorities are at an economic disadvantage and their quality of life is threatened; therefore, their only recourse is to fight for their lives.

We all share the environment which provides a “history of interaction between living things and their surroundings. To a large extent, the physical form and the habits of the earth’s vegetation and its animal life have been molded by the environment”, (Carson, 1962, p. 5). In the environment everything is interconnected the land, the water, and the air. When the degradation of either is intentionally directed at people of color the ugly head of racism is once more unearthed and environmental racism is perpetuated. In particular, African American communities are finding themselves in the throes of this crisis. Several studies have concluded that the practice of environmental racism is prevalent and disturbing echoing a critical analysis of how society views African Americans. Although African Americans are members of society, they are often faced with more social injustices than any other race and find themselves fighting for their lives, and their neighborhoods especially in the southern United States. These fights are often showcased in protests and lawsuits in order to get the attention of local and state government.

Context of Study

Harlem (Hyde Park)

*Here on the edge of hell
Stands Harlem (Hyde Park)—
Remembering the old lies,
The old kicks in the back,*

*The old "Be patient"
They told us before.
Sure we remember.
Now when the man at the corner store
Say's sugar's gone up another two cents,
And bread one,
And there's a new tax on cigarettes—
We remember the job we never had,
Never could get,
And can't have now
Because we're colored*

*So we stand here
On the edge of hell
In Harlem (Hyde Park)
And look out on the world
And wonder
What we're gonna do
In the face of what
We remember.*

-Langston Hughes, 1967

When I read the profound poem *Harlem* by Langston Hughes, it was if I were standing in the middle of the ocean and feeling the rush of wave's crash into my soul. I too feel "the edge of hell" that has encompassed the beloved community of my youth, Hyde Park. The poem which was penned during the Great Depression speaks to me as to confirm that racism is still alive and well in the United States. The "hell" parallels the conditions in which the residents are living that are far worse than White Americans. These residents have to grapple with the economic, physical, and emotional anguish that looms over the community just as in Harlem during the 1930's. Politicians have made promises to help the residents to garner their confidences and votes. But once elected the politicians always responded "be patient we are working on it", revealing

the lies they perpetrated to get elected. The residents of Hyde Park are taxpaying citizens and they are taxed the same as white Americans, but they don't see any of their tax dollars providing a solution to their problem. Because of their place in society they are once again being denied jobs, a quality education, and proper housing. So many promises have been broken and hope is fading. The residents feel powerless to stop this feeling of "living on the edge of hell". *Harlem* to me sums up the experiences of the residents of Harlem and Hyde Park in their struggle to rise above the social injustice that dominates their existence and a reflective way to unleash the hell that is burning inside their souls.

When people mention environmental problems usually images such as Al Gore discussing global warming, Smokey the Bear speaking on the dangers of forest fires or t-shirts about saving the rainforest are common. Even though most Americans find these problems to be the forefront of the environmental crisis, a much larger problem encompasses the lives of those who are of low socioeconomic status and minority communities, the problem of environmental racism. African American communities in particular, have been exposed to more environmental hazards, health issues and continue to struggle with racism in the form of contamination from toxic waste (Bullard 1990,1993,1994,2005, ;Cole and Foster, 2001; Giroux, 2006). Communities that house white residents do not struggle with such inequalities and social leprosy. This environmental racism, environmental injustice denies minority residents of decent housing, schools, and quality of life. The inequities that the communities have faced for several decades detail their struggle to break these institutional practices and policies.

The students that reside in these areas have for years attended public schools that have not made annual Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for several years.

The African American community has always had a strong influence in our history, but the Southern community has its roots strongly in our lives. Almost anyone who is of African American descent has at least one relative in the South. Southern communities usually consisted of people who are related by one or many things. These communities were always encompassed with people who desired equality for all and took pride in the taking care of the community in which the importance of family was stressed. One such community is Hyde Park, a small African American community located in the southern part of Augusta, Georgia, the second largest city in the state of Georgia.

According to the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) (1992, 1993 ,1994) for the last two decades, Hyde Park and surrounding neighborhoods have been identified as having chemical contamination in the soil and groundwater the reports that twenty-six samples were taken from ditch sediments in Hyde Park, PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) and lead were at levels of public health concern and that the Goldberg Recycling site surface soil had widespread lead, PCB contamination at levels that indicate a public health hazard and chromium and lead-contaminated groundwater was found in the Hyde Park area.

These communities have been the homes of many friends and family. We all existed in a world that I used to believe was, just and safe. Never could I have imagined when growing up in such a close-knit community that we would be in this

predicament. When referring to “we”, my family, my mother and sister, still live in this community as well as many of my extended family. The community has deteriorated from a place of promise into a place of contamination and despair. Growing up, “The Park” was a vibrant and a loving place to live. Today, upon entering the neighborhood, the once thriving businesses are closed, there are abandoned houses that have been stripped of “valuable” material, and now my childhood neighborhood is somewhat gloomy and depressing.

Key Research Issues

A Dream Deferred

What happens to a dream deferred?

*Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore--
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over--
like a syrupy sweet?*

*Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.*

Or does it explode?

-Langston Hughes, 1952

A Dream Deferred acknowledges the anguish that African Americans have if they can't reach the goals that we drive for, if the dream was a grape and instead of it becoming reality it becomes dry up like a raisin. It is also like a festering soil that it gets worse and worse because it doesn't comes to fruition. A dream can become like the stint of rotten meat, something that eat at your soul turning you bad to a point

where you can become very angry and it may drive you crazy or insane. Having to postpone someone deepest desire can lead to destruction.

Langston Hughes wrote this poem in 1951 at the end of World War II in which the African American people was dealing with the social and the economic injustices that faced Harlem. These injustices are still evident in our society.

The research issues in my study are to explore the continued racism that has become a constant struggle for the adults and children in the Hyde Park community in Augusta, Georgia. These issues of racism are rooted in the realms of social injustice, environmental racism, and education. In exploring the issues it is important to reconcile the mentality of the dominant culture as it applies to their overall treatment of African Americans. Because we live in the South we must struggle against such oppressive mentalities. These mentalities were the foundation of the slave trade in the South and continue to be a thorn in our society today, "It takes ten generations to get rid of a slavery mentality" Terkel (1992) states and our society has not reached the eleventh generation, evidently.

The environment has become a dumping ground for industry and it bears its scars from the misuse. The community of Hyde Park has become a desolate land because of the contamination that has seeped into the soil. This contamination has cost the residents their lives, dignity, and educational opportunities. It has made the younger generations that reside in the community question their self-worth and their place in the world.

Growing up in the Park I became painfully aware that African American were considered to be second class citizens. The perceptions of the dominant culture always seem to affect the inequalities of Hyde Park. Bullard (2005) makes these observations about the South. In the deep south we are stuck in this legacy of slavery, Jim Crow segregation and whites resistance to equal justice for all”, and that Bullard (2005), “The south has long been an important background in African Americans struggle for social justice”, for example, the schools that house the students from Hyde Park have not met Adequate Yearly Progress set by the Federal “No Child Left Behind Act”, while other schools in more affluent areas have made AYP. As an educator it is important to me that all children are successful in school and all children are entitled to a quality education. As an African American educator it is my duty to be a vital part of the legacy that our forefathers fought so hard to ensure. It is my duty to nurture and protect African American children from the negative perceptions that many educators have brought into the classroom. The mentality that African American children can’t learn at the same rate as white and Asian children is simply a big misconception. Why does the color of one’s skin determine their supposed education? Why does where a child lives make them “unreachable”? Education was and is the answer to our dreams as a culture, but just like our freedom in the past; a quality education is being denied. This situation reminds me of the lyrics from the popular movie *Dangerous Minds* (1995) in which students who were considered unreachable were given opportunities through unconventional methods, methods that were intended to engage and connect with the students:

They say I gotta learn, but nobody's here to teach me,

If they can't understand it, how can they reach me?

I guess they can't; I guess they won't

I guess they front; that's why I know my life is outta luck, fool!

Students know when they are not desired in the classroom and they know when they are not valued. As an educator I know that every child has a desire to learn and be successful, but how they are looked at by the academic community weighs heavily on their access to a quality education. Teachers will quickly identify students as being slow or dumb simple because they live in a particular community. They do not try to understand the student or their life circumstances. Also students who have learning disabilities are immediately ignored and shunned by the teachers. When students are identified as having a learning disability their education is diminished. Even when teachers are presented with a student's IEP (Individual Education Program), they often don't use it to help the student. This is what unfortunately happening to the students of Hyde Park and it pains me to know that they are being treated this way. Who gives these people the right to deny students their education? Why must they suffer because society refuses to acknowledge their potential? I know how it feels to be treated unfairly by your teachers. I remember feeling lost and not understanding why I was being treated badly. I recall the first time in my education that school was not where I wanted to be. What had I done to this woman to make her hate me? Why was I not liked? This experienced scarred my soul and caused me to be suspicious of white teachers and their motives.

By conducting this study I want to be able help educators understand that children are more than a color and a socioeconomic status. I want to implore educators to stand in the shoes of the child and parents when making perceptions about them. I believe it is time for educators to embrace their duties and nurture the potentials of African American students; provide them with the tools to be successful, and to have a liberating experience through education.

Autobiographical Roots

A Change is Going to Come

*I was born by the river in a little tent
Oh and just like the river I been a runnin' ever since
It's been a long, a long time coming but I know
A change gon' come oh yes it will*

*It's been too hard living but I'm afraid to die
Cuz I don't know what's up there beyond the sky
It's been a long, a long time coming but I know
A change gon' come oh yes it will*

*I go to the movie, and I go downtown
Somebody keep tellin me "don't hang around"
It's been a long, a long time coming, but I know
A change gon' come oh yes it will*

*Then I go to my brother
And I say "brother, help me please"
But he winds up knocking me
Back down on my knees*

*There been times that I thought I wouldn't last for long
Now think I'm able to carry on
It's been a long, a long time coming but I know
A change gon' come, oh yes it will*

-Sam Cook, 1964

During the Civil Rights Movement the ability to have faith was crucial for the survival of your soul. The constant struggle for equality and the despair of a culture was evident in the black community. The tireless assurances that we would overcome were often felt to be buffers to the reality of so much racial hatred. But despite all we would always find solace in the hope that those things were going to change. In keeping with our rich heritage we sing songs of uplifting messages to ease the pain. One such song was tapped as the anthem for the Civil Rights Movement; *A change is going to come?* It has such a powerful message to those who were frustrated of images of men, women and children being beaten and knocked down, angry because they were constantly told “you don’t belong”, and brokenhearted about the social injustices that were transpiring in the 1960’s. It spoke to the generations of the “other” and gave them more hope for the future. As I think about Hyde Park and its predicament my heart feels heavy, my soul is troubled and I begin to internalize this song. Although it has been over forty years since this song resounded in the hearts of many, the words still ring true for the residents of Hyde Park for they are still hoping that change for the better will assuredly come.

On the heels of the National Voting Rights Act of 1965, my birth to a young married African-American couple was a celebration of hope and a guarantee for the future generations of my family. The promise of this close-knit community was having a father working in industry until his death in 2000 and my mother attending college to become an elementary teacher, which was viewed as a glorious profession for a young black woman. Living with my parents and maternal grandparents for the first four

years of my life was filled with the wonders of a perfect life. Being close knit family, my parents moved only walking distance from my grandparents; three streets over, a fifteen minute walk, through the path. By the time, my parents moved into their own house, mama had found a job as a teacher at a segregated school in Augusta, before she was sent to an integrated school. The community school was located across the street from our house so walking to and from school was my mode of transportation. When my parents were at work after school I would go to my grandparents until mostly, my mom would pick us up.

There was always activity at my grandmother's house, she was always doing something, a trait that has been inherited, very seldom was she not working, either in the kitchen, the garden, doing the wash, or tending to her flowers. All the neighbors in this community were connected by a shared vision; having a productive life within their means. The education of how to take care of oneself started fairly early. Growing up, and being able to stand on your own was taught and instilled.

Growing up in a black community provided me with a rich and full childhood. The experiences instilled throughout my existence have served as the foundation for my life, and hopefully the life of my children. "Life for me ain't been no crystal stairs", Hughes (1994). That was my motto in college and it still is today. My life will always contain struggles, not because of membership in the human race, but just because of my Race. For many years I lived a sheltered life because I never experienced blatant racism. When I did venture outside the confines of the community, my exposures to other races were no different to people of my own race. I still remember to this day of

going with my granddaddy to the store and Mr. Feldman my granddaddy's Jewish friend, giving me candy, I loved the green apple Jolly Ranchers, and he would always give me a handful to my delight. Going to the grocery store was also the same experience, there were white people behind the counters and the cash register, but I never noticed anything different. This was part of my wonderful life.

In my eyes, our community demonstrated a sense of pride for black people who owned their homes, their lives, and their ancestral history. They took pride in growing a garden and being able to eat from their land. Some of my fondest memories are of being able to pick and eat fresh fruits and vegetables from the vines and trees which bring a smile to my face. I remember my grandfather grinning just about every time he harvested his "crops" in my presence; in retrospect, it was a proud moment for him knowing that he, a black man with a third grade education, was providing for his family.

In the wake of integration and upon leaving the safe halls of the community school I was bussed to a school away from safe haven of my parents, grandparents, and community. There my safe world was shattered like a porcelain doll dropped on a marbled floor. As stated before, my relationships with white people was, from my perception, the same as anyone else, Mrs. Feldman was nice, Mrs. Wind, Mrs. Kennedy, and Mrs. Johnson (teachers) were all nice, but I soon learned the face of pure, unadulterated evil, Mrs. Widener (it took a couple of hours to remember her name, I had blocked it from my memory). This smiling red lipped, husky voice, demoness was not what she appeared. She was a product of segregation and false pretense. She literally made my life a living "hell" academically and psychologically. This nightmare

went on for many months this is where the feeling of helplessness became a constant companion. After taking all they could take my parents had me removed from her class and placed into Mrs. Woods' class; she became my guardian angel; she gave me back my soul, my reason for living. This all occurred when I was in fourth grade, this is my first recollection of the word "suicide", Professor Derrick Bell (1992) writes as if he lived my racial nightmare, "Despite undeniable progress for many, no African Americans were insulated from incidents of racial discrimination. Our careers, even our lives, are threatened because of our color" (p. 3), this incident proved his point.

This situation was the first time that the color of my skin became an issue and the beginning of questioning my respective place in the world in which I had been thrust into. The world that was viewed through rainbow colored lenses now became black and white and the foci became narrowed. During this time of my existence was the first time that I recall that worry became a companion of my parents. They did what parents do, tried to reassure me that all people were not the same, but the damage had been done; not all people could be trusted or let inside my world. Becoming very cautious of people and their intentions was how the world would be handled. Life became different, the person inside became different, and forever changed was my perception of a perfect world, it did not exist. The emotions that are exuding from every pore in my body are those that preferably to be dismissed, but they are part of the bridge that must be crossed to tell this story. Continuing along life's journey, noticing the things that make the world wrong has become second nature.

Education as an undergraduate was not an option; it was planned for and expected. Graduate school was a choice, a thirst for enlightenment.

Since beginning this program the perception of what curriculum has definitely shifted from what I thought it to be, also the means by which I determined what the term curriculum entailed has indeed changed. Curriculum studies is a very diverse way of addressing issues that are important to education in today's society. Issues such as race, popular culture, oral history, and multiculturalism, among others provide a lens in which we view education. As I have traveled through this program, there have been many stops that I have made to understand the importance of such a program. These stops along the road have caused me to reexamine my life and the many things that have shaped many perceptions about life and education.

As I sit and ponder my collective education, so many things go through my mind. My family worked with many different educational and community organizations, which exposed me to a lot of different people and places, and this was a very good thing. I have grown around people who were of different races and cultures. Mind you, I was nurtured in a part of town that is now considered the ghetto and is in the midst of an environmental crisis. Shelby (2006) makes this observations about the criteria for American ghettos, "American ghettos are marked by three core characteristics—race, space, and poverty. Specifically, ghettos are (1) predominantly black, (2) urban neighborhoods, (3) with high-poverty rates. There are of course poor urban neighborhoods that are not predominantly African American." I fortunately have always grown around people who were nurturing and loving. I did not say, "Grew up" because

I continue to grow, as a total being. I guess that is why I am so passionate about many things in my life. The environment is one of those passions not just because the place that I hold dear to my heart is in such degradation, but because there is a future that needs to be left to the many children that will inherit this Earth and how Hyde Park became a “ghetto”, an environmental issue. As Orr (2004) states:

Education that builds on our affinity for life would lead to a kind of awakening of possibilities and potentials that lie largely dormant and unused in the industrial-utilitarian mind. Therefore, the task of education, as Dave Foreman stated, is to help us “open our souls to love this glorious, luxuriant, animated planet.

(p. 213)

Acquiring an education was always instilled in me because as a race we would need it in order to have a fighting chance in society. The commitment of the Black community to education was always the ticket to bigger and better things in a society that despised our existence. One thing that has inspired me is the education I have received by learning from lived experiences, the tales of human lives. Delving into my own lived experiences I know that living in a Black community, namely Hyde Park could be challenging. But I also know that it can be very rewarding and serves as mortar for my cultural foundation. I believe that peeling back the layers of a life and finding meaning can be liberating and educational. With this belief I urge theorists to challenge the perceived notions of what the eyes may see, but to look beneath the surface for the roots of Hyde Park’s predicament. The passion of learning from my life has nurtured my soul to want to give a voice to the voiceless and inquiry into the lives

of the residents in the community. As a form of curriculum inquiry oral history proves to explore the past and present histories in order to find solutions to problems.

Purpose of Study

I Have a Dream

And so even though we face
the difficulties of today and tomorrow,
I still have a dream.
It is a dream deeply rooted
in the American dream.
I have a dream that one day
this nation will rise up
and live out the true
meaning of its creed:
"We hold these truths to be self-evident,
that all men are created equal."

-Martin Luther King, Jr. ,1963

Martin Luther King, Jr. made an indelible impact on the nation during his speech on the steps of the Lincoln Monument during the Civil Rights Movement. King made an impassioned plea to the masses to thrive to overcome the struggles that we have faced and would continue to face to reach the dream of being treated as an equal in this country. He reminded the nation that the Constitution was not a document that included all men, but it was something that he was willing to work to change. His plea for justice and equality still resounds in the hearts of African Americans and it also serves as a catalyst for change.

My study focused on the issues that have plagued one family of three generations in the Hyde Park community since chemical contamination was found in its soil and groundwater. The study aimed to identify the social, educational, and medical

injustices that have inundated this community and their struggles for survival. Since the initial findings, the community has declined in many ways but hope is the glue that is holding many lives together. Not only are most residents living below the poverty line, but if they own their homes the property values have plummeted. Their homes are also literally falling apart and insurance companies will not insure some of the homes or they will set the premiums so high where as they cannot afford to be insured. There are high incidents of different types of cancers, skin disorders, respiratory problems, fetal malformations, miscarriages, and mental problems. The lives of the Hyde Park residents are filled with many concerns and future uncertainties add to their dilemma.

How could my childhood neighborhood become such a dismal place? To answer these questions and others is the purpose of my study into the residents lived experiences in Hyde Park and the racial discord that plague a small rural southern community.

From its foundation, Hyde Park has been labeled as a black community and according to Blackwell's definition (1985); a black community is "a highly diversified set of interrelated structures and aggregates of people who are held together by forces of white oppression and racism." The community began its history as the land of opportunity for many former sharecroppers and their families. Many men, like my grandfather, moved to the community to be closer to their jobs at the various industrial companies that surround the neighborhood. My grandfather's job was literally, through the back yard, and around the corner; he walked to work almost every day. Because of

the eleven or so companies that surround the neighborhood, there are high levels of different contaminants in the community that has turned the community upside down. Many lives have been lost and many futures have been deferred. In *Silent Spring*, Rachel Carson calls attention to concerns about the environment and the health of the human race, "As the tide of chemicals born of the Industrial Age has arisen to engulf our environment, a drastic change has come about in the nature of the most serious public health problems" (p. 187). Her concerns unfortunately, are evident as one looks at the many tests and reports that have been conducted by the federal, state, and local government and health professionals in relation to the Hyde Park community. Even though it is an environmental issue, let us by no means forget that this is indeed a racial issue.

Residents of the community have organized in efforts to fight what many have described as "racial genocide." Racial equality and activism have always been important issues to the community even before the inception of the civil rights movement. The residents along with help of local black leaders and the local Black Panther Party eventually formed the Hyde and Aragon Park Improvement Committee (HAPIC), for "to care for the self is to care for the group, and to care for the group is to care for the self", (Siddle-Walker & Snarney, 2004, p. 11). Because Hyde Park is mostly composed of low-income families, little has been done to help finance a relocation project for the residents, hence the term environmental injustice. According to Bullard 1990,1993,1994,2005, Cole and Foster 2001, and Giroux 2006, throughout the history of environmental injustice, large minority populations have inhabited many areas that

have experienced similar problems; this is clearly evidence of racism. According to Checker (2005) "Other HAPIC leaders cited more systemic practices of racism, referring to their situation as "environmental apartheid" or "residential holocaust." Charles Utley called it a form of genocide." For Utley, the "genocide", environmental racism stems from a deliberate, planned, and systemized racism made up of both corporate greed and discriminatory political institutions" (p. 96). Author Rachel Carson foresaw a frightening reality, "For the first time in the history of the world, every human being is now subjected to contact with dangerous chemicals, from the moment of conception until death" (p. 16). The children living in the Hyde Park community have for years attended public schools that had not made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Many of the students from the community are identified as SWD (Students with Disabilities). These students have grown up surrounded by this contamination and as an educator; I am concerned that the contamination has been a factor in their education development. What kind of childhood is "normal" when you have to play on old carpet laid on the ground to avoid contact with the soil? (Checker 2005) In addition, what messages are being conveyed to these children knowing that they are living in an area that is filled with contamination and no one outside of the community wants to help them? Even in the new "The Incredible Hulk" movie, there was a reference during the final fight scene that the fight should be taken to Harlem. Why Harlem? Is it because even in this day and time African Americans are still not valued in the human race? Are we not part of society? Hence, the struggle to be human remains constant and at times evasive. As Dr. Checker noted in her dissertation, because Hyde Park is known primarily as an

African American neighborhood there has been little help from the authorities in the local government. Much must be done to undo the wrong in Hyde Park, but where does it start. In the groundbreaking book *The Garbage Wars*, Pellow (2004) sums up what is need to enhance these communities, “decent paying safe jobs; quality schools and recreation; decent housing and adequate health care; democratic decision-making and personal empowerment; and communities free of violence, drugs, and poverty” (p. 8).

As an African American that grew up in Hyde Park, it is a humbling and emotional task that I undertake in telling their story of struggle and resilience. Shubert et al (2002), sums up the importance of telling this particular story:

To be quite literal, curricularists are concerned with the human journey that results in learning. What, they ask, are the life excursions that bring persons to certain feelings, knowing and doings? What do learners need? Why do they need it? Through what kinds of content or activity can they acquire experiences that result in productive growth? What is productive growth and how can it be recognized? (p. xxiii)

Challenges of the Study

Revealing lived experience can make the participant reluctant to be “raw” about their feelings and made them feel as though they were being judged. Because Hyde Park was my old stomping ground many were reluctant to speak to me about their lives because at one time they were my neighbors and they felt embarrassed to reveal their personal experiences to me. Many preferred to keep things bottled up and refused to

discuss their life experiences with me during the last ten years. The idea of being honest about their lives seems to frighten them, because they compare their lives to mine. Even after assuring them that was not my intent to judge, they felt that I was intruding in their lives stating, "You wouldn't understand", "you don't live here no more" and "you don't know what I go through" and "You think you better than me".

Circumstances, in my opinion, have forced them to buy into the perception that they are the scourge of society. Even though we as African Americans have a history of strength and ingenuity, some have lost sight and measure themselves by colonial norms for society. Therefore, they remain mis-educated on the facts and have become complacent. As part of the history of Hyde Park, it would have been easy for me to get angry at the lack of participation but I understood the "fear" that has encompassed my former neighbors and the struggles that have made them weary.

The interviews that were collected provided the participants the opportunity to relive times in their lives that were both happy and discouraging. Being able to recount the events that have occurred in the last twenty years was stressful at times and jubilant at others. Listening to the accounts provided me with a chance to recall events and at times stirred up emotions that I had forgotten. As the researcher it was very difficult for me not to chime in on familiar accounts or to express my anger at a particular event in history. I had to be disciplined; not show much emotion even when I wanted to comfort the participant or be comforted. All lived experiences are important and determining which stories to rearticulate will be a challenge for I am

interested in all stories. Most importantly my personal experiences will challenge my ability to be objective about other experiences.

Significance of Study

Still I Rise

*You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.*

*Does my sassiness upset you?
Why are you beset with gloom?
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells
Pumping in my living room.*

*Just like moons and like suns,
With the certainty of tides,
Just like hopes springing high,
Still I'll rise.*

*Did you want to see me broken?
Bowed head and lowered eyes?
Shoulders falling down like teardrops.
Weakened by my soulful cries.*

*Does my haughtiness offend you?
Don't you take it awful hard
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines
Diggin' in my own back yard.*

*You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise.*

*Does my sexiness upset you?
Does it come as a surprise
That I dance like I've got diamonds
At the meeting of my thighs?*

*Out of the huts of history's shame
I rise
Up from a past that's rooted in pain
I rise
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.
Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
I rise
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
I rise
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
I rise
I rise
I rise*

-Maya Angelou, 1978

If history has taught us anything about our country, it is the fact that the African American population still faces many barriers that perpetuate an unequal society. This unequalization is complicated by the reality that many racial and ethnic minorities that are disadvantaged must to live, work and play in environments that can cause them to become sick. Because they are not in an economic position to move to other areas, change jobs, or schools they often remain in the community with little hope of change for the better. Mayo Angelou's poem is a testament of the struggles that African Americans had faced throughout history and the resiliency to rise above them and move forward. The lies that have been told, the perceptions that have been planted cannot and will not deter us from finding the strength each day to survive.

The study of an African American community struggling through environmental contamination is significant to my study of because it provides a clear indication that minorities are still not regarded as intellectual equals in society. The effects of the

contamination and the blatant disregard for the residents' health and well-being are a great concern for many. Bullard (2005) explains how history has played its part in this matter:

If a community happens to be poor, politically powerless, or inhabited largely by people of color, then its residents are often viewed as expendable and they receive less protection than affluent whites and political elites do. In reality, the politics of pollution create vulnerable communities and environmental sacrifice zones inhabited largely by poor people, people of color, and other individuals who lack health insurance and access to affordable, good quality medical facilities. (p. 85)

The results of the environmental hazards in this case have been the death of a promising community, the death and sickness of many residents, the destruction of property values, and the less than quality education that the children are receiving. Constructing meaning of the African American experience in a contaminated environment will help educators, local government, and the general public comprehend the long term effects of environmental racism.

Before the contamination, Hyde Park stood to gain so much just as it had throughout its history. But as soon as word got out and the lawsuit was filed, the once sparkling diamond began to lose its luster. People stopped moving into the community and its heart, Clara E. Jenkins Elementary School, was closed and consolidated with another school in another neighborhood. When this occurred educational opportunities changed drastically for the children and many begin to experience learning and

discipline problems. For some of the students the aforementioned problems are compounded by medical issues caused by the constant chemical exposure in the area. Education is based on societal norms and children who are disadvantaged do not fit the mold of the dominant culture. The problems lie within the design and implementation of the school curriculums governed by the No Child Left Behind legislation that was enacted in 2001. Problems also abound when students and parents encounter educators that view minority students as an intrusion instead of an invitation to share their knowledge and perhaps gain some knowledge in return.

Inquiry into these issues lends credence to the inequalities that people of color are subjected to due to discriminatory practices such as environmental racism. The willful neglect of the environment by industry not only tainted the soil and water, it has tainted the quality education that the students of Hyde Park had been so accustomed to receiving. It has left a community scratching its head in disbelief and worry. "What kind of legacy do we have to offer to our children" a resident asks; "What kind of childhood will they have"? This inquiry may serve to provide a platform for which educators can use to help students from similar backgrounds find success in an education system compounded with hurdles. By uncovering societal roots that lead to these commonplace practices of environmental racism and by using the experiences of the residents their stories will act as a means to understand and expose racial attitudes that perpetuate marginalized groups.

Hyde Park had always been a community that bounced back from adversity such as the numerous floods, living on dirt roads, and living without indoor plumbing. The

black community had always been able to demonstrate a power for resiliency, Terkel (1992). Resiliency is important especially if it psychological. In the narration of her illness, Nettles (2001) affirms that:

Psychological resilience is a process that results in an individual's successful mental and social functioning despite adversity. This meaning of resilience comes from studies of people who function well in the face of multiple stresses, such as those that accompany poverty, or who emerge from traumatic experiences and return to former levels of competence. (p. 3)

Even though life for the residents are have been dramatically challenging they still continue to build and strengthen their personal attitudes and feelings to help them cope with the situation. As Mayo Angelou proclaimed in her inspirational poem, Still I Rise, "up from a past that's rooted in pain, I rise". This is important in order to remain optimistic and rise above and serves a reminder that we can survive anything just as our ancestors.

The Hyde Park community is just one of the many communities across this nation in which racial and environmental injustices are continuing. According to Checker (2005):

Such environmental disparities are widespread throughout the United States, but the South has had particularly lax environment policies...In the EPA's southwestern region, three out of the four largest hazardous waste landfills in the region sit in majority black areas. (p. 13)

Environmental issues in this country are not limited to global warming or the shortage of nonrenewable resources, they include minority neighborhoods that are besieged by environmental hazards that cause cancers, respiratory problems, skin disorders, and poorly educated children.

CHAPTER 2

MAKING THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN RACE, GENDER, AND THE ENVIRONMENT: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Unfortunately, for us the reality is that we all live in a society that determines how we as individuals and groups are perceived based upon the dominant culture, in other words, how we are identified. Granted, we have come a long way since *Brown v Board of Education of Topeka* and *Acree v Richmond County Board of Education*, but it is not enough. There are still education establishments that are guided by inequality. Equality is an illusion, a wish, according to Kozol (2005), and we must utilize several theories to foster genuine equality and reverse the historical cultural domination, which perpetuate human injustice.

Just as the environment is interconnected so is each of these tenets that I have set out to explore. Each of them emphasizes the struggles that are prominent in our society, such as race, sex, gender and class. These struggles are identified as some of the big issues that hinder the equalization in our existing culture while empowering those at the top of society. In order for change to occur, we must have a critical conversation, a dialogue not a monologue.

Justice

*That Justice is a blind goddess
Is a thing to which we black are wise:
Her bandage hides two festering sores
That once perhaps were eyes.*

-Langston Hughes, 1923

Justice is quite blind, especially when you live on the wrong side of the tracks and you're black. A blindfold pretends to be withholding favor, but we know better, it only aids in shielding the *idea* of justice. Langston Hughes wrote this profound poem during an era of African Americans being jailed on frivolous charges and the legal system refuses to acknowledge the injustices. Hughes speaks of the plight that African Americans had to endure because they were black, and the blind eyes symbolize the insignificance of the colored race to their justice system.

Justice for the Environment

Recent studies in the area of environmental racism have identified several communities in the United States that have been devastated by chemical contaminants. Most of these communities very often are of low-socioeconomic status with a large if not total population of minorities. Much like the organization of the earth is stratified; environmental racism uses stratification of people on the basis of race, place, economics and education as a way to systematically dehumanize their existence.

Since the 1960's, during the Civil Rights Movement, it was noted that there was an "inequitable distribution" of poisons that had found their way into many minority communities. Cole and Foster (2001) have detailed the value which society places on the minorities of this country:

The inequitable distribution of environmental hazards, particularly commercial waste facilities, can be traced historically to the patterns of residential segregation and its resulting structural inequalities. Spatial segregation and isolation are key features of racial inequalities in our society. Racial segregation,

in turn, shapes how groups are viewed and what types of resources they can get. This spatial inequality creates a vicious, self-perpetuating circle of causation, resulting in uniquely disadvantaged communities. (p. 66)

“Hope is believing in spite of the evidence, then watching the evidence change” (Wallis, 2004, p.203).

The Hyde Park residents asked the local county government not to grant permits to any more industries to operate in the community. In 2001, the planning and zoning commission allowed a company to put a landfill in the Hyde Park community. In 2003, a new recycling facility was allowed to open in Hyde Park amid much protest. This is only a sample of the degradation of our community, is this not injustice? According to Bullard (1993):

The crux of the problem is that the mainstream environmental movement has not sufficiently addressed the fact that social inequality and imbalances of power are at the heart of environmental degradation, resource depletion, pollution and even overpopulation. The environmental crisis can simply not be solved effectively without social justice. (p. 23)

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) website defines environmental justice as the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies, (EPA, 2009). Their explanation continues by declaring that this goal is for all communities and persons across nation and that environmental justice will ultimately be achieved when everyone

enjoys the same degree of protection from environmental and health hazards and equal access to the decision making process to have a healthy environment to live, learn and work. My experiences lead me to not believe what is portrayed on the federal website. My experiences lead me believe that these are just words to make people feel safe and secure and elude them from the reality of many minority groups.

Issues of environmental justice are growing in importance in several areas and global ecological demand on the Earth's resources for agriculture, mining, and industry has been growing at astounding rates. Here in our local communities, it has long been recognized that environmental services and or justice are not uniformly distributed in reference to income group, class, or ethnic communities. Disparities of this nature stem from many historical circumstances, economic situations, and inadequate governmental regulation (Checker, 2005).

Since the civilization of man, the world has been based on oppressive acts that were majorly forced upon people of color. These people of color have become the minority races of people who are portrayed as the lower rungs of the socio-economic and intellectual ladder. These races of people are trample upon largely because of their low socio-economic status; they are unfortunately situated for whatever reason in areas of environmental degradation which results in an increase of health issues. These living conditions are not the fault of the resident, but a repercussion of the capitalistic society in which we live; a society in which human life have little value, especially if the pigmentation of the skin is hued (Cole & Foster, 2001).

Justice and Society

Our hegemonic society places value on all “things,” that have been bought or acquired, things that can be controlled. In *A Decent Society*, Margalit (1996) writes:

Only the hegemonic culture has the power to accept or reject people from the society as a whole. One meaning is that the culture of the dominant group in the society is the one with the power to decide who belongs to the society and who does not. (p. 169)

Some may say that they (people of color) live in these areas because of circumstance; others say it is where they deserve to live, because they do not deserve any better human existence because of their race. To illustrate this point, students in my class were assigned a project in which they were to work in groups and design a Land Use Model. The students were given a certain amount of land with specific instructions to designate areas for housing, commercial property, conservation, roads, landfill, etc. One group which was comprised of white students made the comment they were going to place the black section near the landfill. To my dismay, it became again evident that perceptions of people and decisions of their place in society are limited. Race is a social construction and the creation of races by the authoritative powers and implies that there is a dominant entity by which these rules were established. This entity then determines those who receive justice and those who do not (Barusch 2008).

Social justice for the African American is far from reach, it is an elaborate illusion. At times, it seems that we as a people have overcome the hardship and oppression, but

there is no light at the end of the tunnel. Social injustice is like a river; it flows and branches out to the masses collecting in a big reservoir to be utilized when it is deemed appropriate. Thomas Jefferson who was the proud owner of 267 slaves penned these immortal words (1776), "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness".

Equality is a myth, born of the pages of flawed perceptions, untruths, and hatred. Many people who have been born on the same soil as our "forefathers" have been reduced to property, devalued property, but still property. African Americans have never been accepted as equals in this country, even though they arrived many years before other immigrants groups, and according to Bell (1993), "Black people will never gain full equality in this country...African Americans must confront and conquer the otherwise deadening reality of our permanent subordinate status" (p 111).

Unfortunately, for African Americans the reality is that we all live in a society that determines how we as individuals and groups are perceived based upon the dominant culture, in other words, how we are identified. In the United States, that dominant culture is the White majority.

Every individual regardless of gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, sexual preference, academic abilities, physical abilities or even age, deserves to be treated with dignity and respect. The contention is that every individual should be educated with dignity, respect and valued as an integral part of society. African Americans have been dehumanized for centuries and "because American society devalues people of

color, African Americans have formed a sense of agency that relies upon their self-perceptions, rather than the images depicted by the dominant culture” (Siddle-Walker & Snarey, 2004, p. 10).

I am a woman, a black woman and most importantly a human being. As human being racism is a fact of my life, that is my cross to bear, but what I fail to understand, is why humanity looks upon those with dark skin as being inferior? One reason for this identity crisis may lie in the color of the skin. When compared with other immigrant groups, the other groups with “compatible complexion allowed them to assimilate by blending into American society” (Takaki, 1993, p. 9). Even Shakespeare makes reference to the negative attitudes by depicting Caliban as of African descent in his play, *The Tempest*:

Freckled,” dark complexion, a “thing of darkness,” Caliban was a “bastard”: his father was a demon and his mother was Sycorax, a witch who lived in Africa. As historian Winthrop Jordan noted, what struck the English most about Africans was their color. “These people are all blacke, and are called Negros, without any apparell, saving before their privities,” wrote an English traveler during his visit to Cape Verde in the 1560’s. In the English mind, the color black was freighted with an array of negative images: “deeply stained with dirt”, “foul,” dark or deadly in purpose, “malignant,” “sinister,” “wicked”.

“The color white, on the other hand, signified purity, innocence, and goodness” (Takaki, 2000, p. 53). This type of reasoning has been perpetuated for over 400 years and counting.

Our history books have often left the history of African Americans stagnated in the slave quarters of the South keeping them isolated from other groups of American society. The lives of African Americans can largely be defined by issues as segregation, race, and civil rights if you consider these books to be accurate, but what about their lives as human beings. Where are our contributions to science and technology? Do we not deserve the right to be treated as though they are a part of humanity? We still struggle for existence in a land that we were born and according to Giddings (1932), assert, "The struggle for existence in its collective form today affects entire races. It affects nations and has become associated with the economic affairs in the new struggle of nations and of races" (p. 187).

Education for All

Although we as African Americans have made great strides in economics and achievements, "The Civil Rights Revolution, however, was unable to correct the structural economic foundations of racial inequality. While the laws and court orders prohibited discrimination, they failed to abolish poverty among blacks (Takaki, 1993, p. 409).

It has always been a known fact that African Americans would always have to work, play, and think harder in order to be considered a success in this society. Author and activist James Baldwin never failed to remind his people of their plight. Baldwin (1985) in an excerpt from his book *The Fire Next Time* made an impassioned plea to find a solution to end racial injustice that would pave the road for future generations of

African Americans:

For the sake of one's children, in order to minimize the bill *they* must pay, one must be careful not to take refuge in any delusion—and the value placed on the color of the skin is always and everywhere and forever a delusion. I know what I am asking is impossible. But in our time, as in every time, the impossible is the least that one can demand—and one is, after all, emboldened by the spectacle of human history in general, and American Negro history in particular, for it testified to nothing less than the perpetual achievement of the impossible. (p. 379)

As an African American and an educator, there is a deep understanding and concern that race influences the education of children, therefore let there be no mistake that in the United States and abroad, "race matters". As long as there are dominant cultures in society, their values will be passed down to minority cultures. In other words, if part of a society is devalued, dehumanized, striped of their cultural roots, then they will only be taught what and how the majority wants them to be taught, which means that their identity is eternally unfounded. According to Freire (2004) "It would indeed be naive to expect the oppressor elites to carry out a liberating education" (p. 136) because without a liberating education, individuals and groups fail to really discover who they are.

There should be a basic respect and dignity that should be afforded to each individual and to all groups of people. When individuals or groups are not valued unfortunately, they become, in the eyes of many, to be a burden to society and society

begins to devalue them as individuals. To devalue an individual or group of individuals is like smothering a fire; extinguishing that burning desire to thrive. Cornel West (1993) makes this observation in book *Race Matters* about how society produces fear in the African American race in today's society:

One of the best ways to instill fear in people is to terrorize them. Yet this fear is best sustained by convincing them their bodies are ugly, their intellect is inherently underdeveloped, their culture is less civilized, and their future warrants less concern than that of other peoples. Two hundred and forty-four years of slavery and nearly a century of institutionalized terrorism in the form of segregation, lynching's, and second-class citizenship in America were aimed at precisely this devaluation of black people. (p. 85)

All students deserve a quality education, and Ladson-Billings contends that African American children like other minority groups need to be encouraged to perform in school. She goes on to state that "Over the past ten years there has been increased interest in looking at ways to improve the academic performance of students who are culturally, ethnically, racially, and linguistically diverse" (Ladson-Billing 1994, p. 15). Even though these strides have been made in education, there still remains a large gap in incorporating the values of these minority groups into the popular curriculum.

Children come into this world bright eyed, full of curiosity and with unconditional love. They do not see poverty or segregation, or injustice, but they are the ones that suffer in the long run, "Education can never be "free" or "equal" as long as social classes exist" (Grande, 2004, p. 34). The debate about education is one of the most

controversial subjects between African Americans and society. Unfortunately, education has been used as the proverbial yardstick to measure the intelligence of all humanity, especially African Americans. Educational programs that need funding are often not funded due to fear from the majority and they insist, "That any social reform will unjustly benefits blacks" (Bell, 1992, p. 4). W. E. B. Dubois (1903), in the *Souls of Black Folk*, recognized this attitude of America, "for the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line." Dubois discussed in detail the need for a new way of thinking for our society and with the new thinking; a new curriculum would need to be forged to effectively educate the African American.

Educating students in this society should be a joint venture, which means that it would take all kinds of people to help students reach their fullest potential. Sometimes as educators we forget that educating students entails more than what is going to be on a standardized test. It involves shaping those students into responsible members of society. It takes a joint effort from society and the educational institutions in the nation. We cannot afford to devalue or forget that all people have an infinite value in our society.

Throughout history people, parents, teachers, community, church, have expressed their views about how students should be educated. These views were of course very different. These different views caused an insurmountable conflict that instigated changes in education. These changes involved the national curriculum at the turn of the century and many improvements were made that were to help increase

student achievement. These ideas of what students were to “learn” grew from many schools of thought, many philosophies, and many studies.

According to the authorities, there was no need for differing curriculums in our public or private schools. There was no need to seek improvements in the curriculum because there was no need to seek connections between the curriculum, the environment (school and/or home), and the learner, but we now know that there is an urgent need to find that connection. Watkins (2001) emphatically makes the connection in his book, *The White Architects of Black Education: Ideology and Power in America, 1865-1954*, that “Education has been romanticized to the extent that, like religion, it appears disconnected from the world of power, partisanship, and the shaping of the social order.”, (p. 10).

Communities of Color

There is no doubt that the residents of any community of color must overcome many obstacles in order to belong to the majority society. These include but are not limited to gender, race, sex, economics, and environmental hazards. Because of these barriers, there is a need to find avenues to make the world in which we live a more equitable one. In order to achieve such a monumental task, people must be willing to reach beyond the boundaries of social exploitation and historic oppression.

Like the residents of Hyde Park, geographers are demanding that there be a change in the social climate that has raged on in our society for hundreds of years. The goal is to create open forum with all branches of people to dismantle the dominant

systems that have been put into place by patriarchal establishments. As stated in *The Dictionary of Human Geography* (2000):

The purpose of critical geography as a political movement is to make a commitment to some form of emancipatory social change that seeks to challenge existing systems of social inequality based upon differences of race, gender, sexual orientation, class, etc. (Painter 2000)

Change comes from the masses, the oppressed. Because of the environmental issues that have been presented the community of Hyde Park "a more just, equitable, ecologically sane and open society than we have experienced" (Harvey, 2001, p. x). In order to establish a society in which differences, race, sex, location, are not a limiting factor, critical geographers seek to humanize the differences for equal social change and study the inequalities that had been organized to perpetuate and maintain social inequalities. These inequalities, which are constantly thrust upon people of color, cause them to publically air their dissatisfaction with the limitations of society. By limiting people of color to a specific geography there is a continual creation of unequal power relations that cause tensions in the already strained situations of race.

The need to combat prejudices and presumptions about Hyde Park is important so that kinds of explicit knowledge cannot be used to preserve dominate power schemes. The more the community understands about power and its constructs the better they will become equipped to change social constraints and gain control over their own existence. The goal of understanding these social conditions is to change the distribution of power of the elite as to where all people regardless of race, creed, or

color will have a chance to promote and transform social practices especially when it involves them. The idea of community is importance because once you get into the mainstream, the mainstream will change and change in society is essential.

A Woman's Work

*Pray God You Can Cope
I'll Stand Outside
This Woman's Work
This Woman's Worth*

-Maxwell

Since the inception of Hyde Park as a community and neighborhood, its foundations were rooted deeply in the concept of family. The community began its history as the land of opportunity for many former sharecroppers and their families to own land and build homes. Many men, like my grandfather, moved to the community to be closer to their jobs at the various industrial companies that surround the neighborhood. The men of the family worked and the women were left to raise the children and run the household, or they worked as domestics. These strong women were often the focus of oppression and many injustices outside of the community, which at times made them question their existence in society; they became the "other." However, let me be clear, that this focus on women does not in any way diminish the fact that men were also exposed to forms of colonization, but throughout history, women have always been oppressed more so than men have.

One such discourse that can be analyzed to answer their questions of the "other" is postcolonial feminism, which is born from the feminist and postcolonial theory. Postcolonial feminism in its essence rejects any type of injustice and oppression. The

injustice subjected is viewed as stemming from the domination of power by a white male society. In terms of Hyde Park and the black woman, postcolonial feminism is applied here to examine the impacts of such practices as sexism on women during slavery, from both white and black men, which has led to the devaluation of her womanhood, racism, and her involvements in feminism. These ideas perpetuate a political and economic stronghold on both women and minority groups. The idea of post colonialism implies that such injustices are of the past, this I disagree but feverishly declare that the injustices and inequalities that both women and minorities faced are still alive, and well in the South and in Hyde Park. Women have always faced a myriad of problems just to be able to survive in such oppressive condition. The domination of western male control has deprived many of their cultural identity, stripped them of their dignity, and robbed them of any freedom to choose (Thompson & Austin, 1999; Tucker, 2002). This subjectivity gives the impression to many that the female is "owned" and hence is a submissive to anyone that had portrayed him or herself as a dominant presence. The subject is then overwhelmingly subjected to exploitation which is in fact racist and the damages can be sexually, economically, and of course political, becoming a subject to power and therefore being colonized. This colonization inevitably affects how the woman views herself, the world around her, and the recurrent racist environment that is as present as there is air to breath. The crushing of the spirit by this male-centered oppression leads women tend to believe that they are weak and are inferior to men in many respects, especially in intellect.

This feeling has been described as having someone's foot on your neck, not be able to move and not being able to breathe, gasping for air.

Women of color have always been strong, they had to be or they would cease to exist. Because of their strength, it was important for them to have solidarity within the community and work towards finding a way to overcome any obstacle. Not only have they strived to overcome colonialism, they had to find a voice to be heard as black women because race was an unpleasant fact. These women were human regardless of the constructs in which they had been placed; they deserved rights as women, but more importantly as black women. In order to receive those rights the women had to have a voice, "Minority women must find their voice, if not then the subaltern woman will be as mute as ever". (Spivak, 1988, p.295)

These women became sisters in the struggle yearning to be free, free from an environment in which racism existed. They wanted to be free from plight that made them question their existence, longing for the days when they would again be equally valued with men. The need for freedom caused them to challenge the structures that had been put into place and gave way to thought that would enable them live without being oppressed; it empowerment them with the strength and it gave them a voice. For this way of thinking is the goal of postcolonial feminism: "Moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited...a gesture of defiance that heals that makes new life and new growth possible" (hooks, 1989, p.9). These women of which I speak are the heart and soul of the African American community and it is important for these women's stories be captured in history.

Seeing the World through Her Eyes

In Your Eyes

*In your eyes
The light the heat
In your eyes
I am complete
In your eyes
I see the doorway to a thousand churches
In your eyes
The resolution of all the fruitless searches
In your eyes
I see the light and the heat
In your eyes
Oh, I want to be that complete
I want to touch the light
The heat I see in your eyes*

-Peter Gabriel, 1986

The female voice is often like the thunder that breaks open the sky, it is a mighty force that can shake the strongest of foundations, for hooks 1989, proclaimed that "Each time a woman begins to speak, a liberating process begins, one that is unavoidable and has powerful political implications... the process of self-discovery" (hooks, 1989, p12). This process of change takes form and begins to break down the barriers of a dominating society. The mighty voice of women movements have always wanted to be heard and be treated equally. As women we have always had a social consciousness toward the environment and the importance of its treatment and the inherent connection between the fair treatment of women and the fair treatment of the environment. This intersection of movements became known as ecofeminism. Ecofeminism instinctively grew from a radical form of feminism that connects the long-

standing acquaintance with women and ecology and the environment as documented by Francoise d'Eaubonne (Morgan, 1992, p. 4).

Black women and the environment have always shared a common thread. Since the beginning of time, the woman has been the helpmate of man; she has provided offsprings, supplied nutrition for her family, nurtured, bore the emotional stability, comforted, and served as the moral compass for the family. The environment has provided a home, the habitat, resources, food, natural beauty, sustenance, and all the means for a sustainable future where women prepare a material home. The environment and women share a distinct spiritual kinship. The connection between women and the earth is a spiritual vision which constructs the earth as a sacred being known as the Goddess or Gaia. According to Spretnak (1990), ecofeminism is a joining of environmental, feminist, and women's spirituality concerns (p. 5). Women see the beauty in the world, regardless of the negatives such as oppression; it is understood that all life is connected and "the destinies of the oak trees and all the peoples of the Earth are wrapped together (Swimme, 1990, p. 22). For millennia the white man has "raped" the Earth; destroying its natural resources just to be able to make a claim that they had conquered something. The conquest may have been a country such as Timbuktu or indigenous women. This degradation of the environment raised the consciousness of women groups to the parallels of their own existence with the environment. Women began to see the relation between the two as a strong unifying force that illuminated the violation of women and the earth as part of the same drama of male control (King, 1990). This unifying force is one that has provided the

foundation for the activism that is being passionately displayed by the women of Hyde Park and other communities. Also, because minorities were held to a lower socio-economic status, much of their gatherings were located in natural spaces. These natural spaces, the environment, caused women to develop a unique relationship and respect for their environment and provided them with raw materials to grow their gardens for food and beautification of their community.

As women, we have an innate sense of duty to protect our loved ones, especially the young and the elderly. In Hyde Park, the majority of the residences are over the age of 50 and there are many young children who are exposed to the environmental hazards. Throughout history, women have been the ultimate survivors and it is our role to help educate and expose the oppression that is being suffered by women and the exploitation of the earth. Starhawk (1990) in my opinion dramatically sums it best:

[O]ur primary understanding [is] that the Earth is alive, part of a living cosmos. What that means is that spirit, sacred, Goddess, God--whatever you want to call it--is not found outside the world somewhere--it's in the world: it *is* the world, and it is us. Our goal is not to get off the wheel of birth nor to be saved from something. Our deepest experiences are experiences of connection with the Earth and with the world. (p. 73)

It has been long conveyed that women are subject to dual oppression, but my contention is that there is no limit to the oppression that women of color have and continue to endure in this white male dominated society. Black women have been labeled as many things throughout history by those in power that do not adequately

illustrate their strengths. Feminist and author, Alice Walker illustrates this oppression so poignantly in her novel *In search of our mothers' gardens: Womanist prose*:

Black women are called, in folklore that so aptly identifies one's status in society, "mule of the world," because we have been handed the burdens that everyone else—everyone else—refused to carry... We have pleaded for understanding, our character has been distorted; when we have asked for simple caring, we have been handed empty inspirational appellations, then stuck in the furthest corner. (p. 237)

We have been able to take the bareness of the world and make it beautiful. We have always been able to use the land which we live to lighten our ever so tiresome load.

We have struggled, we have been knocked down but still we rise.

If it had not been for the strength of women who have faced their fears, wiped their tears, and took a stand for justice, this courageous story of a strong community which have resisted the conventional wisdom of society to stay in their "place" would have been crushed by the society in which is ruled by oppression and dehumanization.

A Place in the Environment

Through the activism and struggles of the Hyde Park residents, transformation is a slow and odious process. However, this is only one-step toward emancipation for the Black community to achieve cultural decolonization. The aim of critical pedagogy is to engage learners by "learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (Freire, 1970/1995, p. 17). Another type of pedagogy that is grounded in natural, ecological experiences that

integrates learning and community is referred to as pedagogy of place. Therefore, a critical pedagogy of place has the same aim as both, and identifies “places” as the contexts in which these situations are perceived and acted upon. The significance of place has emerged as a major theme in environmental crisis because location or place is critical to the relevance of education of the learner and the sustainability of earth. This theory of education has become accepted as an approach to understanding the environment. According to McLaren & Giroux (1990):

At the most general level a critical pedagogy must be a pedagogy of place, that is, it must address the specificities of the experiences, problems, languages, and histories that communities rely upon to construct a narrative of collective identity and possible transformation. (p. 263)

Through critical pedagogy, intellectual tools are developed which are necessary for understanding. In order for people to develop into life-long learners, they must be able to see the world from different perspectives. As humans, we naturally defend what we already believe. Anyone can be taught to get past their habits of thought, which can prevent them from seeing things differently. It can be a difficult task, but people can be taught to challenge their self-interests and think critically about the world around them. This is very important if they are to succeed in the world, to strive for change.

Critical pedagogy is one that has shaped our current democracy in the US, and has led to some of our political policies such as the No Child Left Behind Act; however it does not try to explain our society scientifically, but in terms of the causes and the

effects in our society. All in all the aspect of critical pedagogy is to change our society, by using the critique. By analyzing society, you take into account the topics that you feel are important such as a commitment to social justice and ecological concerns,

A critical pedagogy of place aims to (a) identify, recover, and create material spaces and places that teach us how to live well in our total environments (reinhabitation); and (b) identify and change ways of thinking that injure and exploit other people and places (decolonization) (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 9). Place-based pedagogies are needed so that the education of citizens might have some direct bearing on the wellbeing of the social and ecological places people actually inhabit. Critical pedagogies are needed to challenge the assumptions, practices, and outcomes taken for granted in dominant culture and in conventional education.

The Mis-education of Hyde Park

Two of the most common and often quoted conceptions/misconceptions in education are that "all children can learn" and we as a country are "leaving no child behind." Yet, the majority of school systems in the United States have maintained at the center of their structure a system for tracking and grouping students by ability that, in fact, does not allow all children an equal opportunity to learn. According to Dean, 1997, our American students are in serious trouble, due to their increasingly inability to perform at the same level as international students. So far, many reforms have been implemented to help our kids get to a point where they will be able to perform and compete in the world market. One of these reforms has been the elimination of ability-based grouping, in which African American children have been over represented. In

many schools, ability based grouping, often called tracking, has long been the educational standard in this country and consists of separating students, usually those in grades 4 or 5 through 12, into groups which differ in ability. The terms "ability grouping" and "tracking" have been used to describe a wide array of practices, ranging from the segregation of African American and Hispanic children at an early age, based on unfairly administered intelligence tests, to the placement of gifted and talented children from various backgrounds in advanced courses designed to challenge them. Tracking programs have been criticized on the grounds that they harm disadvantaged children, like the children of Hyde Park. Grouping practices, especially tracking, often have the effect of reducing equity. Research generally shows that tracking and between-class ability grouping benefit students who are placed in high-end tracks or groups while having a detrimental effect on students placed in low-end tracks or groups (Secada, 1992). A study by the Applied Research Center, *No Exit? Testing, Tracking, and Students of Color in U.S. Public Schools*, found that tracking is most common in schools with "significant numbers of African American and/or Latino students." Furthermore, white students regardless of test scores, grades or behavior were much more likely to be placed in "higher tracks" or academic programs. Students of color especially African Americans and Latinos were more likely to be placed in "lower" tracks. Academic programs became "mainly white" set asides, creating separate and unequal schools within a local district or even within a single school, (similar to the Jim Crow Laws). Century, 1994, points out that a disproportionate number of minority and low-income students are placed in low-ability groups and tracks. Students in low-ability

tracks tend to receive lower-quality instruction. Their instruction covers less content; they have more drill and repetition, and places more emphasis on classroom management (Oakes, 1985, 1989). Students in low-ability tracks have difficulty moving out of low tracks into higher tracks (Century, 1994).

Tracking contributes significantly to the achievement gap between low-income, minority students and their more prosperous peers. Ethnic and linguistic minority students from low income backgrounds frequently remain in general and vocational education classes. As a result, they do not become eligible for college enrollment, a major problem. Studying the Rockford Public Schools in Illinois and the San Jose Unified School District in California in 1993, Oakes found that both school systems had created racially imbalanced classes at all three levels--elementary, middle, and senior high--and that, ironically, students were not "tracked" by ability, even though the schools' own thinking supported this practice. Racial/ethnic differences rather than achievement differences provided the primary characteristics differentiating so-called higher and lower "track" classes. White students (and Asian Americans, in San Jose) were consistently over represented and African American and Hispanic students were consistently underrepresented in high-ability classes in all subjects. African American and Hispanic students were consistently over represented while white and Asian American students were consistently underrepresented in low-ability classes in all subjects. In order to move away from the system of tracking that characterizes our public schools, we must rethink the way our schools are organized. As a part of this process we must rid ourselves of the ideas that have been at the very core of the

structure and curriculum of our schools for the past century.

With the heightened awareness in schools, we cannot afford to keep making second class citizens out of an ever increasing part of our population, the minority students, we must begin taking a closer look at innovative and improved ways of schooling that address problems such as tracking. We as a society know that change is never easy, especially the type of change that would do away with such a well-established institution as tracking, especially when it is thought to be a moral necessity. If we as educators want change we are going to have to fight for change. If we as African Americans want change we are going to have to fight for change. We cannot continue to allow failure of our students and denying those students of perceived lower ability an education. We must give them an opportunity to succeed in our society. Theodore Sizer (1992) explained that an intellectual education is every citizen's right and need, and schools must learn to provide it. All children can indeed learn. However, if we give up on some and expect anything less than excellence and success for them all, then it is not they who fail, it is we who have failed them. No child should be restricted to a poor quality education, nor should any child be omitted from the educational framework in American society. That omission is a form of oppression.

I believe that people aren't born with the preconceived notion to oppress; I believe it to be a learned behavior. I believe that environmental injustices such as that in Hyde Park is not a coincidence, it is a product of postcolonial mentalities of slavery. I believe that the loss of lives, loss of culture, and the loss of community in the wake of environmental injustices is a travesty. The Earth in this sense cannot repair herself, the

scars are too deep. Likewise a community cannot heal if its most precious resource, the children, are damaged mentally, physically, and sociologically by those members of society that are supposed to be ethically, and morally responsible. By not acting as such, children are put in danger of never benefiting from opportunities that would have been their legacy if the Hyde Park community had not been contaminated; the legacy of a quality education and life. The purpose of education according to Baldwin, 1963, is to create in a person the ability to look at the world for himself, to make his own decisions, to say to himself this is black or this is white, to decide for himself whether there is a God in heaven or not; for without such an education, the children of Hyde Park and all over the world are poised on the edge of hell.

Oppression

*Together we have travelled a long road
to be where we are today.
This has been a road of struggle against colonial
and apartheid oppression.*

-Thabo Mbeki

Oppression is one thing that I can understand, unfortunately. I have in my lifetime been oppressed and I have witnessed oppression. Oppression knows no boundaries, race, gender, class, or otherwise. Anyone can be oppressed, for any reason. The one thing that I dislike in education is the constant oppression of the students whom we are here to educate. This relates to the children living in the Hyde Park community have for years attended elementary and middle schools that had not made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Many of the students from the community are

identified as SWD (Students with Disabilities). These students have grown up surrounded by this contamination and as an educator I am concerned that the contamination has been a factor in their education development. Not only are they faced with contamination, the elementary school that the students attended had a high incidence of teacher turnover, and an inferior building. These conditions continued until the elementary school was merged with another failing school in a new building. The old school building is now being used as a site for Headstart for students who remain in the community. I have indeed educated those who unfortunately have suffered economically, intellectually, politically and culturally in the world. Freire, believed that by writing *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* that he would be planting the seed of a new perspective for liberation through education all over the world. I do believe that in order to improve your situation in life, one must have education; not to imply, that by having papers from a place of higher learning is the only form of education. I refer to the education in which we emancipate ourselves and become a functioning member of society. Freire (1995) wrote the following:

Oppression-overwhelming control-is necrophilic; it is nourished by love of death, not life. The banking concept of education, which serves the interests of oppression, is also necrophilic...It attempts to control thinking and action, leads women and men to adjust to the world, and inhibits their creative power.

(p. 77)

Oppression in my experience is just another way to kill a person, without actually committing the physical act of murder, but it is in my opinion the murder of the mind and spirit.

Race, gender, and the environment are all interconnected when discussing the history of Hyde Park. This community of African Americans citizens placed great value on being law abiding citizens. The men of the community worked hard to provide for their families, but it was the women of the community that nurtured and organized programs that would prove to be the foundation for the families. It would take strength and a longing for equality to see these things come to fruition and it will take strength and a longing for justice to stop environmental destruction in African American communities.

CHAPTER 3

EXPOSING THE MADNESS OF CONTAMINATION: METHODOLOGY

The Message

*Don't push me close to the edge
I'm trying not to lose my head.
It's like a jungle sometimes;
it makes me wonder how
I keep from going under.*

-Grandmaster Flash, 1982

At the beginning of the 1980's society wrestled with stress, anxiety, uncertainties due to the economic and social woes of the world and the inner cities were feeling the brunt of the problems. The evolution of the hip-hop culture and its new form of music called rap, provided a platform for African American youth to express their struggles. The excerpt from a very popular song, expresses just how close African American came to their breaking point without losing their minds or their lives.

In today's world we (people) are already living on the edge. In Hyde Park there has been so much lost due to the contamination. Most residents are frustrated, they want move, but they must fight the "jungle" of bureaucracy. The edge refers to the psychological (losing their minds) warfare that plagues them in trying to figure out "what in the hell am I going to do", when their life has been spent in a home for over thirty years and most of the special moments with family and friends have been shared there.

After spending more than half of my life in Hyde Park, I want to investigate how these people are "making sense" of their condition by viewing

them through qualitative research utilizing the lens of critical race theory and the collection of oral history. The use of Critical Race Theory according to Denzin & Lincoln (2008), "qualitative research is a situated activity that locates in the world...involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical methods...life story; interview...observational, historical, interactional and visual texts...that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives", (p.4). In my endeavor to find a satisfactory understanding of my role as a researcher and a member of society creating a straight and unobstructed path was not as easy as wished. Racism is so widespread in the South there are many minorities that are constantly failed by society because they are minuscule compared to industry and governmental bodies, therefore they are bullied into living an existence of despair and death of their spirits and eventually their lives.

Critical Race Theory

The environmental injustices that have taken place in Hyde Park are rooted in racism and in the south those roots run deep. African Americans have long had fight for rights revolving around the basic necessities of life and education. The purpose of this study was to explore the affects of environmental racism on the residents and my family of the Hyde Park community. In this inquiry, Critical race theory was the chosen as a theoretical framework and oral history as the methodology. Critical race theory serves as a way to contribute to the understandings of the experiences of African Americans and their struggle for

social justice. (Ladson-Billings 1998, 1999, 2000) By using critical race theory and oral history the lived experiences of my family can be interpreted since the contamination was discovered. By making those connections in these experiences will hopefully help others make sense of the contamination from a perspective other than that of dominant majority.

Critical Race Theory has been described as “a call for ethical behavior in the academy (p. 386) Denzin & Lincoln (2008). Critical race theory is a movement where activist and scholars come together to study and transform “the relationship among race, racism, and power” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 2) in response to the African American plight in the post era of the Civil Rights Movement, Tate (1996). Derrick Bell is considered the “intellectual father figure” of the critical race theory movement and after publishing *Race, Racism and American Law*, in 1973 where he critiqued traditional civil rights legislation, the history of critical race theory began. Bell along with Alan Freeman was dissatisfied with the extremely slow rate of racial reforms that were to lessen the blows of racism in society. Critical race theory is characterized by five tenets “to disentangle how race continues to be a significant factor in maintaining inequity in the United States” Williams-Johnson, 2011 personal communication. These tenets are:

1. Counter-Storytelling gives voice to people of color, enabling them to describe their oppression under America’s capitalist democracy.
2. Permanence of Racism offers an evaluation of how racist views are created and maintained within our everyday lives (Bell, 1992).

3. A critique of Liberalism considers the theories of race and race consciousness, and identifies the slow progress and innumerable delays in resolving racial inequalities in the quest for racial justice (Taylor, 1998).
4. Whiteness as Property is evidence of the advantages to White identity is flagrantly seen in laws and policies that benefit Whites in political and social environments such as voting, citizenship, and education (Harris, 1993).
5. Interest Convergence occurs when the interest of Blacks in achieving racial inequality has been accommodated only when this goal has converged with the interest of powerful Whites (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Taylor, 1998).

The history of critical race theory provides an understanding for the legal debates that followed the civil rights era. These legal debates were the stepping stone for other minority legal scholars such as Richard Delgado, Matsuda Lawrence, and Kimberle Crenshaw to inquire into the treatment of minorities, especially, African Americans. Critical race theory proved to define the "us" and "them" in society. The racisms that were studied in the realm of critical race theory consisted of the use of power differences, unequal educational opportunities, adequate housing, employment practices, and environmental concerns. The research into critical race theory, uncovers practices that have been have occurred throughout history, relating them to political and social norms. Because African Americans are stigmatized for not being legitimate members of society, their claims of oppression often fall on deaf ears. Bell (1992) described in his explosive book on racial oppression, *Faces at the Bottom of the Well*, this first rule of racial standing:

The law grants litigants standing to come into court based on their having sufficient personal interest and involvement in the issue to justify judicial cognizance. Black people (while they may be able to get into court) are denied such standing legitimacy in the world generally when they discuss their negative experiences with racism or even when they attempt to give a positive evaluation of another black person or his or her work. No matter their experience or expertise, blacks' statements involving race are deemed "special pleading" and thus not entitled to serious consideration. (p. 111)

Critical race theory examines and explains how racism exists and permeates within the facets of society. It lends itself as a platform by which we acknowledge its existence and try to work for equality and justice in our society (Bell 1992, Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Matsuda, Delgado, and Creshaw, 1993; Omi & Winant, 2005).

Oppression by the majority has no boundaries; race, gender, or class. Anyone can be oppressed, for any reason, and the use of critical race theory is in place to create solidarity for all humanity. This solidarity branches into the realm of education and the inequalities that minorities encounter is trying to acquire a quality education. Ladson-Billings & Tate introduced critical race theory to the realm of education in 1995 when they called for us to "theorize race and use it as an analytical tool for understanding school inequity" (p. 49). They proposed that race is an integral part of the fabric of the United States and therefore have a significant impact on education. Also significant is the educational quality of a school when property taxes are considered; wealthy schools have a higher quality whereas poorer schools have a lower quality. Depending on who

(the racial majority) is relaying the information of the experiences determines how it is perceived.

Critical race theory framework is significant to my inquiry because it provides a voice to the voiceless in a world of environmental injustices. These injustices force us to take race into account when society is making governmental policies because environmental degradation affects African Americans more than the average citizen. Also, because of racial inequalities, African Americans live in poorer areas; have more health concerns which in turn cause a barrier between them and healthcare professionals. Critical race theory recognizes racism as a malignant system of institutionalized practices that determine the distribution of all social, economic, and political power in unjust and racially embedded ways that are the core of this society. The voices in my study are those of my family who have detailed how racism has affected them and their community through their lived experiences. When these experiences are voiced they are used to foster a pursuit of social justice.

Critical race theorists use the mechanism of counter-storytelling to challenge the racial characteristics of society through the lived experiences (Solorzano & Yosso 2002; Tate 1995; Delgado 1989) and lend a voice to African Americans such as those in Hyde Park. Theorists Solorzano & Yosso (2002) provide the definition for counter-storytelling as being “a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told” which include all marginalized groups (p. 26). These marginalized groups include my family and their stories have produced the counter stories that will hopefully challenge how stories are analyzed in terms of racial inequalities.

The residents of Hyde Park are victims of racist's actions and experiences. Through their stories the participants allow us to become an active observer in their lives. Through their stories we can dissect the parts of their lives that contradict the voices of biased opinion and extract the strands that make them a proud and caring community. Within the strands are voices that I hope will empower others to want to understand the importance of such experiences.

Oral History

Everyone has a story to tell about his or her lives. In my inquiry, oral history is used as a methodology to collect the stories of my family and their lives in Hyde Park. These oral histories are a collection of memories that are significant to a particular time in the life of my family. These histories may not seem important at first, but by collecting these histories valuable information can be recorded for later use. Oral history involves the process of collecting evidence through recorded conversations of memorable experiences (Charlton 2006, 2007; Ritchie 2003).

Oral history is the oldest form of collecting history, "the expectation of history is not only that it informs, but that its meanings are carried by an enriched and enlivened narration", (Short, 1991, p. 79). The importance of the use of the oral history is that it depends on that of "spoken word" and if not recorded could be lost forever. Ritchie (2003)

During the European conquest of the Americas in the sixteen century, Spanish chronicles relied on oral sources to reconstruct the history of the indigenous people, from the Aztecs to the Incas to assist in both colonization and conversion they

collected the testimony of survivors of these once great civilizations, concentrating on their social, economic, and religious traditions. (p. 20)

This spoken word is valuable not only for future generations but it provides the opportunity to experience and acquire knowledge, a learning experience. Oral history was an invaluable way that slaves passed down their history, since they were forbidden to learn how to read and write. These histories documented their lives and everyday struggles as property of many savage people. Likewise oral history is used as evidence in structuring and understanding, in this case, the history of the particular culture and their struggles to survive environmental contamination.

Since the early life of my participants were shaped by the community of Hyde Park their history will provide as a means of access to knowledge that can be entwined with the community participants to create a new voice and expose the experience of racism and contamination. The Hyde Park community can serve as a place in gathering knowledge because, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2008):

With an increasing amount of political and social action now emanating from local-level agencies and community organizations, it is not unreasonable to expect that communities themselves (broadly defined as neighborhoods, municipalities, organizations, and other coherent groups) will want to have access to information, data, knowledge, and interpretations regarding their own circumstances and possibilities for action. As communities acquire systematic information about themselves, they are empowered to participate in designing their own futures and to take action where it is meaningful: locally. (p. 232)

Oral history serves to place the marginalized in traditional history records and provide others with new and valuable information. Not only does oral history provide a voice it also exposes the raw emotion of a particular period of time in a life.

The power of oral history is one the most accepted forms of inquiry in qualitative research. According to Janesick (2007) here are ways that the two converge to make sense of our world: (1) the *basic techniques* of oral history are the basic techniques of qualitative research. Both use interviews, observations, and documents as evidence, (2) telling someone's story particularly through remembering key events and *lived experience* is a major goal for both the oral historian and for many qualitative research projects, (3) using *ordinary language* to tell the story is required for both the oral historian and the qualitative researcher. The beauty of oral history is that the everyday words of the participants are captured on digital voice recordings or digital video recordings and yield an understandable narrative, (4) there is no one set *explanation or interpretation* for a given set of data. Oral historians, as qualitative researchers, use the data at hand and render the most inclusive explanation and interpretation possible at that moment in time, and (5) Historians and qualitative researchers are involved in *describing and explaining someone's memory* of events and activities. There is a powerful urge in the soul of human beings to preserve their stories, their past recollections, and weave the story of their lives. Oral history is a memory of the self. (p. 113)

Most documented history of a culture is derived from the oral storytelling.

Writing among the slaves was not permitted; therefore, stories were passed down from generation to generation. Oral history details accounts economically, intellectually, politically, environmentally, and culturally events of the world. Oral history places the focuses on the perceptions and attitudes of a particular culture (Glesne 2006). Oral histories were and are still a part of family gatherings. Looking back over my life, I can recall many occasions when family history was passed on by the telling of stories. These stories have been recalled when we need to validate some aspect of our history and make sense of our legacy. One such oral history is now well documented and read every year during our church anniversary. This history is a collective story of the beginnings of a one room school house that eventually became our family church and has provided every generation with knowledge of our heritage as slaves to distinguished leaders.

Although this history is important to us, it is important to make the transition from oral history to written history. Written documents such as the narratives of my family, my participants, serve as evidence to capture the social injustices that have taken place in a community of African Americans. Therefore since the oral histories are made public they “would pass muster in line with the canons of the respectable publishing world” (Charlton 2007, p. 36).

The residents of Hyde Park are familiar with telling their story. Many of the residents have told their story in several different forums, newspaper, radio, and most recently documentary. Interaction is a key component when collecting data through oral history, therefore one method of collection that was personal interview and the

other, archival data. Also, newspaper articles and personal video footage was be used to collect needed data. According to Glesne (2006), “the opportunity to learn about what you cannot see and to explore alternative explanations of what you see is a special strength of interviewing in qualitative inquiry”, (p. 81). In terms of community, oral histories allow the participants to “give back” history to the people by empowering them for community activism (Charlton, Meyers, and Sharpless, 2007).

Qualitative researchers use interviews in studies for the reasons of collecting data that can provide background information on respondents and according to Chisaka (2002), “interviews provide access to information that cannot be accessed through observations and document analysis, such as feelings and intentions” (p. 21).

Interviews were utilized during this study for collecting data. Interviews were both formal and informal depending on the time that the narrator was available to meet with me. Qualitative researchers use interviews because the interview allows for deep analysis of the participant, “For qualitative inquiry, the interview is rightly conceived as an occasion for depth probes—getting to the bottom of things” (Glensne 2006, p. 96).

Only adult residents of the Hyde Park community were chosen for interviews. Though many were chosen, only a few participated, and some were victims of their diseases. Because it was important to gather a range of cultural experience, the interviewees consisted of different generational groups. Interview questions were established for each participant; therefore a background for each participant was established. In addition, by conducting interviews observations can be made of the participant’s reactions to the questions and their tone of voice, and emotion exhibited.

I found that the tone of voice emphasized their awareness of the injustices that they were being subjected. The oral histories also made me think twice about how I had perceived things about these individuals; it allowed me into their reality as an individual person.

The interviews were transcribed and processed to collect the appropriate data needed for the study. Just as interviewing is important, transcripts are equally important. Charlton (2006) discussed in *Handbook of oral history* the following, "the transcript has been a part of oral history practice in the United States from the beginning, the transcript was the only record of an interview to survive, to be archived, preserved and made accessible for study (p. 237).

Since this community has such a rich history and their environmental struggle has been documented, the information in their archival data was also reviewed to be included in the study. The analysis of the data included the oral histories from participants, respectively. The data was gathered to identify emerging research findings that were used to further understand aspects of the Hyde Park community residents.

Exemplary Oral History Texts

In the book entitled, *Polluted Promises*, Melissa Checker (2005), details the continued struggle for justice in an African American community in Augusta, Georgia. Her book is written from a socio-anthropological aspect, but the text encompasses the oral histories of many of the residents in the community. Checker's passion for telling the world the story of this community, encouraged her to live in this "black" community

for 14 months. By engaging personally with the residents she became a part of the culture, meaning that she continued the legacy of nurturing and caring for the elderly and the youth. She worked with the residents to create after school tutoring programs, learned to appreciate southern cuisine such as collards and chittlins, and more importantly gave them a voice.

In preparing to collect her stories, Checker met with about three-fourths of the adult residents living in Hyde Park, but only obtained key information from about twenty-five. She attended many meetings and events in community as well as attending the local hangout. She became involved by passing out flyers and distributing bags of food to the needy. Her willingness to immerse herself in the culture of the community and become part of the solution made her a one of them. Checker recalls her experience "I thus got to know residents who came in and out of the center and participated in countless informal conversations and discussions about their lives, the lives of their neighbors, and local and national politics", (p. 194).

In *Overcoming Katrina: African American Voices from the Crescent City and Beyond*, D'Ann Penner and Keith Ferdinand dispel the notions that African-American New Orleanians are a scourge in the city. This book dives into the counter-stories of this citizens and present an opposing view from the mainstream observer "these narratives challenge the widespread portrayal of the poor, lazy, and loud New Orleanian looking for a handout, with stories of flesh-and-blood, hard-working, religious, family-oriented men and women with diverse peccadilloes like everyone else", (p. 229). By

using oral history the authors informs us that the African American slaves were the ones that built the levees that helped to safeguard the city:

African American slaves performed the taxing, dangerous labor that kept New Orleans' levees safe for commercial traffic and compensated for the city's poor drainage system. Their efforts were so crucial that one of the most pressing concerns troubling New Orleans' leadership after the Civil War was who would maintain the levees now that slavery had been abolished. (p. 220)

New Orleans has a rich African American heritage. Oral history captures the essence of heritages and in this particular case, the "passionate currents" of love and respect for their beloved city.

All God's Dangers is an oral history account of the life of Nate Shaw who lived as a sharecropper in Alabama during the Depression. His story was preserved on tape by author, Theodore Rosengarten, as a black witness to rural Southern history. In the text, Nate Shaw detailed how his life had unfolded as a black man in the south. He discussed how as a boy he had heard the oral histories of "how colored people come to America", (p. 300) and he understood at a young age that black people were not recognized as people like the whites and that they "had no voice". The spoken words that Rosengarten recorded, gave Nate Shaw and other African Americans a voice that validated the stories of generations. The text detailed the memory of Nate Shaw and his emotions while telling his story at times with sadness and other times with humor. These stories that he told captured his life and remind us of the struggles that our ancestors had to endure to make it in this world. By agreeing to tell his story I believe

he wanted to bring understanding to lives that he and others lived in the South without garnering pity.

Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl chronicles the lived experiences of Harriet Jacobs. Jacobs tells her story under the guise of another, which is not usually done when using oral history. She begins her story as a young happy child who loses her mother. Upon the death she learns that she is a slave. She is left with her mistress who she recounts speaks of her mother as being "noble and womanly", and stays with her until she dies and is now with a new master and mistress. Jacobs's life progresses and she now begins to understand that she is property and that she must subject herself to the will of her master, Dr. Flint. Jacobs states this about her life with Dr. Flint, "I had always been kindly treated, and tenderly cared for, until I came into the hands of Dr. Flint. I had never wished for freedom till then" (p. 174). She detailed how her life was changed because of slavery and the oppressions she had to bear because (1) she was black (2) she was a slave, and (3) she was a woman. She acknowledges through her history that being a woman slave was much worse than being a male slave. Because this oral history is written by a woman, it provides a different perspective of slavery because slave narratives are usually recounted by men. This text can serve as a platform for women who have stories of oppression that they need to tell.

Elie Wiesel's *Night*, is a harrowing account of his life under the oppression of the Nazis in a prison camp. Wiesel details his life before the Nazis and during his imprisonment. He provides accounts that are so vivid and filled with emotion that one

cannot help but want to rescue this child. Wiesel wrote, *Night*, many years into adulthood, but his lived experiences take you into his horrors a young Jewish boy sent to Auschwitz. He narrates how his family was forced from their homes and sent to live in the ghettos of Hungary, and had to wear the yellow star on their clothes. As Wiesel presents this account of his life, you experience the pain and anguish the he lived as a young boy. The title, *Night*, refers to the first night of horrors that Wiesel experiences at the concentration camp that he never forgets:

Never shall I forget that night, the first night in camp, which has turned my life into one long night, seven times cursed and seven times sealed. Never shall I forget that smoke. Never shall I forget the little faces of the children, whose bodies I saw turned into wreaths of smoke beneath a silent blue sky.

Never shall I forget those flames which consumed my faith forever.

Never shall I forget that nocturnal silence which deprived me, for all eternity, of the desire to live. Never shall I forget those moments which murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to dust. Never shall I forget these things, even if I am condemned to live as long as God Himself, Never. (p. 34)

The horrors that Wiesel pens are meant to provide an opportunity for the world to be a witness to the atrocities that he and others endured during World War II. Many people lost their lives and were unable to share their stories, but Wiesel found the courage to confront the nightmare so that others would learn from it so that it won't happen again.

During slavery the oppressed were not allowed to learn to read or write, for fear that they would acquire knowledge and break free of the bonds. Even though they

could not write their history, they could tell their stories. The experiences of the residents of Hyde Park are nothing less than the horrors that Wiesel and others have had to endure because of race. Because of the perceptions of race, it is in the best interest of justice that society share in the benefits of this inquiry. This inquiry will focus on the community of Hyde Park and its struggle to have access to quality education, healthcare, and lives.

Voices for Justice and Equality

Participants

The storytellers of this study are residents from the Hyde Park community and members of my family. Eunice W. Jordan, my mother, is a sixty year resident, retired educator, activist, and secretary of the Hyde and Argon Park Improvement Committee, Sharon D. Wells, my aunt, is a fifty year resident, an educator, and activist, Ernest L Jordan, my brother, is a forty year old former resident and activist, DeWanna L. Jordan, my sister, is a thirty-three year resident and activist, and Darius L. Jordan, my brother, is a twenty two year former resident and activist. Each participate has been entwined in the fight for justice since the contamination was found. The participant's stories that appear in the study had similar themes running through them. The participants range in age from the mid-twenties to mid-sixties and offer their unique account of their lives in Hyde Park People of different ages sometimes have a different perspective in the way they view their life.

Interviews

Interviews conducted were both formal and informal. The interviews were conducted at the participants and the researcher's home, depending on the occasion. The time allotted for each interview depended on how much time the participant could set aside. Initial interviews were conducted with selected questions while subsequent interviews were conducted with open-ended questions. These questions will seek to identify who, what, why, and how in terms of the environmental contamination of Hyde Park. Clandinin & Connelly (2000) state the following:

In some general sense, the questions of meaning, significance, and purpose are questions of who, why, what, how, context, and form. For whom will we write? Who are the characters in the study? Why are we writing? What are we trying to convey? What personal, practical, and theoretical contexts give meaning to the inquiry and to its outcomes? What forms could our final research texts take?

(p. 121)

Interviews were recorded and transcribed to uncover common themes of the participants.

CHAPTER 4

POISONED GROUND: A WITCHES BREW OF RACE, HEALTH, AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Mercy Mercy Me (the Ecology)

*Oh, mercy mercy me
Oh, things ain't what they used to be
Where did all the blue sky go?
Poison is the wind that blows
From the north, east, south, and sea*

*Oh, mercy mercy me
Oh, things ain't what they used to be
Oil wasted on the oceans and upon our seas
Fish full of mercury*

*Oh, mercy mercy me
Oh, things ain't what they used to be
Radiation in the ground and in the sky
Animals and birds who live nearby are dying*

*Oh, mercy mercy me
Oh, things ain't what they used to be
What about this overcrowded land?
How much more abuse from man can you stand?*

*My sweet Lord
My sweet Lord
My sweet Lord*

-Marvin Gaye, 1971

At the onset of the seventies the world was a lot less appealing to the oppressed and environmentally compassionate members of society. Still reeling from the atrocities of the turbulent sixties, the world at a glance was still in the mist of civil unrest and at odds with the Vietnam War as well as grappling with “the heightened public concern

about the environmental pollution that was symbolized by the Earth Day demonstrations" (Rogers, 1990). I can only imagine that Mr. Gaye's frustration was born out of his desire to make people, especially African Americans, aware of the continued injustices that were occurring, he put his emotions into the one thing that transcended the color line, music. His ability to capture the mood of society, especially African-Americans during this era, helped to make his words a reminder of what society needed to unite to conquer. It was a cry for government to take the helm and act to reduce the health and environmental troubles that were evident much still needs to be done. According to Bullard in *Faces of environmental racism: confronting issues of global justice* (1995) makes this observation of the inequities that still exist:

Despite the recent attempts by federal agencies to reduce environmental and health threats in the United States, inequities persist. If the community is poor or inhabited largely by people of color, there is a good chance that it receives less protection than a community that is affluent or white. This situation is a result of the country's environmental policies, most of which "distribute the costs in a regressive pattern while providing disproportionate benefits for the educated and wealthy"...In fact, the current environmental protection paradigm has institutionalized unequal enforcement, traded human health for profit, placed burden of proof on the "victims" rather than on the polluting industry, legitimated human exposure to harmful substances, promoted "risky" technologies...As a result, low income and minority communities continue to bear

greater health and environmental burdens, while the more affluent and white communities receive the bulk of the benefits. (p. 3)

Poisoned Fruit

Residents always took pride in growing the fruits and vegetables that their families enjoyed; it was a way of life. Throughout my childhood and youth I cannot recall anyone that didn't have a garden in their yards. During summer months there were always peaches, pears, and plums growing. Fresh vegetables were common. I remember having to go out to our garden to pull weeds and pick the vegetables. When mama made a salad or made fried green tomatoes, the produce was right out the back door. I had an unlimited supply of pomegranates that Mr. Utley grew, when they were ripe he would do one of two things, if I was outside in the yard he would shout from his yard to my grandparents, "Debry come get ya plumgranites" or call on the phone to let me know he had my "package". I would go down to his house and get my bag and be so happy, always around Halloween I knew I was going to get my package. I ate pomegranates before they were popular, life was good. Being able to grow your own food in toxic soil and to share them with neighbors was a community norm, now that simplicity of life is a memory for the Hyde Park residents.

Living in an African American community makes the residents more susceptible to a disproportionate number of environmental hazards (Cole and Foster, 2001). Hyde Park has had many test conducted on soil and water samples from various areas by state and federal agencies. In 1991, the University of Georgia Cooperative

Extension Service for Richmond County tested soil and produce from gardens in the community and found high levels of arsenic and chromium:

Surface soil samples from residences and a school (Jenkins Elementary School) in the area were analyzed by the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension Service, and the results were transmitted to Sid Mullis in a letter dated September 9, 1991. The results indicated concentrations of arsenic, chromium, and copper in the soil far above (at least ten (10) fold higher than) natural background concentrations. These three (3) elements are present in chromated copper arsenate (a wood preserving compound) strongly suggesting that the source of this contamination was the SWP facility. Arsenic is a known human carcinogen and also causes severe acute toxic effects including dermatitis, peripheral neuropathy and cardiovascular irregularities. Longer exposures may cause irreversible damage to the nervous system, liver and peripheral vasculature.”

(Ernest L. Jordan et al v. Southern Wood Piedmont Company, Affidavit of Carl O. Schulz, 1991).

A composite surface soil sample was taken from the schoolyard at Jenkins Elementary school and from the drainage ditch that is adjacent to the school playground. These samples were found to contain chlorinated dibenzo-p-dioxins (PCDD), dibenzofurans (PCDF), and phenols. These chemicals are known as carcinogens and exposure to these compounds can cause chloracne, a skin disorder characterized by the exposure of dioxins, and other skin disorders. These compounds

have been also found to interfere with reproduction, can cause birth defects, alter immune function, and cause irreversible liver damage. All of the above chemicals are accumulated through the process of biomagnification, meaning that they accumulate in the fatty tissue of the body and remain indefinitely. Please keep in mind that these toxins had been in the soil and water for years before they were brought to the public's attention. Therefore many people have lost their lives and have been sick from the chemicals before 1990, we just don't know how many. But as a young child I remember friends losing parents and siblings to cancer during the late 1970's and early 1980's and not understanding why, now I know.

During health forums set up by Richmond County health department and requested by residents, questionnaires were filled out about past and current health issues. There were a total of two hundred and twenty-nine questionnaires that were completed overall that indicated their complaints both in oral and verbal communication. In one particular clinic the following complaints were recorded and this information was the spring board for subsequent clinics to gather additional information of health concerns. Below is a chart detailing complaints from residents and former residents from the June 1992 medical forum:

Table 1

Health Complaints of the Residents of Hyde Park

No #	Person Initials	Age	Health Complaints
1	KM	8	Throat Problems
2	JC	38	Sore are taken longer time to heal and has hearing problem
3	CC	38	Lost wife, she died of Medullary Failure, Alzheimer's and Parkinson Disease and I have lost my sense of smell
4	RS	32	Bad nerves, sweaty hands and bronchitis
5	ES	32	I have lupus which started two years after I move into Hyde Park
6	WH	29	Can't gain weight
7	BE	40	Liver disease
8	TD	8	Seizures at a young age
9	MS	14	Breaks out with rashes on the back and leave dark spot
10	SB	21	Scalp sores, bold spot in head
11	BE	37	I have a liver disease
12	NB	20	Received spots on skins and skin is very dry, will peel and bleed
13	PR	42	Keratosis on the sold of her foot
14	GK	33	I have inflammation of the lung called , sarcoidosis diagnostic in 1986
15	GL	32	I worked at Clara Jenkins and I was pregnant and my children developed some birth defeats
16	SC	40	I have pain on top of head, nerve hurt or muscle cramps in head and have nausea
17	WC	50	I worked at SWP(Southern Wood Piedmont) and been treated for kidney problems and has light headedness
18	JC	36	I have four children that worked in the area, one of my sons lost his hair and the other son has rashes that will not go away. My husband work for SWP for 30 years and I have had an ectopic pregnancy.
19	HM	41	I have bad headaches and pain all the time. It's hard to breathe, hard to remember things and can't see to good

20	LP	60	I break out on the inside of my feet
21	ES	61	I have breast cancer and my husband has been diagnosed with liver cancer.
22	GM	60	On renal dialysis worked at wood yard
23	JG	52	Daughter has a cyst on liver and son has encephalitis
24	CJ	42	I have back problem (kidney), eye sight went bad, heart problem, memory loss and gum problems.
25	BC	51	Some dark rough spots on my hands and stayed on my hands and I lose one eye. Shorting of breathe all the time. Urine infection all the time
26	CL	14	My uncle Jack had lung cancer and I have liver cancer
27	CS	66	My toenails are thick and dark around the edges of my feet; I got blisters and sweats heavily of my feet. Occasionally I wake up and can't stop crying I have been to mental health for this and they say my nerves is just bad
28	RJ	22	I believe creosote is the problem and the discoloration to my skin pigmentation and I be nervous all the time
29	AK	12	My eyes run water a lot
30	BL	35	My children has birth defects such cleft pallet, I have back problem, my eye sight done go bad, I have ulcer on my leg
31	BT	49	Heated water taste awful. I have had many problem with my health and I'm sure was cause by environmental condition in-addition to the cancer and severe skin problems. I have had failing eye sight, bad teeth, and back problem. Also I have problem with memory and learning which I have no explanation for I can't advance to what my mental capacity could be, skin around eyes ruined from scratching because of itching. I am sterile and unable to conceive. My daddy died of cancer which spread to his lungs.
32	JD	45	Mental problems
33	FD	44	I worked at Clara Jenkins school for 3 years and had bad headache ever since
34	CD	49	When we burned the wood the flames were blue and smoky made me feel I wanted to fall out
35	IP	47	My children had club feet and cleft pallet and had a miscarriage and had blur far vision
36	MS	72	Just used the wood and wood stove for heating purposes

37	JS	40	The smell from the plant was terrible it made me nauseous, I had a garden and black berry from the ditches near the plant
38	JL	37	I grow playing on SWP grounds and in the pond behind it and I have leukemia
39	BR	41	They built a back room with the wood. I have a thyroid problem and two relatives that live in the same house and died of cancer, and I had skin cancer
40	NJ	34	I have dizziness and severe headache and weakness, doctors can't find anything wrong with me
41	JB	68	Our house is bad for get flooded, we are on many medication for our problems
42	SN	65	Lennie brought slabs of phone poles, it has a greenish color, the water was awful it burned our eyes, nose smell like moth ball, had a orange skim on water when boiling food, the pots turn a dark blackish color from the waterline when cooked in the pots kept a dark line around the food.
43	SW	50	I have had a lot of female problems and had to have a hysterectomy.
44	GK	29	Always sick to stomach and have lots of trouble with my feet
45	MC	72	My first husbands die in 1993 of chronic asthma and I have had cancer removed from skin
46	CM	43	We played on the ground of the Piedmont, on the pole and drank the water it was across the street piedmont (water well) have been hospitalize for nervous breakdowns off and on for 8 years, had a child premature born at 6 and a half months, have coughed up blood and had numbness in hands and strange feelings, hearing voices far away when people speak and when I speak ,scary feeling in chest and had tumor in the wall of uterus
47	RR	35	I built rabbit pins and other stuff with it (wood) I 'm on disability with nerve problems. I had to retire at 28 years of age, I have child mister that has a learning disability and a behavior disability and was also born with ear trouble, and he had to have tubes put in his ears. I have had spots from waist down when itching while cutting grass.

48	AG	53	My mother died of cancer and my brother is dying of terminal cancer
49	DF	45	I have skin discoloration and trimmers
50	SH	26	I had two miscarriages and a premature birth
51	EW	50	Skin problem burns on breast, and history of boil in the going area and vitiligo
52	MR	39	My husband and my son have dead skin that come on the bottom of their feet and it come off in hunks, my skin stays dry and my daughter has dry skin
53	JC	42	Darkening and hardening of skin with extreme itching
54	JM	48	We went swimming at the ditch by Piedmont by the railroad tracks and I have kidney problem and skin problems
55	SW	40	I had problems with my left ear when I was a child for 1 ½ years. I'm deaf now in my left ear
56	DC	32	I lost my wife with lung disease I had 13 skin cancer and other skin disease
57	LC	43	I spent much time for several years with Mr. Tucker and drank well water at his house, he has died. When I move to S road 15 years ago I was in excellent health since I have been hospitalize thirteen times for gastrointestinal problems. I have serious nervous problems and I was determined to be totally disabled by Social Security, a neurologist did EMG test on my legs I have neuropathy in both leg.

One of the participants that I hadn't seen in a while sat down with me to talk about the situation and he had because he felt that his quality of life would have been much better if he had not been exposed to toxins:

When I was little eleven until adult hood, I drink water on the SWP play there and hunted there and picked berries on the ground. I burned wood in the yard to see the different colors. I use it as fence post around my gardens a couple of times. I want to list some things that I want to know if SWP chemicals caused.

- 1 Partial tone deafness
2. Sinus trouble
3. Burning eyes while they were in operations cleaning up over there
4. Heart murmur
5. I'm on disability and have been on it for 15 years, because I was diagnose as having a border line personality with schizoid features, I will like to know if long turn exposure could have cause neurological damage,
6. Fatigue
7. I have bladder control problem while I was asleep until I was 30 year old, I would like to know if SWP had anything to do with that,
8. I had a rash on the side of my stomach a little above my belt line also relatives have had Lymphoma and skin cancer.

People want someone to take responsibility for the destruction to their lives.

People want to hear, "We're sorry" just once from the companies that have contributed to the toxic environment, but they are still waiting. They had to know that chemicals

were flowing into the neighborhood. They had to know it would make us sick. Were we to be test subjects as in the Tuskegee Experiment? Rachel Carson (1962) warned of the biological implications of chemicals into the environment:

As the tide of chemicals born of the Industrial Age has arisen to engulf our environment, a drastic change has come about in the nature of the most serious public health problems. Only yesterday mankind lived in fear of the scourges of small pox, cholera, and plague that once swept nations before them. Now our major concern is no longer with the disease organisms that once were omnipresent; sanitation, better living conditions, and new drugs have given us a high degree of control over infectious disease. Today we are concerned with a different kind of hazard that lurks in our environment—a hazard we ourselves have introduced into our world as our modern way of life has evolved. The new environmental health problems are multiple—created by radiation in all its forms, born of the never-ending stream of chemicals ... chemicals now pervading the world in which we live, acting upon us directly and indirectly, separately and collectively. Their presence casts a shadow that is no less ominous because it is simply impossible to predict the effects of lifetime exposure to chemical and physical agents that are not part of the biological experience of man". (p. 187-188)

Evidences of the biological implications of chemicals in Hyde Park are documented in the medical files of past and present residents. Watching a neighbor or relative deteriorate from cancer is not a pleasant experience. It makes you angry

knowing that this could have been avoided. I also suspect my health problems, my cancerous cells, could have been avoided. I often wonder how different people's lives would be if these chemicals hadn't been let in our community. I believe my problems began when I walked in the contaminated water during the flood in October 1990. Not only did it flood in Hyde Park but it flooded in Augusta that caught the nation's attention. I will always remember that flood for several reasons but the reason I had to wade in the 3ft of water was to retrieve a dress and shoes that I was to wear the following day to my best friend's wedding, I was her matron of honor.

We had to leave our home in a hurry on that October day because it had begun flooding and the water had reached our porch. I returned the next day to retrieve the dress, but the flood waters had not receded so, I walked about a mile in that polluted water to recover the dress. I remember that I had to dispose of the clothes that I wore that day because I could never get the black tinge out of them. I didn't think about the oily substance, I thought it was from oil slicks from the cars. Since that time I have had numerous problems with my reproductive system including cancer, so I know how being ill, being in pain can change and interfere with your life. Three people were with me that day and one had to have a hysterectomy, another is on dialysis, and the other has had to have cysts removed from his body.

The oil that was mentioned in the previous section turned out to be the creosote from Southern Wood Piedmont which contains dioxins and is toxic to humans. In the article below it identifies a picture of Maxine Baez with lesions that were once full blown acne that ulcerated and left scars on her skin. This same type of skin condition has

been linked to veterans that have been exposed to Agent Orange. Also in the article Pam Smith the former director of Richmond County Emergency Medical Services wanted to step in to provide assistance to the residents of Hyde Park however, the local government would not make any decisions in favor of the community; therefore she could not do anything to help without the expressed approval of the local government. The state government wanted to help but they needed a plan from the local level which has yet to be done.

Plagued By Cancer, Rashes, Other Diseases

Residents Demand Answers

by Clarence Wilson
AUGUSTA—An angry crowd of more than 350 jammed into the Clara E. Jenkins Elementary School gym last week for a public meeting with representatives from the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR).

The Hyde Park residents were seeking answers to pollution problems which have plagued their neighborhood for years. Residents claim chemicals used by the Southern Wood Piedmont Treatment Plant are the cause of their many health and respiratory problems. The chemicals, they say, have been carried by ground water from the plant into drainage ditches surrounding their neighborhood and homes.

The meeting, in response to a request made more than three years ago, quickly heated up as residents were forced to sift through complex charts, confusing jargon, and scientific rhetoric.



One statement though came out crystal clear—ATSDR officials said they could find no current public health hazard. This infuriated Charles Roberts, a Hyde Park resident whose family members have been diagnosed

"They knew that stuff was contaminated, and they dumped it in the creek anyway. I know 15 people from here who have died of some kind cancer or bone disease."

—Ray Lamb
Former Southern Wood Piedmont Plant Foreman

with cancer and other diseases. Roberts grabbed a folding chair and rushed forward, screaming, "I ought to kick your a-!"

After he was escorted out of the meeting, others in the crowd also expressed the same outrage with the ATSDR findings.

Ray Lamb, who has lived on

"This is a thing going on between the federal government and the state government. I feel helpless sitting back and forced to watch. I just want to do what is right for these people. There are hard working people here. We really need to do something to help these people, and you keep tying our hands behind our back."

—Pam Smith, Director
Richmond County EMA

Carroll Road for more than 25 years, was a foreman at the Southern Wood Piedmont Plant in the 1950s.

"They knew that stuff was contaminated, and they dumped it in the creek anyway. I know 15 people from here who have died of some kind of cancer or bone disease," he said.

Lamb said he does not understand how ATSDR scientists can say there is no public health threat.

"When we had that flood, I had to get out and try to tie some stuff down. I've got scars and burn marks on my legs and hands from the water that came out of that ditch," he said.

Not only does Lamb believe there is a danger from the ditch, but he also feels trapped because it is not financially feasible for him to move from his home.

"We tried to sell our house in 1989, but when the real estate company found out about the chemicals, they refused to sell our house. They (the realtors) came out to our home and pulled the sign up from our front yard. The banks all refuse to loan anybody the money to buy our house," he said.

Charles Utley, president of the Hyde Park Improvement Association, understands Lamb's dilemma. He is very concerned with the decline in property values.

"Property value is zip. It is



"IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR A GUINEA PIG, THEN USE ME," Hyde Park resident, Maxine Baez told ATSDR representatives who said they did not have the statistical data to determine potential health risks. "You've got proof right here," Baez said pointing to the rash on her face and arms.

Staff Photos by Clarence Wilson

worth nothing now. How can they really think they can come in and clean it up? They are just sitting there and watching the destruction of the people," he said.

Pam Smith, director of the

Richmond County Emergency Management Agency, expressed sympathy for the plight of the Hyde Park residents.

Smith said Southern Wood see Smith page 2

County Survey To Assess Possible Health Problems

AUGUSTA—The nearly 100 Hyde Park residents who gathered in the Richmond County Commissioners' chambers Monday were introduced to a plan by the county health department to begin a comprehensive health assessment survey.

Dr. Frank Houser, director of the Richmond County Health Department, said his agency has identified 400 households which comprise the Hyde Park neighborhood, and his agency will begin contacting each household to fill out the survey.

"We need information on actual health events in every household. We will compare that information with the rest of Richmond County, and with matching populations in Macon and other areas. When that is done, we will have clear evidence to say, 'here is the problem,'" he said.

Houser said the survey should be completed within six months, but that time could be reduced if individuals would call in to complete the questionnaire by phone. Individuals who wish to answer the questionnaire by phone should call Barbara Wilder at 724-8802.

The decision to conduct the health assessment grew from the numerous health problems reported by residents who met last Wednesday with members of the Agency for Toxic Substance and see Survey page 2

Figure 4. Article published in the Metro Courier newspaper detailing medical issues of the Hyde Park residents.

Strange Fruit

As I was growing up, my playground was in my Grandmother Lillian's yard. All the children in Hyde Park played in their yards. When children play in their yards they make mud pie and sometimes mistakenly ingest dirt, but they don't sit and eat a meal of dirt.

The cartoon below displays a message not to eat from the ground and not to drink the water. The Hyde Park residents grew their own vegetables and at times pumped their own water from the ground, how could you not eat the soil. Strange Fruit identify the contamination that we did not know about that change the way the fruit, vegetables, water look and taste.

Children played in the soil because we did not know about the contaminates in the community. As children we ate from the soil because we did not know about it; as children we played in the ground because we did not know. It is evident that big corporations do not care about the contamination, they do not care about the population around the factory nor did they care about life. All they cared about was the bottom line of how much money they can make off the back of the blue collar workers and make a profit. The cartoons below depicted don't blame us so; don't blame the children or residents for coming to a community to live the so called "American Dream". The Environmental Protection Agency says "Don't eat the sediment" and "Don't use the ground water and Southern Wood Piedmont says "Don't blame us", what are we to do? The mailbox is in a location called Hyde Park where there are children.

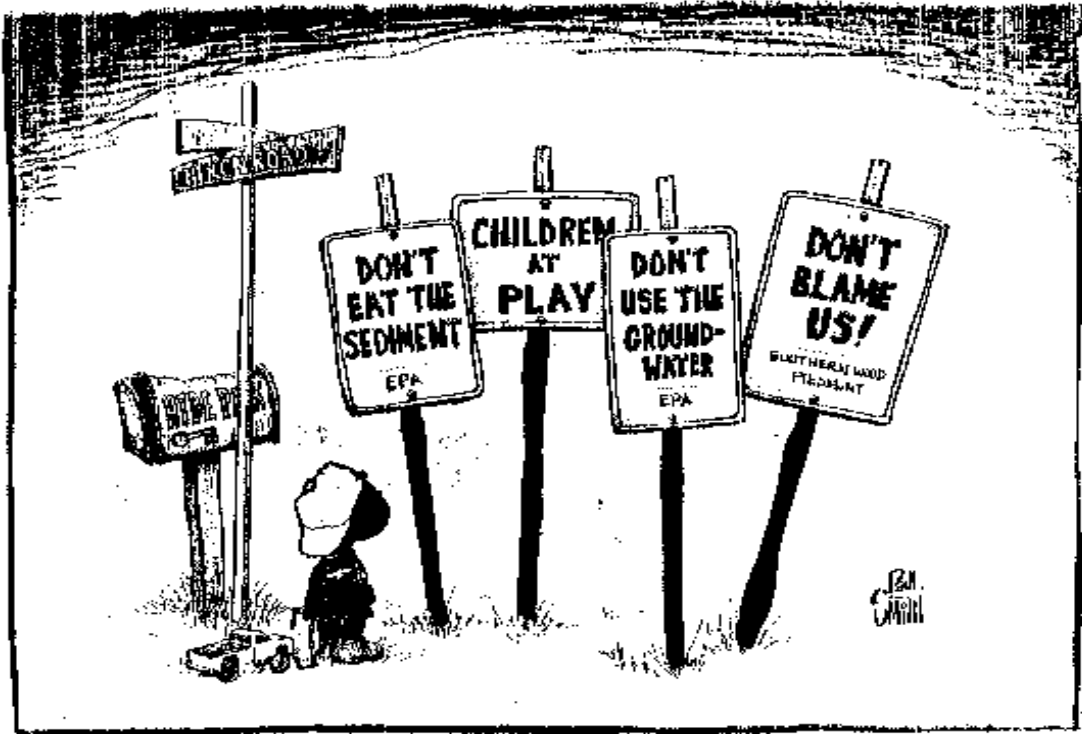


Figure 5. A cartoon depicting the dilemma of the children living in the contaminated community of Hyde Park, Augusta Chronicle Newspaper

CHAPTER 5

OUR HISTORY: LIVES OF HYDE PARK

RESIDENTS BEFORE AND AFTER THE CONTAMINATION

Psalm 23

*The LORD is my shepherd;
I shall not want.
He makes me to lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside the still waters.
He restores my soul;
He leads me in the paths of righteousness
For His name's sake.
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil;
For You are with me;
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil;
My cup runs over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
All the days of my life;
And I will dwell in the house of the LORD
Forever.*

The most beloved psalm of David is one that offers peace and understanding in a time that is trying and often times unjust. David believed that through his proclamations of God's love he could endure all. The psalm is a reminder of God's promise that we shall want for nothing in this life if we keep his commandments and trust in his word. I remember this scripture as being my grandmother's favorite. She and my grandfather were raised in the church, where her father was a deacon and one the founders of our family church. I would always hear my grandparents either singing or humming a hymn. It was very common to her grandma reading the 23rd psalm and

saying a prayer. Aside from their love and guidance, these are the kinds of memories I have of them both. These people are the architects of our lives in Hyde Park. If it were not for them wanting to be land owners and wanting own the American dream, we would not have this story to tell.

Our Family

To understand the dynamic of this African American family, this family tree illustrates the relationship between me and the participants. My grandparents were Willie and Lillian Wells. They moved to Hyde Park in 1950 and laid the foundation for our love and commitment to the community. Eunice Jordan and Sharon Wells are their daughters that grew up in the community. Eunice Jordan is my mother and Ernest Jordan, Sr. was my father. I am the oldest of their four children: my siblings are Ernest L. Jordan Jr., DeWanna L. Jordan, and Darius L. Jordan.

Our lives as a family in Hyde Park were centered on the notion that we owned the land that was our birthplace and would have that land for generations to come, but the contamination of the community has irrevocably changed that part of our legacy. I have watched family, friends, and neighbors die from illnesses that were not of their choosing and be force to defend their lives against people who see them as less than human. The stories of the following participants were recorded with the intent of exposing the realities their lived experience.

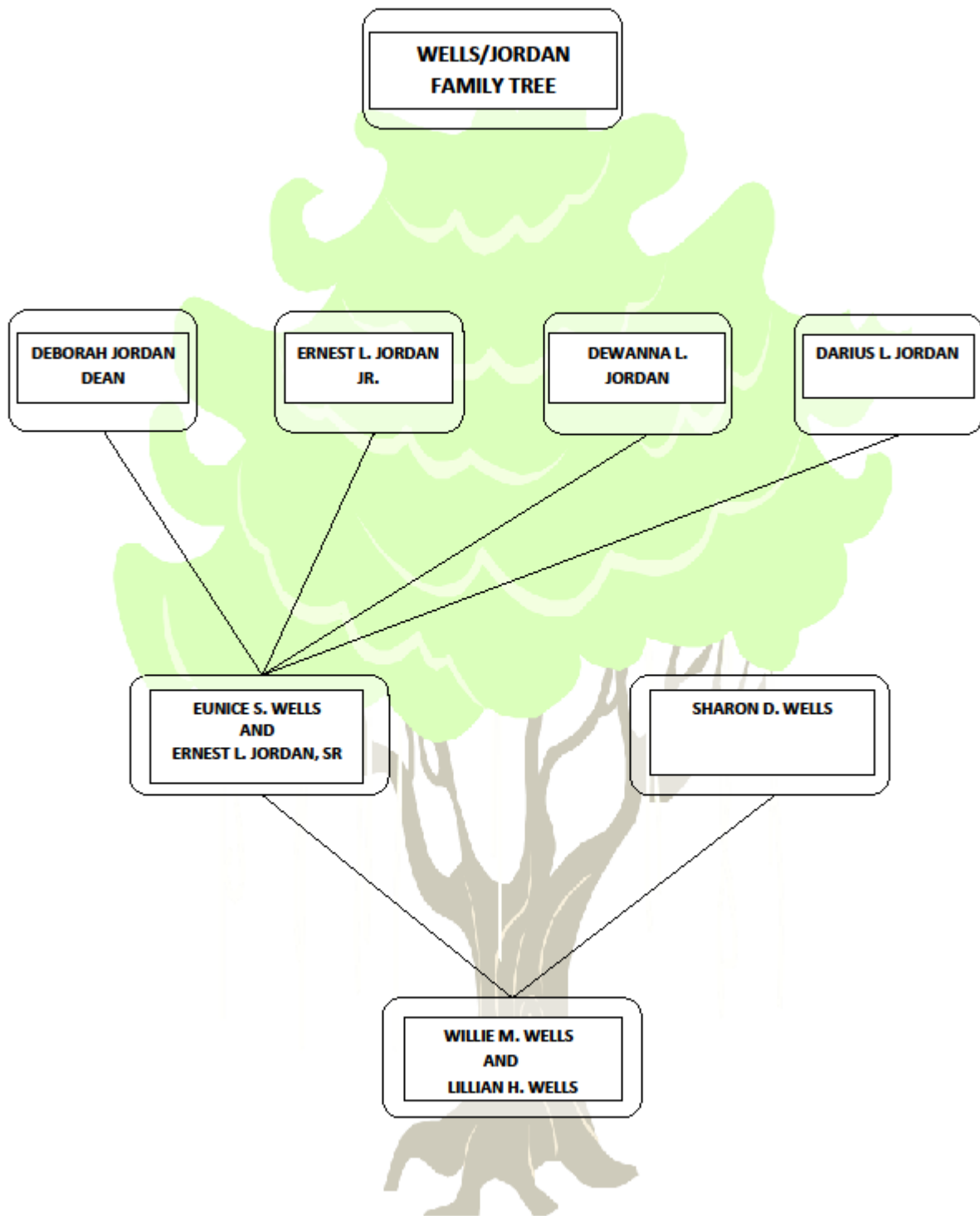


Figure 6. The family tree of my family and participants of the inquiry

Grandparents



Figure 7. Parents and Grandparents Willie and Lillian Wells

Willie Marshal Wells

Willie Marshall Wells was the only grandfather I knew, my paternal grandfather died when my father was a little boy. Willie Wells was a tall, slender built man that had a wide smile. He always stood tall and strong, much like the pecan trees that he grew in his garden. I have never recalled a day that I didn't see my grandfather smile. He was a strong father figure to not only to his family, but to many in the Hyde Park community. His life was one of always giving and caring, if someone needed something and he was able to give, he would, without hesitation. Yet he was a "straight shooter", he didn't care for foolishness or laziness. He was not formally educated, but no one could question his knowledge or wisdom. Granddaddy was always a strong presence in

my life until he passed suddenly in my sophomore year of college from pancreatic cancer. Until then I had never known my grandfather to be ill. Pancreatic cancer was what took my grandfather away from me.

Willie Marshall Wells was born in Modoc, SC and moved to Augusta, GA after marrying my grandmother. As a young boy, he spent his childhood working the fields with his father who was a sharecropper, which was probably the reason he received only a third grade education. My grandfather moved his family to Hyde Park in 1950 after purchasing a plot of land. He built a home for his family, more importantly he built a life in a former swamp that garnered him much pride. On his land he had a home he built, a smokehouse, a chicken pen, a garden where he raised fruits and vegetables, pecan and pear trees, rose bushes and many different types of trees. He worked at the local plant that made ceramic bricks and walked to work because it was literally right around the corner. I remember him as being a gentle soul and not much aroused his anger or displeasure. He was a neighborly man and loved his family; I was the first grandchild, and I lived with him and my parents the first three years of my life. I never once heard him complain about his life or talk negatively about anyone. He was a simple man with a simple dream, to have a good life. In my eyes he was a strong black man who was as majestic as the tallest tree and like the tree one that commanded respect.

Nina Lillian Henderson Wells

Nina Lillian Henderson Wells was the love of Willie Marshall Wells and my beloved grandmother. She was the baby of her family, and in my opinion the most

beautiful of the girls. I loved to comb her hair; it was jet black, wavy and soft like cotton. She had a stern yet soft voice and an infectious laugh. She was a babysitter when my mother was at school and my father at work. Lillian was soft spoken but she didn't put up with mess, whatever she said, she meant, there were no if ands or buts, just what she said. She would get up every morning and cook breakfast for her family. Growing up I go to watch her cook and prepare meals, can foods, and tend her garden just to name a few things that she did to keep her household intact. She never worked outside the home, but she took care of the neighbor's children and family when needed. Her life as a child was spent in a large family of thirteen children where she was the baby of the bunch. She was raised in the hills of South Carolina and left when, as she put it "they were killin' people 'round there, meaning that the Klu Klux Klan were killing black folk because they wanted to get hold of the land. She married and moved to Georgia to start a new life with my grandfather. Grandma had three pregnancies that ended in still births before she delivered my mother, my uncles are buried not too far from where I reside.

Grandmama Lillian was always resourceful; she grew her own herbs and made herbal teas before they became popular. I remember learning the ships that Columbus used to sail to America in by remembering her first name, the Nina, the Pinto, a type of horse and the Santa Maria. Grandma would meet me at the path each day that I walked from school to her house. She always was waiting and she would ask me "how was school" or "what cha learn today". Grandma always had a thirst for knowledge. When she was in school in South Carolina, the school only went up to seventh grade.

She attended the seventh grade three times, until the school told her she couldn't come back. She wanted to attend the August Institute which is now Lucy Craft Laney and doing that time it was the only black High School. At the present it is still 98% black. The reason she didn't attend was my Great Grandmother told her it was too far. At time that she live in Edgefield County South Carolina.

Eunice W. Jordan



Figure 8. Mother, retired educator, volunteer, and activist Eunice W. Jordan

My name is Eunice Stean Wells Jordan. I went to Dowdy Elementary School, I went from primer to second grade ... I never attended second grade, then I went to Levi White School then, I went to Collins Elementary School but, wait I went to Collins Elementary School before I went to Levi because we had to wait for Levi White to be built. Then I went to A. R. Johnson Middle School then Laney High School then, Paine College, then Augusta College, then to Whole Life School of Theology. That's it. During my public school education the schools were segregated.

My family and I moved to Hyde Park when I was five years old and we moved on Walnut Street. My father parents moved from New Savannah Road which is now Doug

Barnard Parkway and my momma parents lived in South Carolina and we moved here in 1950. Well I grew up in Hyde Park and it was kind of a tight net family where as I play with my neighbors kids. I played in the yard with the kids down the street because my mother would not let me go nowhere. I had family all over Walnut Street. I had the Kimble's who live down the street and then moved to Dan Bowles road where I grew with them. Life in Hyde Park we were families who look out for each other and caring um parents sit on the front and if you do something wrong your parents will know about it in a few seconds um, while we were at Laney High School we were future homemakers of America so if you stay for after school programs and the buses were gone then we had had to walk home (eleven miles) and that was often. Mainly we all look out for one another and called some of my friends my brothers um, the men fished and hunted together and they did a lot of thing together so it was a nice neighborhood in my opinion, but, it was a neighborhood...Oh when I was young about 9 years old it was this man name Reverend Paul Kelly he worked at the White high school, he use to come in the neighborhood with a tent and there we use to have church on Sunday he established the Christian Fountain Baptist Church where we as a family attended service and meeting, the church is still Christian Fountain Baptist Church is still a part of the Hyde Park Community. There were a couple of stores where we use to go and buy candy there was Mr. Jack store and Boyd Jones and there was a lady who did hair, Mrs. Smith, her and her husband had beauty and barber shop and a store um, it was a thriving neighborhood.

Ok when it flooded um, each time it flooded in the neighbor there were boats that will come and get your family. Mr. Utleigh had a boat and his son still has the same boat today he will come get each family and take us to the railroad tracks and then we go over to someone else house and I always go over to Cutin (Cousin) Child's house and that's where I started courting your Father (laughing). That was the way I got to see my husband more but he was my boyfriend then. Anyway every time it flooded we had to leave and sometimes we stay and waited for the water to recede. One time it was starting to flood and I want to go down the street to see the Christmas lights and my Father caught me and dunked me in the water face first (laughing), but it was fun and we did a lot of things together and a lot of thing we shouldn't have done but anyway.

The neighborhood has gone down because in 1990's we had real bad, bad floods and all the homes was flooded and this was about two years before we found out about contamination doing the flood the Piedmont Factory had some contamination on their premises and doing the flood it got into a lot of houses and people became aware of the contamination and we did not get a lot of services so we started to get a lot of abandon homes, because they were young and people that could afford to move has moved and the closeness of the community was not like it was and we were younger or I was younger so we started a neighborhood association because we this neighborhood started we had dirt street and no street lights and we didn't even have any water and then in 1958 my parents had a septic tank dug then they got an electric pump then um, about 69 or 70 we started getting water put in through commissioner Ed McIntyre

which became the Mayor and Barnard Mulherin um, I mean Matthew Mulherin and Barnard is his brother.

The community worked together we had flower garden where we share our flower and we had fruit trees and we pick the fruits from the trees and we had vegetable gardens but after we found out about the contamination people was told now to eat the vegetables and one of my neighbor across the street Mr. Thomas Walker was told to pull his vegetables up they were in his yard because they were contaminated. Life was just different when I was a child we were a close net family um, we did a lot of thing as neighbor but because of the contamination people started moving out and not caring anymore and the people were getting depress trying to find out how the chemical has impacted our neighborhood such as what different diseases that could have been cause by the chemicals so, it wasn't the same neighborhood as it was. People have died out because of cancer or thing that was related to the contamination so it has just kind of change, the atmosphere kind of change in the neighborhood.

I feel that I been working to help this neighborhood relocate, because of this contamination the neighborhood is not where it need to be because we don't get services from the county anymore like ditches does get clean the prisoners use to clean them and the county stated that they can't clean them because of the contamination. I love my neighbor and the people in it but I know we need to move to a healthier place, the people around me we have been neighbor for 20 or 30 years. We are still close, this area is kinda close. Most of the houses on my street have been abandon but I love my neighbor and if we can get rid of the contamination and the flooding then I would

love to stay or if I can take my house and move it, I wouldn't mind doing that. It, it's in my little circle it is a good place to be. I love my neighborhood they need to get some help. I have been contaminated half of my life um, contamination has impacted everyone life, I think I said that earlier you know now we look differently at the health of people in the neighborhood, look differently at people who had problems in health, In 1990 the Health Department came out to our neighborhood and that is when we found out about the contamination and we did screening an clinics and we found out that there were so many different thing we were not aware of such as little things in your hands kerasotosis this let you know you was poison by arsenic um, a lot of cancer, there were many women who had miscarriage and there some that could not carry child full term, we even had a baby tumor, the tumor on the baby head was bigger than the baby, we also had six legit pigs in the neighborhood. It, it really have been um, um, let think of the words I want to use Jesus, people are depress, our county government, State Government and Federal Government won't do what they need to do they are saying that there is some contamination but not enough but this is the way I see if there is a little contamination with all of the different chemical that comes together then they are lethal... It's just like I said before a person is not a little pregnant you either pregnant or you are not. If it is contaminated or not you can't tell me there in a little in this spot and a lot in this spot and the last thing was done about 3 or 4 years ago down by Fleming show that the whole area in the neighborhood was contaminated. Said um, we had the EPD to come, the EPA to come, the county to come, all kinds of test from the health department, we are still sitting here and it is not

a good experience for people you get the ideal that you are getting ready to leave and then something will happen, we are middle class to poor neighborhood so we have not been treat fairly so the contamination has impacted the neighborhood and affective our lives an it's a terrible life to live because I really feel for the children because um, living in this neighborhood you don't know one day from another, your parents are talking about one day you are moving then the next day somebody might be sick and I have seen some of my neighbor deteriorate and lots of thing has happen I seen a young lady who was beautiful when she was younger and now her face is cover with lupus it come from the contamination um, the male in the neighbor couldn't have children, could not Father children it a lot of things that happens in the this community so we continue to fight, continue to fight and continue to go to meeting and that how it impacted our neighborhood.

I'm going to tell you what I feel. There has been a lot of cover up by local State and Federal and I remember as I say when the health department came and there was a million dollar study and after we gather all the information about all the concerns we fill out form and did surveys and we had clinics but the local Federal and State still didn't help with this process um, a lot of times when one agency will say there was a lot of contamination and something must be done, we had ATSDR stated something needs to be done then, you have the State who say there is a little contamination. I say there is no such thing as a little contamination, the Federal rule and regulations, there was a Federal test done here, there was a state test done here in this community, there has been private testing done here and in every test they were saying something wrong but

stating there was not enough but if you mix it all together there is plenty because we have not been cheated fairly by the local State and the Federal Government and they um, talk about doing a major clean up then one time they have started digging up in the neighborhood and we had several people who has die doing the digging part. The government has hindered us a lot, one of the things we are waiting on is Richmond County to sign every time we go to Richmond County there is an excuse, even two years ago Dr. Rumph who was the health commissioner told them that we should have been out in the 90's and he came back in 2007 or 2008 and said these people needs to be move, the guy that did Fleming um, testing um, say the contamination and these people needs to be move and we have not had any help but the most hindering part has been the city because Federal and State wants to come in but the city has not say ok that you can come in and do anything like, you live in your house, I can't tell someone to go to your house, that is your house. So we had hindering from the Local, Federal and the State right now they are talking about making this neighborhood an retention pond and where it right now the grant has been sent to the Federal and State Government and we of waiting to find out if it going to be enough for a grant, um and other prominently white there was a perception of a flooding problem Holiday Park the state went in and paid them \$200,000 and they have a few left and they told them they had to move. Just about two weeks ago their commissioner disagrees with getting us out but he agreed to pay to get the other people out of Holiday Park. They are taken \$200,000 to move... yeah but their homes weren't flooded it was just a perception of flooding. We kept going down there and they continue to refuse. But again we have

been hindered by the Federal, State and local, by the power to be because we are a low income black neighborhood and I say middle to low income. Ok did you also ask me about the injuries that happen in Hyde Park? Ok, Lupus, their three people I know that has Lupus; Fibro, chronic, pain, cancer, a lot of respiratory problem, miscarriages, female problem, men are impotent...oh I forgot, "laughing", tumor you have miscarriages, tumor the youngest I know that had cancer was 13 Arthur Dixon, he would go fishing in area in here and he die of cancer. it just a lot of cancer, lung cancer, breast, black lung disease pancreatic cancer ovarian cancer um, um, I was shock to see how many young women fill out the sheets that ministerial problems from the neighborhood. Crystal across the street said she had horrible problem having her child. The children in the neighborhood have been classified as low learners. One of the trend are when a children comes from this neighborhood they want to put in a special class. A lot of them have emotion problems and as I stated they are the first to be put in special class.

Education has change in terms of learning and this No child left behind, stuff. When Jenkins move out of the neighborhood and merged with Levi White people was complaining about coming to Jenkins in the wake of contamination and not to long after that the Federal Government enacted No child left behind. Since the children left Jenkins and moved on over to Jenkins-White Elementary School, the school haven't made AYP they had not made AYP before ,but the school is no longer a traditional elementary school because there were so many problems of learning and achieving success so they had to go up under a charter school to make AYP. The student is no

longer going to a neighborhood school; even though Jenkins-White is not so far out it is still kind of consider being in the neighborhood.

Because it is not in the neighborhood, that is one of the things I don't like because it causes a disconnect with the parents and another reason they said they was closing Jenkins, remember them white kids in the Virginia subdivision said there were not enough according to State guideline, there were not enough children to keep Jenkins open. When Mrs. Utley was alive we will go and campaign to keep it open but because of the contamination and the people and the family dying out cause contamination was so bad people die out or move out then there were not enough children to feed into Jenkins and see people here (Hyde Park) could walk down to Jenkins to see about their children and now that they are over to Jenkins White now it is not a neighborhood school. See when you'll went to Jenkins I could walk down there but the parent now don't have transportation to get to Jenkins White and many of them don't have cars. Also until two years ago we don't have a bus to come into the neighborhood and according to the city if you want a bus to come into the neighbor you will have to make an appointment with the city. If you have to go to the doctor's you must call two or three days in advance and pay two dollar then they will come and get you. But there is not a regular bus so it inconveniences the parents who don't have transportation to go check on their children and that kind of thing so, that it is why I say the transportation has been taken away from the community. There is little parent involvement because at Jenkins everybody could walk to the school to attend PTA meetings and programs but it so far that parent here can't even walk there to be a part

of their children education. So again it has been disconnects and unfair practices to the student and their parents. What get me is that they close down Jenkins and they sell the building to head start and they monitoring well on the ground of what is now Head start. I don't know if you knew that because what since does it make to close a school and still open a building to Head start program. The monitor is closest down here by the railroad track to monitor the air and the soil for contaminate on both sides of the railroad tracks. When you all went to school the school was full because of feeder neighborhoods such as Virginia Subdivision, Lombardy Court and over there where um, the Flea Market is now.

The Hyde Park community was growing and caring community in educating the youth and the adults. In 1968 there was a Pre-K program established for the children in the community. Funding for the program came from grants from the Equal Employment Opportunity office and the Episcopal Church through St. Albans. The Pre-K was established to help with job opportunities, be a place for the children to play in the afternoon, and a place for working parents to drop off until they came home. There was always a need for money and the brochure explained why it so important for the community to provide support to keep the program open. This program was a multi-function building that was used for the following; sewing classes, 4-H club, Silver Tea Club, a teen center and a head start program that you graduated from in 1973. I think I still got the picture.

Below is the original brochure that was developed announcing the purpose for the building and asking for donations to continue operations.



Figure 9. This is a brochure detailing the need to fund the Pre-K School and other programs to make Hyde Park a better community.

The Hyde Park Association has designed programs that will enable us to put into structured reality, our hopes and aspirations. These programs are as follows: A freedom school for pre-schoolers, the establishment of a teen center for teenagers and political education classes for the adults.

A teen center is now in operation in our present location. This gives the youngsters a place to go and something to do. However, your contributions will enable us to provide them with more recreational facilities. This group will also be taught Afro-American cultural heritage.



YOU CAN HELP

We feel that it is the duty of the community to support these programs.

YOU CAN BY:

1. Giving personal contributions
2. Soliciting money from neighbors
3. Holding and attending fund raising events
4. Patronizing all fund raising activities given by the Hyde Park Association

The school will feature classes in Afro-American and African history. The children will also be taught the intricate details of the development of Black culture and the necessity of its survival. Included within the freedom school will be a kitchenette to provide hot lunches for the children and a small, but efficient library.

The adults will have classes in political education. In these classes they will be taught the structure of the county government and the duties of each of the offices.

These are the major undertakings of the Hyde Park Community Association. Our immediate goal is the development of water and sewage and paved streets. We feel that with the help of the entire community we shall have great success in implementing these programs.



Figure 9. continued

Sharon D. Wells



Figure 10. Aunt, educator, volunteer, and activist Sharon D. Wells

My parents that raised me gave me the name "Denise Wells", but my birth mother named me "Sharon". I don't know the reasoning for "Sharon", but I understand my sister, Eunice liked the name "Denise" and well, "Wells" came with the package. I attended Clara E. Jenkins Elementary School (Grades 1-7); Sand Bar Ferry Jr. High (Grade 8); Edward Murphy Jr. High (Grade 9); George P. Butler High (Grades 10-12); Paine College (B.S. Education – Early Childhood Education); Lesley University (Masters Degree in Creative Arts Education); and Beacon University (Associate Degree in Theology).

Presently, Instructional Coach at Windsor Spring Elementary (3rd year); Augmented Teacher (2 years); Teacher – 2nd, 4th, and 5th grades (19 years) – all at Windsor Spring Elementary; Teacher – Combination classes at a private school (2 years); Teacher at Lamar Elementary (1 year); Paraprofessional at Lamar Elementary (1 year); and Substitute teacher (3 years). I have worked in the Augusta office of Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney (1 summer). I worked for two years as research

consultant for Patricia McCracken in discovery and input evidence for the residents of Hyde Park.

I am a member of Carey Hill Baptist Church, Clarks Hill/North Augusta, SC; a member of the Hyde Park Task Force; former member of the Hyde Park Executive Committee. I physically lived in Hyde Park from April 1959 – June 2002, which is to say, most of my life. I enjoyed life in Hyde Park, since I don't have much to compare it with. The neighborhood was family orientated and you also had family in the neighborhood. People were creative and friendly. The children all went to the same school from kindergarten to seventh grades and we knew everybody. People shared with each other, prayed for each other, and were always right there for each other in bad times. I remember if someone died during the night in a home; the neighbors would get out of their beds and go to the home immediately. If someone were short with food or money; neighbors would share hog meat or vegetables from their gardens. I don't see the neighborhood atmosphere of loving and sharing. I don't see the concern for one another, and I don't see respect for one's property.

My feeling about the past Hyde Park community will always be one of the positive parts of my life, but something is missing now. I think gifts in our original residents of Hyde Park, has cease to exist, such as the traditions of home, family and respect of your fellowman. I think that these gifts and many others gifts may have died with them. The contamination has impacted my personal life mentally, physically, emotionally, financially, and spiritually. Mentally, to think all those years, while I played in my parents' yard, my school's yard and at the community center's yard, I was

slowing poisoning myself, because someone did not care about THAT neighborhood of people. Physically, I put in many man-hours working in and for my neighborhood to receive justice.

In 1968, my last year at Jenkins Elementary (seventh grade), we was the last class, the '68 class, that served the whole time through the seventh grade at Jenkins before they started splitting up the classes, from Kindergarten to 3rd grade and then they went to Fleming so you had a situation where you had Caucasian Americans that cannot deal with the African American children and you know so to keep from dealing with the situation they said "okay they can't learn" but as we've learned now some people just don't know how to relate to 'em. Well the atmosphere at Jenkins that year was like I said before, we were the last class to go through the seventh grade and then after that because the children were split in the middle of elementary school you started seeing more and more of you know and you all came behind me that you know these children can't learn where at Jenkins we had one special education class that consisted of about ten people maybe and you didn't have that and you know there were teachers that worked with children and we were a neighborhood that we all went to the same school everybody knew everybody's mama, you know you had to pass everybody's house to leave Jenkins if you were a teacher swinging by somebody's house, it wasn't a problem. Things changed once they got over to Fleming. Also during the late 1960's, Clara E. Jenkins before the community center, it was the heart of the neighborhood, I mean if there were any programs it was going to be at Jenkins, if it was anything big it was going to be in the neighborhood, it would be at Jenkins, it was always the heart of

the neighborhood. When I went to school all the children went to Jenkins and knew each other.

Emotionally, it affects me greatly that people thought so less of my family, my friends, neighbors and me because of the color of our skin and the socio-economy backgrounds we shared. I remember finally getting paved streets, water and sewerage, and drainage systems (that did not work).

The flooding, that's the smoking gun. That started the fight for our lives. If you lived in Hyde Park, you would not like it, "how could flooding create this monster?", because it often floods in the neighborhood. Well, "The Flood of 1990" was different; it attracted local, state, and national news. It was a different experience for survivors of Hyde Park flooding. It made major changes; it floods on the Westside of Augusta, Eastside of Augusta, and the Southside of Augusta. Guess what, it did not have to happen because drainage construction was delayed in Hyde Park and moved to another community.

I was called into work that morning and was released by 10:00 a.m. because the flooding in the city had gotten worse. My sister took our mom and myself over to Mrs. Brown's, to take care of her. Our mom by that time suffered from Parkinson's disease and had a small stroke. She was not walking and was carried from the house to the car. I left Mom at Mrs. Brown and my sister and I went to work. When we tried to come home, water was in the street from Goldberg's to Clara Jenkins School. My sister drove her van down Dan Bowles Road, where we could see the back of our house (which was surrounded with water). My sister's van made it to Jenkins School and then

it flooded out. Jenkins School by that time of the day was the shelter for the community, but that did not last long, because it begins to flood in the school. I tried to walk down Leona Street to get to our mom, but the farther I walked the high the water came up to my neck. I turned around and came back to the school with my sister. My sister Eunice was trying to get in touch with her family who also was on Leona Street.

When we finally got the family together, we stayed with my brother in law's mother, Annie L. Adams, in West Augusta. We did not have a change of clothes, mediation, nothing.

When we got to Mrs. Adams' house, everybody needed to take a shower and change clothes. We borrow clothes from Mrs. Adams' son, Timothy and Mrs. Adams gave me a house dress to put on mom. The next day, Deborah, DeWanna, Timothy, and I tried to go back in the neighborhood, which at that time being guard by police. You had to identify yourself as a resident to get in, but water was still standing. We came in by the school and tried to walk to my sister's house. My oldest niece, Deborah was in a wedding and we walked to the house. Near the school was the neighborhood pets and my sister's dog, Pam was in that area. Pam saw us and tried to walk back home with us. Pam was a small frame dog and got tired quickly of swimming. I remember picking Pam up, who at that time was covered in black gunk and put her on somebody's car truck. When we came back by the car, Poncho had some food for her. When we got back to Mrs. Adams' house we all had to shower and change again. I remember seeing oil floating on the water as we walked to and from my sister's house.

We found out later that the water we were walking in was covered with snakes and water moccasins. I mean we actually walked in that water me, you, DeWanna, and Timothy. We all returned home on the third day (Sunday) and could tell how high the water got and how deep the water was the black line left on people cars, on the side of the mailboxes, and their houses.

It has been the worst flood when it came down to knowing that there was actually something in the water. It was a way of life in Hyde Park to be in floods and children swimming in it and everything like that and that one became so vicious and the flow of the water coming in could just push you over and it just so vicious but it was a way of life for the children because they went swimming.

Well also what happen was because Rae's Creek had over flooded and those are the houses by A. Brian Merry, those were the bank presidents and also Hyde Park was already in line to, before the flood, in line to have new sewage lines placed and fixed and whatever they had to do, and there was a grant through the city of Augusta to take care of all that and uh but when all that water showed up on the west side they made such a big fuss about them being flooded they took us (Hyde Park) and put us at the bottom of the line and put them on the top and they weren't even on the consideration list sent them and that's how Rae's Creek got all those nice rocks and stuff up there and we had to wait again.

When I first heard about contamination in Hyde Park, I remember seeing the news one day after the flood and it was Harry James and Trish McCracken standing near the ditch, the hot ditch right in front of Aunt Weese house (on Dan Bowles Road),

I don't remember how...the smell was, somebody complained about the smell that was coming from the ditch and the next thing I know there were tests going on and the next thing I know there were discussions of chemicals in the neighborhood and from there research went on and it just got bigger, bigger and bigger, but the first time I remember hearing anything about it and the reason the flood came up is that they think that the materials came over with the flood and because we were known for having several floods in the neighborhood and uh that the "hot" ditch constantly had all the chemicals in it and in the neighborhood from one factory or another.

I think the announcement of the contamination back in 1991 and the slow process of doing anything about it began the slow death of Hyde Park. The residents works hard to gain the respect of being a homeowner and to be told that the property is slowly killing us as well as the property have little to no value, was the knife that cut out the heart of the neighborhood.

I remember going to meetings and our neighborhood problems being put on the back burner, so that West Augusta can receive help. The list goes on. Financially, getting less and less values of the properties my sister and I own. Finally, spiritually, since I am a person of faith. I believe in the promises of God, but it grieves my spirit to see how some people have taken their eye off of Christ for the solution for Hyde Park and focus on the money aspect of the contamination situation.

It has been like a yo-yo. You have people that will go out on a limb for the neighborhood and the "bad politicians" or "people with money" overrule or try to destroy them personally or politically. We have had people like Ed Mulherin, Ed

McIntyre, Cynthia McKinney, Henry Howard, Bob Young, etc., to work hard to make sure the voices of the Hyde Park residents are heard, but “the powers that be” or “time” has stepped in and shot it down.

When I think most of the females in my family have experience problems of reproduction or female problems, such as: hysterectomies, still births, fibroid tumors, heavy menstrual periods, can't have babies, etc. The men experience heart problems, cancer, jaundice, etc. If I looked at this information of facts spiritually, this is an attack to eliminate a race of productive people, who could change lives in this world.

I don't know direct since the elementary school have moved out of the neighborhood, but during the time Clara E. Jenkins Elementary school was in the neighborhood; I observed principals, teachers, faculty and staff that were caring and invested their time and lives into the success of the children of the neighborhood. Mrs. Frankie Brickle, one of the original teachers of Jenkins, often comments on the positiveness of the community, parents, and the children in Hyde Park.

When I think of my nieces and nephews who are a few years younger than me growing in and attending that same elementary school I attend. My older niece and nephew, Deborah and Ernest lived in our house with me the first portion of their lives where on the other hand the younger niece and nephew, DeWanna and Darius lived on Leona Street where the hot ditch with the chemical flows ran under their house.

The United States say Augusta, GA it was the first week in April, you saw Washington Road you might've seen downtown Augusta, but you didn't see what else was going on in Augusta. I think that's when people began to realize that Augusta was

not, what are those flowers called, magnolias, Augusta is not the beautiful magnolia that the rest of the country thought and that didn't sit well with the local government. We got out, started holding signs posted to the website, I was looking at the website the other day and I was looking at how I had the hat turning backwards. "This is not the home of the Master's but the home of contamination", we were outside Daniel Field because all the little planes came in and um we were out at the airport and asked by the Sheriff department at that time to move our cars because we were on the side of the road that was owned by the city of Augusta and we waited for the Red carpet Tours to come for three years straight and finally someone paid attention on that Red Carpet tour and they had a shift at the Master's on Washington Road and because of those protests and we had people like Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney and a lot of people speaking out on our behalf and I remember going to the capital and seeing Governor Zell Miller. Finally at that point somebody said, "oh, Augusta may not be all that" even now, even going through the things we go through now, I often use the example from *The Color Purple*, when Celie say, when she tell Mister, "everything you done to me will be done to you" and everything that they have done to us, they bought property, contaminated property, they found money they couldn't find for us, but they bought contaminated property on The Riverfront, to build and then the man backed out of the deal and they lost money; the X-mart, they lost over half a million dollars, you know so all this stuff and they act like they ignoring us and don't pay us any attention.

Ernest L. Jordan, Jr.



Figure 11. Brother, volunteer, and activist Ernest L. Jordan, Jr.

My name is Ernest Lavert Jordan, Jr. I am the second child and the oldest son of Ernest, Sr. and Eunice Jordan. My job occupations are: Produce receiving clerk, merchandise manager, warehouse manager, transportation shift supervision, and lead corporate accounts shift supervision. I have been a member of: Royal Ambassador, Who's Who among High School students, Cub Scout, Boy Scouts (Star Scout).

High School Band, Arts and Media student, AVID Reader and Writer, audio engineering, experienced Professional Driver, Graphic Art Interest. Community Outreach Programs

My life in Hyde Park was fun filled. I was fortunate to grow up with my cousins and grandparents in the Hyde Park Neighborhood. Now I live in Atlanta Faster paced, but not as family oriented and, little or no personal interactions with people. Everyone now have thousands of Face book and Twitter friends, but can't name five of their neighbors. Everyone expects schools or society to raise or discipline their kids. I love what my neighborhood was, but it has lost a lot of the pride and identity that our parents and grandparents fought so hard to instill in us. My father's garden, which

contained potatoes, mostly tomatoes, bell peppers, red peppers, squash and lots of root vegetable. My recollection of Hyde Park before the contamination was like a historically black neighborhood founded by former sharecroppers or families of sharecropper. I remember everyone pretty much worked at the local textile jobs in the area. Hyde Park was a thriving community and everybody knew each other, everybody had family, for back-up. There were four families of cousins that lived around us and our grandparents in the neighborhood. Everybody knew each other, so the neighborhood was like a family; we were all raised with one another. It was always fun, we played outdoors and did a lot of things at school, such as, football, basketball, etc. We all knew each other and went to each other's house. We got along and if we had problems everybody talked to each other not about one another.

There was one particular family in the community, lived (rented) on every street in the neighborhood the Dunn's family and Miller's lived specifically on Walnut Street and Willow Street and some areas around Aragon Park which is on the other side of Gordon Highway. This family had members who were in the exceptional needs classes in school. Other children that could have been effected by contamination lived in the area across the street from where Goldberg was and a lot of the time you run into the Jackson's that stuff used to pool right across the street from their house, but a lot of kids were fully functioning that lived near those ditches, but in school they would be labeled, you know special needs and whatever, well it was special education when we went to school but now its special needs; I guess that's politically correct. What I remember about Fleming, when Fleming was a white school, it was one big school, but

you had to go down the hill, cross the field to a house that they had converted into the special education wing.

After the contamination investigation any and all health issues are called into question. Most of our grandparents lived well into their 80's and 90's, now many are passing away in their 30's, 40's and in the case of our parents 50's or 60's. So life expectancy is decreasing drastically. People who don't smoke die from various cancers and heart ailments and defects. The concern of whether these may be passed to our children is ever present.

The contamination has changed a lot of the ways people lived in the neighborhood. Where many had thriving gardens and animal life the fear of arsenic in the soil led to many abandoning the growth of fresh fruit and vegetables. The fear of contamination and mounting unexplained illnesses has led many to leave and abandon multi-generational homes changing the socio-economic status of many families, and wherein many home were rented out to new tenants the fear of toxic conditions kept interested parties away. Leading many surrounding areas to question the safety of sending children to school bordered one of the primary waterways believed to be involved in the contamination. In addition, the high unemployment rate which has consistently led the stat coupled with the high vacancy of buildings in the neighborhood has led to a surplus of drug havens in the neighborhood combined with the general apathy of local police and politicians in the local area who don't live or have any interest in the areas in question. The City of Augusta has and will always have one chief interest in the welfare of the city, "The Masters." Once public outcry became an issue

in the public perception of the city came to the notice of the PGA and National Media then the city took the matter somewhat serious. Leading to City Councilman, Commissioners, representatives and mayors to take the matter to heart out of general concern or political survival. Many concerned parties that had moved on to state office in the EPA and HUD (i.e.) former Mayor Robert "Bob" Young had programs in place to assist Hyde Park pending a plan of action from the city commission. Only through the diligence of the citizen, interested environmental parties and concerned elected officials has any movement of the state or federal level been gained. Possible uterine fibroids, miscarriages and birth defect related cases increased frequency over the years. Asthma and breathing related problems in younger children, as well as cases of deformed animals including a six legged pig closer to the toxic cleanup site.

Recently many cases of younger children being labeled as "special needs students" who seem to function well if not excel in real life situations. Now, Hyde Park now is really just a remnant of what is leftover. Everybody has pretty much moved out because of the contamination, health concerns and fear of populace concerns, and with the situation with Augusta because they have a high unemployment rate, one of the highest in the state at times and besides there aren't that many jobs for people my age, they grew up and if they can't find a job in Augusta they move to Atlanta, or somewhere else and people don't come back, because the schools are not fully functioning schools because of the contamination there are no people moving in like they used to...people use to move out and rent their houses out, but nobody is moving

in, it always in the news and utters of contamination and no one is moving in because it is a risk to take.

I remember during the Flood of 1990 was so historic that it came on in Atlanta and on the news and it was so memorable because, I was like "that's my aunt in the boat" and everybody saw it.

That area up where the Master's is and again everything in Augusta flows from the Master's down, that's the common view of Augusta, the Master's is going to be the first priority and everything comes after that, and again the Master's come first and certain human lives. When the residents of Hyde Park had the protest at the Master's that's when the city of Atlanta started taking notice, you know, people, black people where outside the Master's protesting while all these celebrities were inside and the country was taking notice of what was going on.

Even in Atlanta when people find out that you from Augusta, the first thing they ask is "How is the Master's" my reply, "Never been there, never been invited", I lived in Augusta twenty years of my life and didn't never go and if you ask anybody from Augusta about Master's week "oh, that's when we leave town", (laughter).

When the city comes up with a plan, it's because they want to do something with the land, where they benefit, ah we goin' put a racetrack here, we goin' put a stadium here, uh now it's a retention pond, it's always something when they can benefit from it. You know to put concrete on this land, is like putting a band-aid on a bullet wound and they supposed to have more intelligence than us please...stupid. You put a band-aid on

a bullet wound and that's supposed to help the situation, contamination is contamination. Discrimination is discrimination. Death is death.

Another thing about Augusta that is different if, you look at the black neighborhoods in Augusta, with the exception of East Boundary and one or two other neighborhoods, all the well-known black neighborhoods back in that time were "projects", they were all living in government subsidized housing, like Jennings Homes, Southside, they were around us but they were subsidized housing, but Hyde Park built itself up from the beginning.

And life expectancy, like many of our older neighbors died in their eighties, now a lot of people are dying in their forties and fifties, some cases thirties depending on what kind of health ailment discovered...you know. I think in our family DJ and DL are really the only ones that have any kind of allergy related problem that was wide scaled growing up as kids. My mother even noticed now, because I don't, when I come home (Hyde Park) she says my breathing sounds heavier. I don't know if that's the case, that there are still some contaminants in the air or, I know Augusta itself has a lot of textile plants so the air is a little different than other places in the world. I have been concern about the power plants that's over there in the neighborhood. Georgia Power, power plant that is supplying all the power to the neighborhood not that far away. It reminds me of a special on television about the veterans and in Vietnam it was called "shell shocked", in other wars it became now its post stress related syndrome, it changed names as it became more palliative to the viewing public. The students were bored and nothing to challenge them or nothing for them to do they lose interest. Also, that is

where we are now with education and especially with our African American males. The student with special needs was over there by the playground. I believe that house, was a house, and when they integrated the schools, I believe that they bought that house to house the black special education, even though we had to be in the building they kept the black special education children out of the building, but see know you can't do that. If you had to take something to Ms. Thompson, cause that's who was the special education teacher, and everybody wanted to go take something to Ms. Thompson because you got out of class and it took a long time to come back, but you never wanted to go when it was cold or raining, but that's where they stayed the whole day and even they came outside to play they were enclosed in a fence away from the other students and when they came to lunch they had to be in the weather, until they got to where they were going, you know nice and sunny fine, but when winter comes, there was no catwalk going down there it was just open field. The only time you got to see them was when you were at recess and your teacher allowed you to use the playground near the house because they could watch you play but they couldn't play with us. Our friends that were in special education, we saw them on the bus, but once we got to school we didn't see them anymore until we got back on the bus to go home and we played in the neighborhood together but other than that we were separated at school. I think that is the time they started with the band and we would be outside practicing and they would be watching through the fence. They were running around having fun but still they were separated from us. It was like they were in jail in the fence. Also, we used to take field trips down to St Albans and the Chinese store where

they used to give, us fortune cookies, chop sticks, and lo mien, or the movie theatre they used to watch us because they didn't get to go anywhere.

DeWanna L. Jordan



Figure 12. Sister, volunteer, and activist DeWanna L. Jordan

My name is DeWanna Jordan and I am the daughter of Eunice W Jordan and Ernest L Jordan Sr. My education started at Butler High School (Child Care), then continued with my primer grades at Clara E. Jenkins Elementary School, then went to middle school at Murphey, and finished my public education at A. R. Johnson Health and Engineering Magnet School, then I went on the college at Savannah State University where I obtained a degree in Biology and minored in Forensic Science. I have been employed as: Substitute Teacher, Industrial Lab Technician, Human Resources Coordinator, Medical Laboratory Assistant and Shift Manager. I have been a member of National Council of Negro Women, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., Youth Ministry Choral Director, and Volunteer at East Georgia Libraries as tutor.

Life in Hyde Park was being raised by two hard working parents that always encouraged us to see the world and learn as much as we could and not dwell on our

surroundings. We learned about contamination due to exposure and our first experience of fighting for equal rights. There are more children now being raised in Single parent homes; kids have access to more electronic gadgets and often don't learn to effectively interact with others I feel that the city of Augusta has looked over the residents of my neighborhood and have not treated its residents fairly. I am proud of where I was reared and raised because my parents were great providers.

My experience in Hyde park has been one of a lot different challenges socially and health wise being exposed to a lot of chemicals and the discrimination from the city of Augusta and it is just at a point now where they need to give the people what they really need for what they have suffered through all these years. It's not a neighborhood I want my mama to stay in...or anybody, but mama has put in so much fight, I think she has fought out, you know what I mean, and she's tired. This thing with the city is like they are trying to enforce that colonialist mentality of "we got the power and you gonna live where I tell you and how I tell you until I'm ready for it to change.

People from other communities in Augusta were often surprise to see children from Hyde Park, be successful in academics. Even going to an inner city magnet school, most of the black people lived in neighborhoods like Kingston, or Jamaica Estates, or Bel Air or they were bused in from Evans and like that and they ask you where you stay and I'd say Hyde Park and you know they say from Hyde Park, well how did you get into A R Johnson, I'm like the same way you did, took an interview, passed a test, that's how I got in.

Attending Clara E. Jenkins Elementary School was a great education experience; all the teachers cared about what they were doing. I had a very good foundation in kindergarten and first grade, teachers who really made a difference in my life. It was a good experience, I was a talker in school but got my school work because my parents weren't strict, but they expected you to do your part and they did theirs. So I had a good foundation in elementary school, I enjoyed playing with my friends, the same friends I started out in kindergarten continued through the fifth grade and most of the lived in the neighborhood where I lived. We played in the yard, um in the school yard by the contaminated ditch all the five years I was at Jenkins; we would often take field trips to the baseball field and walk on the trestle over the ditch to get to the baseball field to play baseball or to the park when it was later redone. We used to have library parades where we would walk around the neighborhood and different things and PE as well as different types of parades, and learning about different types of trees, which ones were seasonal, and which ones were evergreens, learned about different flowers, honeysuckles, blueberries, blackberries and all the things we learned about in Clara Jenkins school yard.

The students have been rezoned several times and unable to be educated in their own neighborhood. The Clara E. Jenkins School now houses the head start program and the students are still exposed to the contaminants the environment without any care from federal government. I think I was about twelve or thirteen when they found out that the neighborhood was contaminated. The contamination has impacted me with permanent allergies and the use of more nasal aids as the season

changes. There are changes in the economy; lack of support from state and federal agencies to aid in relocation; for over 20 years the local/state/federal governments, have not done their part so, the neighborhood doesn't receive the same services and amenities that other areas in the city have been given.

The thing is when it was going on we weren't really aware of the contamination, so at the time a lot of young kids were actually out there swimming and I could remember, you know what I'm saying, my neighbor TC, went swimming in the stuff and got out of it and literally, he had cut his head, he had a fade, TC had to get his fade cut off because after that they couldn't get that stuff out of his hair, his grandmother was like "either you cut it off "laughing", so I mean it just smelled bad.

A lot of people have died, be it from a lot of cancers or from just illnesses that are really natural...really not a product of you know living in a "normal" community. We've had an abnormal number of people dying from skin cancers and also just different cancers in general. That ditch went from Golden Rod, diagonally to Willow and then shifted to Walnut because you had to go through the path that ran parallel to the ditch, that's something to think about, especially when it used to be so prosperous. You know, so it's like, how can I say, a sad situation, but the people try to be upbeat about it and hold on to what they have left and what pains me when I leave mama's house every now and then I ride up and down those streets just to remind me, just how bad it is, and then I'll be depressed for about two or three days, it really does something to my soul to see our childhood in such disarray.

Even our other grandmother (Grandma Adams) that didn't live in Hyde Park who

lived downtown and later on the hill were the more prominent folk would come to Ms. Bertha's to get here hair done religiously, so were self-contained and self-sufficient and we had other people from other places, other black people coming in to patronize the businesses and to see all that go by the way side is really disheartening and to go the neighborhood now, it's really bare, where everybody would be outside working in their yards, children playing, activities going on, people talking and conversating, neighbors visiting, now it's just a ghost town and if you see somebody you don't know them...it's like a cesspool, you see people with addictions and those that don't have any other place to go now in Hyde Park. You also run into a situation where its ah um sign of the times also because I think the educators now have a yearning to want to do for the kids but when I was in school the teachers had sense of professionalism and a sense of pride and then throw that unto us to give us a strong sense of pride to make us learn and tell us that this was something that you can achieve too and more initiative to want to learn and it wasn't until I went to college that I realize we lived in a supposed poor neighborhood and come from a two parent home, people thought that was strange, but that was normal for us, I mean growing up I had friends that came from a single parent home, but they would have such a dynamic family structure that I really didn't consider it to be a single family and they had just as much support as I did at home. I think it has a lot to do with how we perceive other people and what was instilled in us determined what we were going to do and be in life. Even though things were happening in our neighborhood, when the contamination first came to our neighborhood our dad was like, you live out here, but that don't mean you have to be

here you know you go outside of here, you go to school you get your lesson and when you come home your mama and I will take care of this household and provide for us and that was the norm for us, but something were happening that we weren't aware of because they kept that unity and they worked it out whatever it was, that's what we knew...for them school was our only concern.

Darius L. Jordan



Figure 13. Brother, volunteer, and activist Darius L. Jordan

My name is Darius Levi Jordan. I am the youngest son of Eunice W. Jordan and Ernest L. Jordan. I have been marriage to Samantha Renee' Royal for 3 years. We presently are living in Huntsville, AL. My father, Ernest L. Jordan was the initial plaintiff in the Jordan vs. Southern Wood Piedmont case. He started the whole Hyde Park is contaminated thing because he recognized that there was something wrong with the water and the plants in the neighborhood. My father was a man with gumption and zeal and he did not give a damn of what others thought, which is why he agreed to become the lead plaintiff; that's pretty much who I am and I am the youngest of their four children.

My dad recognized that plants were not yielding like they use to and that they had discoloration that wasn't natural and there were deterioration and abnormal growth in those plants. For example, he once told me that some crops were tremendously strange, abnormal shapes, for instance tomatoes would grow in the shape of a chili pepper instead of an actual tomato.

Planting gardens in your yard was what everybody did in the neighborhood, what I was told, to make sure families did not spend money on going to the grocery store and paying those higher price. Many of the people in Hyde Park planted garden because job just weren't supplementing or the income wasn't good enough to go to the grocery store all the time.

I don't know exactly all the plants, actually I don't remember him planting anything because I was too young to see that. By the time I started growing up, my dad stopped planting gardens and the community found out about the contamination in the area. I was about seven going on eight when the contamination was discovered. Many of the residents were entrepreneurs. Hyde Park had their own community stores; they had their own little juke joint known as "the club". We had a neighborhood barber I mean...we had a lot.

Children my age group, grew up during the time that the contamination was really ah prevalent. We enjoyed playing outside, unfortunately before we knew better we actually played in that ditch because you could usually catch frogs and fishes and stuff like that until we were told what it was and really played in that and that would be my age group of about 28-30 (years old). My neighborhood is definitely one of the

highest places for asthma and I was one of the victims. Growing up I had a lot of allergies and am deathly allergic to certain foods. There were many times when I was young that I had to be rushed to the emergency room because I would have an allergic reaction and my throat would start closing up. I never got to experience the "joy" of having to cut the grass like my siblings, but now I know it wasn't the grass itself. It was chemicals in the ground.

I can think of a few of my friends that went to school that were sick, that had weird things that were not normal to anyone else in the schools we went to, some friends that end up going to Murphey Middle School, through our middle schooling, we would have people that had different little hard bumps on their skin and that they wasn't any pain associated with it, it was always there and it was always us, that had them.

Yes, these students lived in Hyde Park, and also we had ah the biggest number of asthma suffers that went to that went to that middle school as well as for the cancer I only know one and I think she has been treated for it. I haven't spoken to her in a while, I think it was a mild form of cancer, skin cancer I think it was and what is unique about her is that she lived right behind us in line with the ditch; her family had a lot of different illnesses too.

Also another thing about what you guys were talking about earlier with the generation I grew up in it got to point where a lot of kids were so frustrated that we had, I think, four black males who dropped out of school before they finished seventh grade. A lot of them were put in educational classes and they were not

learning anything. They really didn't do a lot I don't know if it was special education or it was just separated from what we were doing, because I myself were in a lot of the advanced classes and I can say that two actually belong to the Dunn family that you guys were talking about and just stopped going to school because they weren't in normal classes you know. My father once told me "I don't give a damn what you know and who you know, you can't let where you live determine what you will do in life and how other people perceive you.

We didn't grow up with a stigma of living in Hyde Park; there was a pride in living in Hyde Park. As far as my life as a youth in Hyde Park and my activities outside of Hyde Park, let me put it this way I was in the American Red Cross youth board, I was fortunate enough to be put on the state's youth board and then for a short while I was on the national youth board. Now whenever I'd go to these functions with these rich white people, because I was the only black guy from an inner city school there, the first thing they would ask is "Well where are you from", do you go to Evans, Lakeside, or what neighborhood you live in and I'd say "I'm from Hyde Park", and the look that these people would give me was of such bewilderment that anything like myself or like you guys that have done things in your life, could come from Hyde Park they just really couldn't fathom that, where it was different for my older brother and sister, there were expected to do something. You didn't grow up with that stigma, and you didn't see how those rich white people looked at you, like wow you're a miracle.

I had parents of people in the Red Cross offer me rides and once I told them where I was from, those offers were cut off, Oh, well I have to go pick up my husband

or I won't be able to do it this time, but maybe next time, or oh well we got to pick up some food and it's on the other side of town, or just "we can't do that"

Yeah, I remember the Flood of 1990, but it had flooded in Hyde Park before, no big deal, right, but not only did it flood in Hyde Park but over there in the Virginia Subdivision, the white folk section. It flooded everywhere in Augusta. Yeah I remember when Grandmamma Adams was talking about the caskets coming out of the cemetery right down the road from her and THE MASTER'S and that was the real reason it got attention because they had to hurry up and redo the greens and everything before the next Master's Tournament.

When it flooded my sister car was in the yard and the insurance had to replace the engine, but they had to replace all the carpet and upholstery because they couldn't clean it or get the smell out of it, they had to replace just about everything and if she had known about the contamination I would have had them to junk it and got another car.

During that protest we (residents of Hyde Park) were stopped, not only by businessmen but also by the Augusta-Richmond county police, they said we needed to stop it because it was making the city look bad, not because we were sick and a matter that they were going to take care of, but just because it was making it look bad I remember that. James Brown stopped his car, one day during the week of the Master's the week we protest, and came out and said "why y'all doing this", we were in front of the Sheraton, "why y'all doing this to these people", so they proceeded to try and explain it to him, I don't remember him making a statement, he just got back in his car

and left because I think he realized I better keep my mouth closed, cause these here folks do buy my records (ha ha), mostly the old folk. Well, at least he stopped and asked and listened, and evidently thought okay, y'all need to handle y'all business, but he didn't join the fight either, hmm, Now, back to the Master's why is it called the Master's hmmm, I have my own interpretation of why, not necessarily because they were the masters of golf, because all of them were white. This is a southern town, I mean we in the Bible belt, slavery's Kitchen, and my personal favorite Redneck central or whatever you want to call it, we in it, I mean come on, it's the MASTER'S and Massa don't want the black niggas to mess up what they got going. You can come to the Master's and put on their uniform and serve them food and drinks, and get your but pinched by the white women, but to stand outside those gates and say "this is wrong and you need to turn those camera's around and go really look at Augusta, y'all come here and stay for a week and see capitalism at its best" but you need to see what we see twenty-four seven, what is really going on in Augusta, racism at its core. It's like you when go to somebody's house to visit and you know it's hell that go on all year 'round, but when you there everything is perfect, and that's basically how it is...it's a whole different ballgame when you are in the mist of it when you have to deal with really the racial discrimination of the city of Augusta, not only the city but the state and federal governments um.

But you know what? The racial element is also what helped us get noticed 'cause when I was younger right across the street from my home was the field and the ditch they were putting up a fence and ah Patricia McCracken kind of caused a big deal

and we were over there and what, was she handcuffing herself, laughter, she chaining herself or handcuffing herself to the fence and she was saying okay, if you put up this fence you know you are pretty much admitting that there is a problem and they came there to actually arrest her because she was trespassing or something crazy. I'm talking about the fence right across from where we were living, beside Roger's house. That's where the picture came from with me and Ms. Trish I also got a lot of exposure because you had a crowd of black people, one white lady with blonde curly hair, a little black boy beside her crying and that's what made people take notice of our situation (locally) of our situation.

The interview log below is used to illustrate the dates and times I spent with participants. We spent quality time together to talk about the issues and concerns of Hyde Park. Some interview times were spent together during the holidays which made the interviews more enjoyable when discussing the recent struggles of Hyde Park.

Table 2

Participant Interview Log

	DATE	TIME INTERVIEW
EUNICE JORDAN	11/17/2010	3 HRS
	11/29/2010	2 HR
	12/10/2010	3 HRS
	12/29/2010	1.5 HRS
	01/20/2011	2.5 HRS
SHARON WELLS	11/22/2010	1.5 HRS
	11/29/2010	2 HRS
	12/9/2010	3 HRS
ERNEST JORDAN	11/29/2010	2 HRS
	12/27/2010	1 HR
	01/14/2011	1 HR
DEWANNA JORDAN	11/29/2010	2 HRS
	02/18/2011	1 HR
	01/10/2011	1.5 HRS
DARUIS JORDAN	11/29/2010	2 HRS
	12/14/2010	1 HRS
	01/17/2011	1 HR

CHAPTER 6

EXTENDING BEYOND OPPRESSION: REFLECTIONS ON INQUIRY

A soul hungering for freedom

Is a soul screaming for a voice.

~Deborah Dean

In this chapter, I summarize eight findings that have emerged from my inquiry into the lives of participants. (1) Mainstream societal perceptions become visible as racist when viewed through the lens of critical race theory. (2) African Americans view education as a liberating act and the answer to a better life. (3) Environmental injustices are bathed in racism that afflicts African American communities. (4) Through nurturing relationships African Americans exhibit a community of care where their freedom thrives. (5) In a community such as Hyde Park, African Americans have a connectedness and solidarity that fosters a sense of caring and respect. (6) The environmental injustices silently crept into the lives of the participants have awakened a cry for justice. (7) Just as contamination runs deep, so does injustice. Having the opportunity to delve into the lives of my family and my own life has enabled me to feel their anger and pain through their bodies and see injustice through their eyes. As I explored the oral histories of the five participants, Eunice Jordan, a retired educator and community activist, Sharon Wells, an educator, instructional coach for an elementary school, Ernest Jordan Jr., graphic artist and commercial driver, DeWanna Jordan, supervisor at a medical laboratory, and Darius Jordan, assistant manager of a book chain and child advocate. Each of these residents has a passion in sharing their lives so

that others may benefit and rise above the challenges that are prevalent in life as an African American. As I explore their lives as an observer, I become aware of the individual struggles that each of us has endured and I have also become aware that my life is interconnected with theirs in this struggle.

Viewing the lives through the lens of Critical Race Theory, mainstream societal perceptions become visible as racist **(Finding I)** (Chapter 3). The stories my participants told held powerful truths about their lives; not only did the stories reveal truths, but they legitimize the lives that they have lived and are still living. My passion for doing this study was centered on my love for this African American community. As a former resident of the community, I have found myself disturbed by the lack of acknowledgement and care that society has placed on the lives of the Hyde Park residents. I am also disturbed by the lack of responsibility that the industries have taken when countless tests have pointed to the source of the contamination. I am disturbed by the countless lives that have been lost due to the incidences of cancers and other illnesses. (Chapter 4) As an educator I am especially troubled by the low achievement rates of the children from the neighborhood. Why have these lives been devalued and ignored? Why must the children struggle to achieve success? These are questions that must be addressed.

The narratives of the participants provided an account of their lives in Hyde Park before, during, and after the contamination. Their narratives provided an understanding of accounts that led to the decaying of their community and the need for the invisible to be heard. The oral histories of my participants have taken me on a

journey of pain and discovery that needed to be traveled. Society had its perceptions of what is the norm in a community that has been contaminated environmentally, mentally, and physically. My hope is by exploring the lives of the participants that I was able to take a detour into a place that still has hope and promise and strives for a secure and peaceful life.

In our Democratic society such injustices should not be allowed, but changed to better societal relationships. These injustices are part of the social inequalities that African Americans are to endure in this country. These inequalities include the accessibility to quality healthcare, food, housing and education. Because these inequalities exist, many residents in Hyde Park have had to suffer in silence.

As an educator the disparities between African American children are ever increasing. Murrell (2008) agrees with my observation stating, "America's education challenge may actually serve to perpetuate, rather than eliminate, the achievement gap by further camouflaging the historically rooted inequality embedded in the practices, policies, and politics of American education (e.g., Ladson-Billings, 2006; Murrell, 2002)". Many educators have fallen victim to the perception that students residing in a low socio-economic area cannot learn. By closing the gap, educators have lost sight of the initial purpose of education, liberation through knowledge. Such mandates such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), forces teachers to concentrate on test scores instead of the child as a whole. Education has always been the goal for Hyde Park. I know this because like my participants, it was understood that you would go to school, and would learn. (Chapter 1) When the school was in the community, my teachers didn't have to

worry about me getting my work because most of my teachers taught my parents so there was no playing around, all they had to do was threatened to call my daddy and I was fine. As I got older and attended middle and high school, my teachers were classmates of my parents and again I couldn't escape. I remember when I took Biology the rule was that if you maintained an A average, a grade between ninety and one hundred, you could be exempt from the final exam. Well at the end of the year I had a 92 average. I was happy because that meant that there was no final exam, well to my surprise Mr. Moore would not let me be exempt and I questioned him as to why... I had the requirements, he simply said, "Your grade should have been higher". So I went home and complained to my daddy and he simply replied, "He's right". Not only was it a norm in my household, but in the households of the participants. Education was so important to Mrs. Jordan's parents; it was one of the stipulations before giving her hand in marriage:

When Ernest asked for my hand in marriage I ran down to Mrs. Utley's house. I knew daddy wanted me to go to college and I was afraid he was going to say "no". He told Ernest that we could get married but he had to promise him that I would go to college and finish because that was his dream that I get a degree.

As I listened to the stories that my participants told, I realized that Hyde Park had a strong sense of the quest for knowledge. African Americans view education as a liberating act and the answer to a better life (**Finding II**). The community prided itself on having a school so close, it allowed students and parents to participate in school activities. (Chapter 1 and 5) Mrs. Jordan and her mother were active in the PTA and

made sure that their children participated in school activities. They never missed a meeting or an opportunity to work with the students and teachers in the school. Everyone was able to connect on a level that focused on the education of the students in the community. Not only was excellence expected in the school but also in the after school programs that were initiated at the local community center. Mrs. Jordan and Ms. Wells along with other adults worked at the center to tutor students and foster their talents. They both worked during the summer months with the Feed-A-Kid and community programs. Students from the neighborhood all congregated to learn new things from people outside of the community. Ms. Jordan remembers being involved in the reading program at the center and having arts and crafts during the summer for all the elementary students. She recalled how they would sit in a circle at the community center and played games and read aloud. (Chapter 5) Because education was an important part of their lives all participants remember having the book mobile coming to the community every two weeks so that they could have access to books, to read and learn. As I reflect on my childhood, I can still remember how the bookmobile smelled and the excitement I had when it came to my street. The students from Ms. Jordan's school would participate in book parades where the students would dress up in their favorite character and parade around the school to encourage reading goals and parental involvement. Parents were also encouraged to volunteer and eat lunch with their children. Darius Jordan recalls celebrating birthdays in the class was part of building relationships between the school and community as well. Parents, teachers, family members and students shared in the celebration and it built strong bonds.

Parents, teachers, and administration worked together to build relationships in order to provide a support system for student achievement. (Chapter 1 and 2)

As I listen to the stories from my participants, I have recognized that environmental injustices are bathed in racism that afflicts African American communities **(Finding III)**. African American communities are magnets for many injustices however; they persevere in times of adversity. Sticking together is sometimes all we have as a community. The Democratic system we now live in entitles us to vote for equality and to rid our communities of injustice that involve the status quo; where there is a belief that Big Companies can't be sued and communities can't band together. (Chapter 1) Hyde Park stands firm and stand together without the anguish of ridicule from the opposite race because now African Americans don't have to live in a closed society; all of us have a chance to make their own mark in this world, and do something with our lives, regardless of circumstances. In conducting my research I have learned that environmental injustices occur in areas in which industries foresee a "path of least resistance" (Bullard, 2000). But since then, the Hyde Park community has become a thorn in the side of local and state governments. This community has reorganized the activism that afforded them many improvements in the 1960's and 1970's. These improvements included paved streets, indoor plumbing, appropriate sewage construction, and street lights. This community posed a threat to the long established rules of society and demanded that they be treated as equals.

Mrs. Jordan has served as the secretary for the Hyde and Argon Park Improvement Committee for many years. She has witness the installing of water,

sewage, gas lines, and the paving of roads. Once again, the activism that grew in the 1960's and 1970's would prove to be a guiding force in the struggle for environmental justice in the community. Mrs. Jordan recalls one commissioner meeting in particular that she and other residents attended, "We wanted them to tell us more about the contamination. So I had to remind them that we were serious. I told them that we were not beggars, we were professional people. There were teachers, retired military and blue collar workers that paid our taxes and we worked hard to send our children to college". She explained, "We needed to tell them this because we wanted people to know that we were; we wanted to challenge the stereotypes of what people thought of a Black community". Not only did Mrs. Jordan continue the fight, Ms. Wells help organize meetings in the community, typed letters and made flyers to inform the community of what was happening. DeWanna, Darius, and Ernest pounded the pavement and passed out the flyers. They also stuffed envelopes with letters to television and radio stations to get the word out that Hyde Park was not going to sit idly by and just go away. This was an issue that needed immediate attention. (Chapter 5) Checker (2005) explains the agenda of the residents of Hyde Park:

People infuse their physical surroundings with memory, experience, and history and these interpretations are often a crucial inspiration for collective action.

When people's places are threatened, the force of the meanings and identities that they have ascribed to them transforms into powerful activism (p. 76).

Because the activism that grew from the contamination the residents of the community began making contact with the local health department and found an ally in the

director. My participants became involved and organized and with other residents began to make contacts of the people that they thought would be able bring this issue to the public eye. It was important that this should not happen to anyone else if the participant could help it. DeWanna Jordan explained that helping the community fostered her desired to go into the medical field, "we were always expected to do something in life that we loved and could help people and this was helping a lot of people. I felt empowered to be helping at a young age. I could go to school and talk about how much we were doing in the community and feel proud."

African Americans have always had to fight for equal protections under the laws in the United States. The residents of Hyde Park knew that this injustice was no different than any other injustice and that they had to continue to fight if oppressive policies were going to change. (Chapter 1) These practices help strengthen the determination of the residents while they were waiting for change and it also opened up many opportunities to that they did not have before. For example, the activism that the residents established recently have garnered them local, state, and national attention. It impresses me that a small southern African American community standing for what they believed to be right, has opened doors for others to share their stories.

In June 2009, thirty residents from Hyde Park took a bus and visited Spartanburg, South Carolina. The trip was to be one of hope and possibilities to regeneis their struggling community. Mrs. Jordan remembers the trip as being exciting, "because it gave us a feeling of hope of what could be accomplished". Mrs. Jordan explained that the area visited contained newly built houses that were

reminiscent of what Hyde Park used to look like. Another avenue that was opened for the community was a grant that they received in which they were able to make a documentary about their lives in Hyde Park entitled, Hyde Park: Desperate...Determined (2010).

During my inquiry, I have also found that through nurturing relationships African Americans exhibit a community of care where their freedom thrives **(Finding V)**. Darius Jordan is a fun loving young man who has been a member of various organizations. He discussed how he was admired by all and considered to be a great guy. He also discuss parents of his friends in the Red Cross were taken with him until they found out where he lived, "Red Cross parents stopped offering me rides home just because I lived in Hyde Park. It was just weird. It was like I had all of a sudden contracted the plague. I hadn't change, just their perceptions". (Chapter 3) DeWanna on the same note commented on how she was questioned as to how she got accepted into the first magnet school in Richmond County, "I guess it just wasn't conceivable that a black girl from Hyde Park could attend such a prestigious place of learning, Oh were they wrong". Even though these things happed many years ago, it just reaffirms that race has its place in society.

Ms. Wells discussed her leaving the Park to go to school located about 15 miles away. She went to a Junior High School that was in "the bottom" in other words it was in a part of the city that was populated by all African Americans. This neighborhood's residents were mostly military and middle to low income families. This school was much like Clara Jenkins Elementary school. "Teachers cared about what we were

doing". She then entered a high school which was integrated. Her educational experience changed and she realized the differences in her white teachers:

They were the perceivers, but we were the believers in what we were taught. Even though you all, Darius and DeWanna grew up during this era of the contamination you still had pride in your neighborhood, regardless of what was going on, we were raised with your parents, you were respected, you were to be respectful, you knew to be the best you could be and you could do anything that anybody else could do. Like daddy always said to be the best you could be. And that was instilled in us at home and at Clara E. Jenkins. Those teachers had a stake not only in our education, but our lives, because as teachers they wanted us to achieve and be successful and you could see that they cared about us, they knew our parents and they made sure that we were afforded every opportunity that they could give.

DeWanna Jordan recalled going to PTA meetings with her parents and carnivals that were at the school. As a child, she stated, "I was destined to go to college; my parents started a college fund for each of us when we were babies, so it was expected". Parents in the community made sacrifices to make sure that if nothing else, the children were prepared for school. I was truly blessed to have neighbors that saw in me what my parents saw. In particular was Mr. and Mrs. Lewis, they lived two doors down from us. Whenever I would get an order form for Scholastic to order books, they would order and pay for books for me, so that support of education didn't just revolve around family. They would also be in attendance to any plays or concerts I was in a

school. To me that was a norm in my existence, but for many students now, it is nonexistent.

During the late 1960's a preschool was established in the house next to my grandparents. The house was divided into an office, classrooms, a library, and a kitchen. The front yard served as playground for the children. I was one of the students. The house also provided a place for teenagers to go to get help with homework and to keep out of trouble. Mrs. Jordan worked at the school part-time while she was attending college. The school focused on Afro-American history and political education. The community felt that it was their duty to support these programs because as I learned from Mrs. Jordan and Ms. Wells reiterated, it was in the best interest of the African-American children. Mrs. Jordan stated, "When the black children were in schools being taught by black teachers, they had an identity, they knew their heritage, and they were loved and respected. Now a lot of our children don't know who they are, and that's because no one has nurtured that pride in them". Mrs. Jordan went on to explain that her goal as an educator was to make sure that all children learned. But she emphasized that as an African American educator she felt it was her duty to instill a sense of identity in her African American students every day of the year not just in February. She also made it a point to invite parents to the school to volunteer and call parents to let them know how their student is progressing.

My grandparents and other families saw a dream fulfilled when they were able to purchase land. They saw a new life ahead, the Promised Land while the land owners were unloading swamp land. Regardless of the type of land, each family took pride in

the fact that they owned land. (Chapter 1) I can remember from the time I was little, my grandmother had a yard full of plants. She grew potted plants on the porch and in the yard she had rose bushes, and the climbing kind that covered the arch above the gate and she had a hydrangea bush on each side of the steps of her house. She had flowers all around the outside of the house. When you stand in her yard and look around all the yards looked just as beautiful. This was a source of pride for the neighborhood. Everybody had flowering plants in their yards, just as they had gardens. Owning your own land was a dream fulfilled and that meant that you took care of it. My grandfather always trimmed the bushes and trees. He never had any electrical equipment to keep everything manicured. Often time, because of environment those minorities are forced to occupy, they are perceived as being dirty and uncaring, and this perception was noted in Terkel (1992) "They don't take care of their homes, let them run down. Don't like to work...They look like shit. They live like low-lifes..." (p. 140), but this was not true, not in Hyde Park. The community instituted community clean up days during the 70's and 80's and since there was a recycling plant close to the community, they did their part and recycled bottle, metals, and plastics. Landowning was the goal for the original Hyde Park Residents, so keeping the yards and gardens beautiful was a normal part of life. Owning land had long been denied to African Americans for so many years, that when they secured the ownership they wanted to take care of it so that they could grow produce and have something to show for a life of constant sacrifice.

In a community such as Hyde Park, the connectedness and solidarity foster a sense of caring and respect (**Finding VI**). Ms. Wells talked about how the community would rally at all hours to comfort neighbors when there was a death or if someone was sick. The community acted as one body, when one was in need, it was taken care of and resolved. Having gardens with crops meant that not only did you have food for your immediate family, but you had food for your extended family. It was not uncommon for neighbors to borrow a cup of sugar or flour, I did it often, she said. When we only had one car and daddy was at work our neighbor would take us to the store. The women in the neighborhood were always cooking and if they baked a pie or cakes, you were sure to get a piece. Caring has long been a moral value for African Americans and according to Siddie Walker & Snarey (2004) "a Black ethic of care emphasizes care by and for the collective as well as by and for individuals" (p. 29). (Chapter 1 and 5)

Mrs. Jordan remembers her mother who kept children during the day, her home was a caring and respected home. The parents that left their children with her knew that they were in such good hands. She recalled that one of boys, now a man in his fifties, told her of how Miss Lillian had made him some shoes because he didn't have any and how he was so grateful for her love and kindness and it would be something that he would never forget. How could you not care for a place that has nurtured your spirit and given you a voice? The passion that the participants felt for their community was nurtured by the relationships that were shared with other residents.

Hyde Park is dear to the hearts of my family. It was the security blanket of a familiar world that offered so much love and encouragement. It helped them prepare for the harsh world that existed on the other sides of the tracks. Mrs. Jordan lived and worked in the world when Augusta, Georgia had separate toilets and lunch counters. She lived through the race riots that threatened to tear the city down the middle. Through her voice and tears, I have felt the sting of racism she had to endure. On one occasion she recounts how she was grabbed by a white man in a department store. She explains that she had gone to the department store to take her senior pictures and was riding on the elevator with a white male and female. When the doors proceeded to open she went to step out of the elevator she was grabbed by the white man and asked "Don't you see a white woman here, girl". She was hurt, she was frightened but it did not deter her from wanting to stand up for what she thought was right. She has never forgotten that day and the cruelty of racism. She explained that she was well aware of racism, but she had never experienced in such a blatant way before. (Chapter 3)

Ernest Jordan, Jr. reminds me that racism is alive and well in Hyde Park, "Just look at the neighborhood now. Look what they have done to our community. It is not our fault that it is this way." In analyzing the stories, it is obvious that Hyde Park held such hopes and dreams for its residents and their future generations. I recognized the importance of this African American community to the liberation of minds. The participant's stories shed light on the plans for the children in the community. Their stories also shed light on the injustices that seeped into their community and

contaminated the grounds. The contamination that has engulfed this community has been a disaster. Yet it has propelled its residents into community activism. Ernest Jordan, Jr. recalls that when the contamination was discovered and the facts about the toxins were released to the public, they knew what they had to do...fight. The community was dedicated to equality and making their voices heard. Before the contamination, Hyde Park was just another Black community in Augusta. In the text *Polluted Promises: Environmental racism and the search for justice in a southern town*, Checker (2005) describe the community:

Back then, Hyde Park residents were nearly all employed—many in nearby factories or as domestics. The neighborhood was a vibrant place, with small groceries, churches, barbershops, and even a few bars where residents could take the edge off a long week’s work. But for the rest of Augusta, Hyde Park was almost invisible. (p. 5)

As I analyzed the oral histories I collected from my research, I recognized that the environmental injustices that so silently crept into the lives of the participants had awakened a cry for justice (**Finding VI**). Those that had been silent for many years were now spoke words of encouragement and protest. Their passion for justice had never died, it had just lain dormant. The community that was once invisible was now being heard from on the local level to the federal level. These voices I learned reorganized the Hyde and Argon Park Improvement Committee and began to make contact with researchers, politicians, and medical professionals from around the country. DeWanna Jordan recalls how she and others that were teenagers at the

beginning of the discovery walked the health professionals to the houses of the Hyde Park residents so that they could get permission to talk to them or to collect soil samples from their yards; "We were their liaisons to introduce the outsiders to the residents. Since everybody knew us, it was easier to trust us than the others. It was easier to talk with someone that you share a community with than an outsider, because it was the outsiders that had contaminated our community". As I listened to the participants talk about the contamination, they expressed how they felt to be heard and recognized as a person. Darius Jordan stated, "The community had people knocking on their doors and asking questions, we were given a voice, we were being heard and ultimately our lives were forever changed. (Chapter 3 and 5)

The more research I conducted and the more stories I heard, the more I began to realize that environmental injustices occur in neighborhoods of color, in this case an African American community. To reiterate this fact, Bullard (2000) *Dumping in Dixie* refers to African American communities of the South as be like a "Third World" region of the United States, I was also reminded that members of the community had attended meetings in Atlanta, Georgia and Washington, D. C. to address the issue of the contamination. Because the community was passionate about preserving their way of life, they had ventured into areas that known had been trained to enter. In telling their stories African Americans relied on the strength and love of community to thrust them into the prying eyes of the country. As Ms. Wells and Mrs. Jordan agreed "it was scary, but it was a liberating experience". They had dared to say "hey we matter, maybe not to your standards, but we matter". I learned that they were comfortable in

their world and they weren't ashamed to fight for it on their terms. Their strength reminded me of the humble beginning of Hyde Park, people wanting and deserving a better life.

In diving into the lives of these residents, the pain of my story also evolves. The stories that the participants have told has made them relive. Along with those memories comes the pain and anger that has been a companion for over twenty years. The lives of human beings have been disregarded basically as unimportant. How can we as a society cause such pain on a race of people without thinking that it will not have repercussions? Do they not think that the loss of life isn't painful? Do they think that just because the residents are African Americans that they don't matter or will have a say in how they are treated?

In conducting the interviews of the participant's and listening to the residents in the community, anger and the pain of the situation is common. The big questions is why, my question is why, but for the life of me the only answer that surfaces is that as Cornel West proclaims "race matters", especially in the South.

Because of the racial aspect, society expects African Americans to live an existence that they would not want. Mrs. Jordan and her husband bought the land and home that she occupies, forty years ago to raise a family. When they purchased the land, it was a place that would be their homestead and property that their children and grandchildren would always have. (Chapter 1) Since the contamination the land value has significantly decreased and she has had trouble getting her home insured, because

of the contamination. She contends "I can't even get a loan on the property, yet I still have to pay taxes on the property. We worked hard to pay off this house, paid every note on time, pay my taxes on time...and um I can't sell it if I wanted too. It makes me mad! They just need to move us out. I am so tired of feeling like we don't matter.

Ms. Wells feels with emotion when she echoes Mrs. Jordan, "It's like a place where people dump all the stray dogs, Hyde Park has become the place where they dump all the negative people and driving off and leaving them: Ernest Jordan also added "that's true as the talk of contamination got worse you would go by Clara Jenkins and see where people would dump trash on the side of the road. (Chapter 3)

When I listened to the participant's voices tremble, when I looked into their eyes, there were tears, when I thought of Hyde Park my soul screamed for a resolution. In order capture their stories and recognize their anguish, as a researcher I had to distance myself from them emotionally. There were times when I wanted to join in on the conversation, but refrained. I had to be the observer as if hearing the story for the first time. The anger I felt couldn't be displayed because it would have fed their emotions even more. The collecting of the stories proved to be both exhausting and exhilarating. It process made me uncomfortable , it made to reexamine my life , and it gave me a strength that I didn't knew I could possess, to share with others the history of a people and their struggle to survive.

When people have lived doing what they know to be right and just, it is unconceivable that at an age when you should be enjoying the golden years, you are

constantly bombarded by feelings of despair. Mrs. Jordan and DeWanna both have trouble sleeping. Both have attributed to their worries about the community and what they are going to do. DeWanna states sadly, "Yeah, I am worried. I mean mama should be comfortable in her house; she shouldn't be worried about her and her neighbors. At sixty-five she should be able to feel secure knowing that her struggles in life have been worthwhile, not worrying about what unethical people have done to her and her community. (Chapter 3) Also, Darius adds, "I worry a lot because, mama is alone, I mean she has us, but you know daddy was here when this thing started and now...she has to do this kind alone. Man it just pisses me off."

Like them I too am angry, my anger drives my passion for this inquiry. I too have lost friends and relatives to this nonsense. When I think about the children that have been hurt, it is devastating. How can you look into the eyes of a child and explain to them that the world doesn't want you to be successful? It's hard! Just as contamination runs deep, so does injustice (**Finding VII**). By denying children their right to life and liberty you are creating a society that in turn will devalue your existence. Eyes so bright and so full of life are being extinguished before they are even given a chance to live. When we learn from history? When will we as a society learn that you can't take care of some without taking care of the others?

Having the opportunity to delve into the lives of my participants and my own life has enabled me to feel their angers and pains through their bodies and to see injustice through their eyes (**Finding VII**). Because contamination homeowners, such as my mother has been informed by her home insurance company that they can no longer

insure her property because of the contamination. This is an insurance that my mother and father obtained over twenty years ago to protect their property. Now my mother has had to be stressed over finding a new company to insure and it has not been easy in light of the condition of the soil. No company wants to insure you when there is a major risk existing. Also, residents who have lived in the community and have paid off their mortgage can't even get an equity loan or try to sell the property, but yet they receive a bill from the tax commissioner that is expected to be paid, regardless. How can the community heal itself when the residents are still being diagnosed with cancers and other life threatening illnesses? All of these things are part of the racist practices that make this situation disheartening. These types of problems that my family and others face complicate acquiring justice in this society where you are perceived as an afterthought.

The facts as I knew them were just a shallow attempt at the truth. I thought I knew the history of the community and its residents, but I have come to realize and understand that their lives are much more than what I had envisioned. These participants have let me into their private selves and shared some of their joys and pains. I now see them in another light; I now see others differently, because I see myself differently. By allowing them to tell their stories, the people I interviewed had given others the opportunity to learn from their experiences. Every person has a life, for every life there is a story, and for every story there is a lesson to be learned that even through the blinds of injustice we can still see a community of hope, love and struggle.

EPILOGUE

Democracy

*Democracy will not come
Today, this year
Nor ever
Through compromise and fear.*

*I have as much right
As the other fellow has
To stand
On my two feet
And own the land.*

*I tire so of hearing people say,
Let things take their course.
Tomorrow is another day.
I do not need my freedom when I'm dead.
I cannot live on tomorrow's bread.*

*Freedom
Is a strong seed
Planted
In a great need.*

*I live here, too.
I want freedom
Just as you.*

-Langston Hughes, 1949

Just as African Americans were impatient for democracy during the Jim Crow era, the citizens of Hyde Park are just as impatient now. They have lived in a contaminated area for over twenty years waiting for a chance to be free of this situation. African Americans have a right just like any other in society to live in a safe and healthy environment. All that they ask is that they be given the right to live in a society that will not treat them as if they were second class citizens and deny them

what is rightfully theirs, freedom. They have waited, they have fought, and they have stood firm for what they believed. Now is the time for them to be made whole and be liberated from the hold that this contamination has on their lives and community. They deserve democracy too. But the question is “will they ever taste the freedom that a true democracy serves”? I think not. Even though the United States is hailed as the greatest Democracy in the world, the treatment of marginalized people is a testament to *dream* of democracy.

Through this inquiry, I have allowed the voices of my family resound through the halls of justice, but they fall on deaf ears. If we are to believe the voices of the majority, we would be led to think that all is fair in our society. Take for example the treatment of the residents in Holiday Park that I mentioned earlier, here are white residents in pricey homes, lawyers and bank presidents that have a perception that their area is prone to flooding. They are placed ahead of the Hyde Park residents, paid a hefty sum, and are relocated. Here again Hyde Park stands on the edge of hell, ignored again and still waiting for justice. In this situation, critical race theory (Bell, 1992; Delgado and Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings and Tate, 2005) exposes racism as being embedded in American society through the stories of my family’s lives. I had always prided myself on being a fair person, but now I am not sure that my fairness is seen by all to be the same. ; I now wonder was my view of justice one sided. This inquiry has required me to take the blinders off and critical observe social issues from another perspective. Although I am close to my family, there were many things that I perceived to be one way, but found to be the opposite.

While doing this inquiry I have come the realization that the local government may have prolonged this situation to continue collecting taxes from the residents in the community, because as stated earlier they still pay taxes on the property that they own. Is it true? I can't answer for that governing body, but I believe it to be probable. It seems to me that the government who are mostly those "good ole boys" still are operating on a slave masters mentality, "you gonna do what I tell you so that I can make a profit on your blood, sweat, and tears and since we, the government, have money and you don't, we get to decide your fate".

In order to address these issues of inequalities in Hyde Park a new mentality must be forged and voices from the "bottom of the well" must be heard. Hyde Park is struggling to survive and struggling to stay positive. I have always thought of my mother, Eunice Jordan, as being a smart and strong willed person. She is short in stature compared to many, but she has always been a towering force in the family and it is that force that goes toe to toe with mayors, commissioners, judges, the EPA, EPD, and whomever else that thought she was insignificant. This inquiry has left no doubt in my mind as to who is responsible for the destruction of Hyde Park. I am convinced that politics, public policies, and educational services have perpetuated these social injustices. But I am still searching for the answers that will be needed to change society's mentality toward the residents of this community. I have been inspired to seek answers to this dilemma in stopping the cycle of inequalities in our society. I don't know how, but I can certainly start by attending HAPIC meetings more often and even volunteering at the community center.

In addition to the issues of the contamination, the education of our students also needs to be addressed. I am giving a voice to the students of the community. I am convinced that we need more strategies to help African American children who are struggling in the classroom. NCLB does not allow for the cultural differences that our students face. It only serves to stagnate the African American student because it does not take into account the circumstances of the whole child, but yet they want accountability. From what I have observed in education, NCLB is perpetuating the creation of a larger underclass in our society. My question is what can be done? I know that when I am cleaning my classroom at the end of the year, any books or materials that the children of Hyde Park can use at the community center, I will donate so that they can have possibly have a reading program this summer. It is going to take a lot to rebuild our community up, but I am willing to do what I can to help eradicate the social stigmas that plague the community. Hyde Park is home for me and my family and home is where sacrifices begin.

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