

**LEARNING AND LIVING WHILE BLACK: BLACK STUDENTS, WHITE  
UNIVERSITIES, AND THE AGE OF POST-AFFIRMATIVE ACTION AND POST-  
RACIALISM**

by

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## **DEDICATION**

Dedicated to the memory of Latasha Harlins & Trayvon Martin

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is twofold. First, the research aims to deepen our understanding of the learning and living experiences of black graduates of predominantly white institutions (PWIs) of higher learning. Second, this study seeks to expand on and update the literature by considering two critical and, significantly, concurrent developments over the past decade: the systematic dismantling of post-secondary affirmative action policies and the increasingly popular, but highly contentious, ideology of post-racialism. A Critical Race Theory (CRT) and social justice perspective (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995; Gutmann, 1987; Howe, 1997 and Young, 1990) frame this study and, in conjunction with counter-storytelling (Ladson-Billings, 1998), will be used to analyze students' stories and lay the groundwork for a deeper understanding of black student experiences on a post-affirmative action, so-called post-racial predominantly white campus.

Recent challenges and reversals notwithstanding, few constitutional precedents have done more to impact educational access and attainment for black students than *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). To be sure, *Brown* has significantly broadened the scope of opportunity for black students seeking access to institutions of higher learning. African Americans not only have gained better access to many institutions of higher education that previously denied them access based on race, but their overall rates of participation in higher education have increased steadily (Allen, 2005). Marable (2006) writes:

Riding high on the crest of the Brown wave, African Americans finally won access to higher education at unprecedented rates. In 1960, there were 200,000 African Americans enrolled in college, and three-fourths of that number attended historically Black

universities and colleges. By 1970, as a direct consequence of civil rights protests, 417,000 Black Americans age 18 to 24 were attending college. Significantly, three-fourths of these new students were at predominantly White institutions. (pp 190-191)

Unfortunately, the increased presence of African American students at predominantly white institutions (PWIs) has not always translated into their acceptance and integration into mainstream campus life. To the contrary, data reveal that racial tension and conflict at these institutions remain a serious problem (Feagin et al., 1996), with adverse consequences for the African American student. Specifically, black students attending predominantly white institutions of higher learning experience racial affronts and discrimination (Feagin et al., 1996), view the campus as unwelcoming, tense and hostile (Feagin et al., 1996), and experience poorer overall psychological adjustment (Feagin et al., 1996; Allen, 1985; Fleming, 1984). Studies have also noted that, relative to white students, Blacks demonstrate lower and more compromised academic achievement levels (Steele, 1997; Fries-Britt, 2004), less likelihood of enrollment in advanced degree programs, and lower post-graduation occupational attainments and earnings (Allen, 2005).

Interestingly, the preponderance of literature exploring black students' experiences on predominantly white campuses predates major shifts in our thinking about race and racism. Indeed, a great deal has changed on the social front since Fleming's (1984) watershed study comparing experiences of black students attending PWIs with those attending historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs). Two such developments with profound implications for this study are the systematic effort to dismantle affirmative action in higher education and the increasingly popular notion of post-racialism. Each issue will be discussed in turn.

## AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

In November, 1996, after a long and contentious challenge, the State of California adopted Proposition 209, an amendment to the State Constitution that proposed to eliminate so-called discriminatory practices in public employment, government contracting, and public institutions of education (Teranishi & Briscoe, 2008). As with earlier challenges to affirmative action programs (see University of California, *Davis v. Bakke*, 1978), proponents of Proposition 209 argued that affirmative action programs granted unfair preferences to underrepresented minorities and women, and thus ran afoul of the spirit and intent of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Teranishi & Briscoe, 2008; The American Civil Rights Initiative, 2011). The American Civil Rights Initiative, a non-profit, conservative-leaning organization aimed at reversing affirmative action programs, affirms this view thusly:

The American Civil Rights Institute is a national civil rights organization created to educate the public on the harms of racial and gender preferences... ACRI also seeks to affect a cultural change by challenging the “race matters” mentality embraced by many of today’s so-called “civil rights leaders.” ACRI’s leaders and supporters believe that civil rights are individual rights and that government policies should not advocate group rights over individual rights. (American Civil Rights Initiative, 2011)

Though advocates of anti-affirmative action legislation view their efforts as a positive and affirmative step toward a “color-blind” society (American Civil Rights Initiative, 2011), the measure has had a decidedly adverse impact on black enrollment, particularly students seeking admission to selective public institutions (Teranishi & Briscoe, 2008). In their notable study examining the impact of Proposition 209 on black matriculation rates and college choice in California, Teranishi and Briscoe (2008) report that black first-time freshmen enrollment

decreased 43% at UCLA (Los Angeles) and 38% at UCB (Berkeley) following the enactment of Proposition 209, in the single year between 1997 and 1998. Teranishi and Briscoe also found that anti-affirmative action, meritocratic rhetoric conveyed to students of color that they did not belong in highly selective institutions, and that this perception of racism during the college-choice process caused students to struggle with self-doubt.

The subsequent passing of similar measures in other states, notably Texas (*Hopwood v. State of Texas*, 1996), Washington (Initiative 200, 1998) and, most recently, Michigan (Proposal 2, 2006) suggests an incipient anti-affirmative action social climate. Confirming this view, ACRI, writes:

In the wake of the passage of California's Proposition 209 there was a strong sentiment that the movement should not end, but should continue nationwide. A sustained national effort toward the elimination of racial and gender preferences required a carefully coordinated system of continuing education and political influence. (<http://www.acri.org>)

Importantly, much of the affirmative action research to date focuses on the extent to which Proposition 209 has impacted black student enrollment (Teranishi & Briscoe, 2008). While these data provide important baseline information, they do little to account for how black students may be impacted by learning and living in an anti-affirmative action context.

#### POST-RACIALISM

A second and arguably related development concerns the increasing characterization of American society as post-racial, as a color-blind society where racial barriers no longer exist (Bonilla-Silva, 2003). Although the notion of a color-blind society has been considered before (see Marable, 1998), the ascendancy and ultimate election of President Barack Obama appear to have added credence to the idea that America is transcending its preoccupation with race. As

Zamudio, Russell, Rios, and Bridgeman (2011) write: “This notion [of a colorblind society] is further problematized with the election of Barack Obama to the presidency, an event to which political pundits point to suggest that we are not only a colorblind society, but a post-racial society” (p. 21). Indeed, references to a post-racial U.S. society abound. For instance, a lead article in the *Washington Post* read: Edging (at times clumsily) toward a post-racial America (Givhan, 2008). In a similar, albeit conservative, vein, *Los Angeles Times* writes about Obama’s post-racial promise (Steele, 2008). Perhaps more indicative of the debate concerning a so-called post-racial America is the lead question on npr.org: Are we living in a post-racial America? (National Public Radio, February 11, 2009).

Despite the popularization of a “post-racial” ideology, there is considerable debate as to whether U.S. society is close to realizing this ideal. Scholars are among those challenging this view. Feagin (2009), for instance, cautions against the uncritical characterization of America as a post-racial society, suggesting that present-day racism renders the notion a fallacy. Similarly, Marable (2009) contends that despite recent interest in the notion of a post-racial society, racial equality and social justice for African Americans appear more elusive than ever. Bonilla-Silva (2003) challenges the subtext of the new post-racial, color-blind discourse, positing a “new racism,” one that replaces the old, more overt Jim Crow racism with a decidedly nuanced and subtle “color-blind” ideology:

A new powerful ideology has emerged that combines elements of liberalism with culturally based anti-minority views to justify the contemporary racial order: color-blind racism. Yet this new ideology is a curious one. Although it engages, as all such ideologies do, in “blaming the victim,” it does so in a very indirect “now you see it, now you don’t” style that matches perfectly the character of the “new racism.” (p. 275)



Furthermore,

Although the “new racism” seems racism lite, it is as effective as slavery and Jim Crow in maintaining the racial status quo. The central elements of this new structure are: 1) the increasingly covert nature of racial discourse and practices; 2) the avoidance of racial terminology and the ever-growing claim by whites that they experience “reverse racism;” 3) the invisibility of most mechanisms to reproduce racial inequality; 4) the incorporation of “safe minorities” (e.g., Clarence Thomas, Condoleeza Rice, or Colin Powell) to signify the nonracialism of the polity; and 5) the rearticulation of some racial practices characteristic of the Jim Crow period of race relations. (p. 272)

A critical reading of the literature, combined with recent developments in our thinking about race, racism, and equality of educational opportunity, highlights the need to expand our understanding of black students’ experiences on predominantly white campuses. In particular, there is a need to inquire into the impact of broader social developments (i.e. post-affirmation action and post-racial discourse) on the learning and living experiences of black students, to illuminate the challenges that might be associated with these new developments, and to investigate the ways in which black students perceive and cope with the realities of the contemporary predominantly white campus. Ultimately, the aim is to determine whether previous conceptualizations of race (and racism) still hold, or if there is a need to recalibrate both our thinking of, and approach to, research in post-affirmative action, post-racial contexts.

Thus, the purpose of this research study includes developing an understanding of the particular circumstances of black students at a predominantly white university in the Upper Midwest, especially the extent to which a so-called post-racial, “color-blind” situation exists.

## SIGNIFICANCE

Why do the lives and experiences of black students attending predominantly white institutions of higher education merit investigation? To begin with, academic achievement and retention remain a challenge for black students attending predominantly white institutions of higher learning. Significantly, this challenge exists at a time of unprecedented economic uncertainty and in a context (severely eroded manufacturing base, globalization and an increasingly competitive job market) in which a college degree is no longer optional but *sine qua non* to economic success and advancement in society. Although factors such as financial support, academic preparedness and institutional fit have been implicated in student progression and retention studies of black students at traditionally white institutions of higher learning (Nettles, 1988; Tinto, 1993), other factors appear in play as well. Tinto (1993), for example, found that college attrition was significantly influenced by experiences which took place during the college experience. To be sure, data show that experiences with racism remain a significant liability for black students (Feagin, Vera & Imani, 1996; Love, 1993; Allen, 1988; Nettles, 1988), begging the question: If black students face racism on a regular basis, how might this ultimately impact their chances of succeeding in college?

Furthermore, little is known about what it means to be African American college student in a post-affirmative action, so-called post-racial context. Although there is a significant body of research on the black experience on predominantly white campuses, most notably Agony of Education, “only a handful of research studies in the 1990s have examined the racial barriers that African American students encounter in predominantly white colleges and universities” (Feagin Vera & Imani, 1996, p. xi). Moreover, these studies preceded both the emergence of post-racialism and the systematic challenges to affirmative action in higher education. Thus, there is a

great deal to learn in terms of how black students may be impacted by the evolving cultural, social, and political landscape. By exploring what it means to be African American in a post-affirmation, post-racial context, findings from this study contribute to deepening our understanding of the black experience on the contemporary predominantly white campus.

Finally, a central goal of research in the critical tradition is to effect social and institutional change, in part by dismantling policies and practices at variance with democratic and social justice ideals. Thus, it is hoped that by drawing upon the voices of black student graduates of predominantly white institutions of higher learning, this study may ultimately build upon and lay the conceptual groundwork for developing socially progressive, culturally inclusive policies and programs in higher education.

As will become clearer in chapter two, this study will explore black students' perceptions of, and encounters with, racism and discrimination, in terms of their interactions with white faculty, staff and students; the impact of these interactions on their well-being and achievement; strategies for adapting and coping, and how these encounters might shape their conceptualizations of race and racism on a white campus.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **INTRODUCTION**

As I ponder the task before me, exploring the living and learning experiences of Black student graduates of traditionally white institutions of higher learning, I am reminded of a watershed moment in civil rights history: James Meredith's 1962 desegregation of the University of Mississippi, then an exclusively White institution of higher learning (Meredith, 1966). Several questions come to mind as I reflect on this historic event: The overtly oppressive and endemic racism of the South and broader society at the time notwithstanding, what were Meredith's day-to-day experiences on the racially-charged, Ole Miss campus? How did being the first and only impact his actions relative to his race, within and beyond the classroom? What about his relationships with administration, faculty and fellow students, and his perceptions of those entrusted to provide a fair and equal educational opportunity to all students? How did he cope and maintain a sense of well-being in the face of persistent racial hostility? Devoid of a black student community and support structure, to what might we attribute his progression and ultimate graduation? And lastly, as racial tensions on campus and beyond seemingly abated, and Meredith's presence became presumably more "tolerable," had race figured less prominently in his day-to-day existence? Although race relations have certainly changed for the better since Meredith's historic desegregation of "Ole Miss"—the 2008 election of Barack Obama is often touted as a case in point, this review will reveal that many of these questions remain troublingly relevant, at least through much of the 1990s. In fact, the studies constituting this review converge on one point: race remains a prominent theme in the lives of black students on predominantly white campuses.

A second side of this coin exists, however. Some scholars and social commentators question the persistence of racism on predominantly white campuses, arguing as Berstein did that “racism is no longer the social norm in American life,” (cited in Feagin et al., 1996, p. 3) or that black students exaggerate, if not fabricate, claims of racism (Steele, cited in Feagin et al., 1996). As noted previously, others posit a post-racial America, suggesting the transcendence of race and, by inference, racism. (Revealingly, many of the same voices repudiating the existence of racism also oppose affirmative action and other compensatory policies aimed at redressing racial discrimination). However, although racial tensions may have lessened over the years, the literature suggests that considerable room for improvement remains. For instance, as I detail in a subsequent section, racism and racial conflict are serious cause for concern at predominantly white institutions of higher learning (Feagin et al., 1996).

In their qualitative study exploring the experiences of black students at a predominantly white university, Feagin, Vera and Imani (1996) countered conservative notions of racial harmony, asserting instead that racism and racial conflict are prevalent at PWIs and experienced by black students at disturbing levels. Drawing upon both qualitative and quantitative studies, I expand on this theme, relating the stories of students of color, their living and learning experiences as shaped by race, and the various ways they respond to these experiences.

#### FRAMING THE STUDY

In what follows, I seek to deepen my understanding of black student experiences on predominantly white campuses. Here, an old adage comes to mind: “To understand the fruit, you must look at the root.” That is, to understand the “what” and “why” of black student experiences at traditionally white institutions of higher learning, it is critical that we understand broader social contexts—the root—in which these experiences occur. Thus, I will begin this framework

with a synthesis of the empirical research on black student experiences on predominantly white campuses. Furthermore, to evaluate those experiences in a systematic way along social justice lines, I draw upon Critical Race Theory and philosophical conceptions of equality of educational opportunity and non-oppression to provide analytical frames through which to understand the particular experiences of black students at predominantly white universities. Critical Race Theory (CRT) will help me to understand if and how race impacts the learning and living experiences of black students, while equality of educational opportunity and the principle of nonoppression serve as complementary frameworks to facilitate a deeper understanding of these experiences. Specifically, the frameworks serve as a standard against which to assess educational opportunity and oppression in predominantly white contexts.

#### Blacks at PWIs: The Continuing Significance of Race

In his watershed work, *The Declining Significance of Race*, William Julius Wilson (1980) posited an America where race relations have evolved to the point where socioeconomic status is more important than race as a basis of discrimination. Not surprisingly, this view of a post-racial society, a society where race ceases to be relevant, has been challenged by several scholars (Feagin, 2006; Hacker, 1992; hooks, 1995; Marable, 2009). Feagin (2006) for instance, asserted: “Even many social analysts who recognize the still difficult conditions faced by certain groups, such as contemporary discrimination against African Americans, do not assess how deep, foundational, and systemic this racial oppression has been historically and remains today” (p. 5). Hacker (1992) observed that “racism is real, an incubus that has haunted this country since Europeans set foot on the continent” (p. 26). With particular regard to traditionally white institutions of higher learning, Love (1993) states: “ ... there has been little institutional recognition of White racism, little discussion of how it is manifested on campus, and little

attention to how it affects black students, even in the absence of overt intent to discriminate” (p. 29). Indeed, incidents of ethnic and racial intolerance and discrimination are still prevalent in American universities (Chang, 2000). As the literature will make clear, in the case of black students attending PWIs, DuBois’ (1995) prescient declaration that “the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line” still rings true (p. 3).

Over the past fifty years, African American students of predominantly white institutions of higher learning have drawn considerable scholarly attention. A notable subset of this work explores their academic and social experiences, as well as challenges faced on these campuses (Feagin et al., 1996; Allen, 1985, 1992; Fleming, 1984; Nettles, 1988) As the first study to “explore systematically and in depth the racial experiences of African American students in their daily rounds on a predominantly white university campus,” Agony of Education is seminal and sets an important standard for research aimed at illuminating the experiences of black students at these institutions (Feagin et al., 1996, p.xi).

In Agony of Education, Feagin, Vera and Imani (1996) investigated the lives and experiences of thirty-six black students (and their parents) attending a predominantly white university in the South. Describing the impetus for their work, they write: “In this book we take issue with the misinformed portraits of what goes on in the corridors, classrooms, offices, and byways of predominantly white colleges and universities in the United States” (p. x). Indeed, their findings revealed a campus rife with racism and discrimination, debunking the conservative view of racial harmony and rampant multiculturalism (Feagin et al., 1996).

Agony of Education is also noteworthy for its use of qualitative methods and the care taken to preserve the voices of its African American student participants:

This book is based substantially on focus group interviews with thirty-six randomly selected black juniors and seniors at State University and with forty-one black parents in nearby metropolitan areas, areas that often send students to the university. These black students and parents were not selected because of their activism in regard to racial matters [but chosen at random from telephone lists] They are typical of the students and parents who grapple with the barriers faced by African Americans in higher education in this state and the nation. (Feagin et al., 1996, p. xi)

Whereas traditional educational research seemed to obscure participants' voices in statistical data, Agony of Education “preserves the voices of African American students and parents who have directly or through friends and relatives experienced racial demarcations and barriers at State University” (Feagin et al., 1996, xi). In this way, Agony of Education is unique in that its contribution to the literature is one grounded in the accounts and voices of black students at a predominantly white university. Several themes emerged from this work that bear on my present study, beginning with context of choice.

### *Context of Choice*

In *Understanding Equal Educational Opportunity: Social Justice, Democracy, and Schooling*, Howe (1997) observed that the existence of a (real) opportunity, or an opportunity worth wanting, requires a favorable context of choice, one in which “the thwarting of the desired results of individuals' choices is reduced as far as possible to the kind of uncertainty that gives deliberation and choice their meanings” (p. 19). That is, the context for choosing one college over another, for instance, must be such that choosing an educational opportunity does not come with an attendant “noxious result,” such as the possibility of encountering racism and racial discrimination. Although “most black parents work hard for their children to succeed, and many



see advanced education as a way up for their children” (Feagin & Sikes, 1995, p. 130), the decision to send their children to a predominantly white institution is one often marked by ambivalence. Indeed, “because of the negative climate at many predominantly white colleges, very difficult choices are forced on African American students and their parents” (Feagin et al., 1996, p. x). As one African American parent noted:

Very often, blacks will feel that [at] State University...they can get a good academic background. However, for blacks, they feel that there’s a lot more negative kinds of feelings, emotions, considerations going on there. In fact, even with their black programs here that they have—the student programs—there’s not enough knowledge of the cultural differences, not enough allowances for expressing the cultural differences. So the students—while they may be academically sound, you’re talking about a total person, and especially in the undergrad level—are not able to develop into a full-fledged whole person who feels good about himself or herself. (Feagin et al., 1996, p. 30)

Indeed, the implications associated with attending a predominantly white university appear not to be lost on black students and parents. For instance, many wonder whether their child will be received at these institutions, or encounter an inhospitable and potentially demoralizing racial climate (Feagin et al., 1996). As one parent in this study observed:

I think I would like my children to go to [names a local university], a black institution. And that’s because of the topic that we’re discussing—racism in higher educational [settings]—there is or has been a lot of racism within this state’s institutions....I didn’t attend that school [State University], but I know lots of people who did, and the black people who attended...all experienced racist attitudes among the students and among the teaching staff there. I think things may change... They now have a black administrator. (Feagin et al., 1996, p. 26)

Faculty support is yet another consideration for black parents and students. However, Nettles (1988) found that while white parents can be reasonably assured that their child will have ample white faculty from which to draw support, this is less the case for black parents and their children.

*Racialized Spaces*

A persistent theme in the literature concerns the adverse racial climates to which students of color are exposed. Feagin et al. (1996) describe such climates thusly: “The concept of racialized space encompasses the cultural biases that help define specific areas and territories as white or as black, with the consequent feelings of belonging and control” (p. 50). In several studies, scholars found an overall unwelcoming and often hostile climate as being a challenge to black students (Feagin et al., 1996; Nettles, 1988; Allen, 1985). Hurtado’s (1992) work on campus climate supports other findings that traditionally white college environments are locations for racial conflict and alienation. For example, Feagin et al. (1996) found that most African American students, including those with top grades, have some adjustment difficulties in coping with the unwelcoming climate at predominantly white universities. In particular, black student participants at State University cited instances of racial stereotyping and profiling by college personnel, underrepresentation in yearbooks and other college memorabilia, and an absence from college rituals such as homecoming, to name a few grievances. As one black student noted:

This university does cater to white students. You know, the commercial strip near the university is for white people. You know, bars everywhere—all white boys in it, no black people. The frat row’s white, no black Greeks, nothing, so they’re coming from where they’re coming from....[She added later] Sometimes I’m like, “God, if I was white I’d have the best time.”...They get to have parties at frat houses. They don’t have to pay for it. You know, they just have the best time. Everything is geared toward them. Their [campus] paper is geared toward them. Everybody agrees. (Feagin et al., 1996, p. 55)

Underscoring this perception of whiteness, another black student of a predominantly white university commented:

I applied to a lot of different schools besides here, and I got accepted to this Ivy League school. And I went up there, checked it out. And a lot of people at home were like, well, you only got in because you’re black. You don’t deserve to be there, or you don’t deserve to go, which may be true. I may have gotten in on affirmative action, but I deserve to be there, simply because of my merit. And I felt bad; I felt out of place. One reason I didn’t go there, besides the money (I couldn’t afford it), one reason I didn’t go was because it reeked of whiteness. And that is no joke. And I am not exaggerating. I was only there for

two days, and after one day I wanted to leave. And I mean, really, it reeked, everywhere I went, reeked of old white men, just lily whiteness, oozing from the corners! [laughs] I wanted to leave (Feagin & Sikes, 1995, p. 94).

According to Solorzano, Ceja and Yosso (2000), racial microaggressions, the subtle yet offensive treatment directed toward people of color, contribute to the racialization of space in predominantly white settings, the signaling that the predominantly white campus is “home territory” (Feagin et al., 1996, p. 61) for Whites. As a case in point, one black student recounted an experience with a white student pulling into a parking space:

As she’s about to get out. And, you know, I’m walking up. I’m not even paying attention to her, and the next thing I hear is “click, click.” And she’s looking at me like I’m going to rape her (Feagin et al., 1996, p. 61).

#### *Faculty-Student Relationships*

A consistent finding in the literature implicates white faculty in the overall poor experiences of black students on traditionally white campuses. Unfortunately, despite Kobrak’s (1992) claim that “the education of any student ultimately rests and falls on the teacher-student relationship inside and sometimes outside the classroom” (p. 515), the black student-white faculty relationship has been characterized as tenuous at best (Feagin et al., 1996; Allen, 1985; Nettles; 1988). Black students report less contact with faculty (Nettles, 1988); report an inability to form strong relationships with faculty (Fleming, 1984); felt that faculty had difficulty relating to them because of race (Allen, 1988), and characterized relationships as confusing and contradictory (Feagin et al., 1996). Not surprisingly, as a recourse, students of color tend to seek academic help from family, friends, or faculty and staff of color than from white faculty (Guiffrida, 2005).

A recurring lament of black students concerns their treatment in the predominantly white classroom. Specifically, black students report instances of racial insensitivity and stereotyping, as well as pressure to represent the so-called “black” perspective. According to Feagin et al. (1996),

“a characteristic experience of black students in predominantly white universities is feeling the burden placed on them by whites to act as defenders and explainers of their group” (p. 91). As one student noted:

“[White professors] can be talking about a whole other subject...[and] they use the word “minority” in a sentence. And their eyes just look right at you” (Feagin et al., 1996, p. 91).

Fries-Britt and Turner (2002) found that black students took exception when faculty asked them to represent their entire race by giving “the black perspective” on issues, and when they stereotyped them as less capable than their white counterparts.

Although most reports of stereotyping involved faculty, fellow students also have been implicated. In fact, Kobrak (1992) contended that what black students experience in the classroom with white instructors often serves as a catalyst for racist perceptions and behavior by white students. One student recounted:

This one is kind of dumb, but anyway I’ll say it. I was in one of my history classes when I was a freshman, and these white guys were talking about hockey, and I said something about it, and they said, “Oh, what do you know about hockey? You’re black.” And I said, “Well, just because we don’t dominate that sport too doesn’t mean I don’t know nothing about hockey.” (Feagin et al., 1996, p. 66)

#### *Lack of Recognition/Visibility*

Such experiences call to mind Young’s (1990) observation that “to experience cultural imperialism means to experience how the dominant meanings of society render the particular perspective of one’s own group invisible at the same time as they stereotype one’s group and mark it out as the Other” (p. 59). Indeed, lack of recognition and visibility emerged as another theme characteristic of black experiences on these campuses.

A central theme found in our group interviews is this black invisibility, that is, the experience of white professors, students, staff members, and administrators as full human beings with distinctive talents, virtues, interests, and problems.... African American

students at predominantly White institutions often do not receive full recognition and respect from many White students, teachers, advisors, police and other campus personnel.

The White failure to recognize is very serious for it teaches lessons of out-of-place-ness and self worthlessness to Black students (Feagin et al., 1996, p. 15).

According to Howe (1997): “‘Recognition,’ as I use it, requires appreciating characteristics such as race, ethnicity, gender, culture, language, religion, and sexual orientation as central to persons’ identities” (p.77). Black students, however, faced a lack of recognition and visibility:

The subtle thing is waiting in line for things. Like when you go to the computer lab, if you’ve got something to do, people get crazy about getting on the computer....If you’re standing, and you sign on a list, so you’re waiting to get on that list. And [white] people will look at me and try to walk in front of me to see if there are any computers. And the other day this girl, I mean I almost slapped her...The person got up, and she ran over and said, “Are you finished with that?” I said, “Excuse me. I’ve been waiting here a half an hour. I don’t think so.” And she’s like, “Oh, I’m sorry, I’m sorry.” And she saw me standing there. She saw me. I made eye contact with her, too, like, “Hello. I’m waiting, too. You’ll have to wait.” And she just looked at me like, “Yeah, whatever.”... I was there before she was. [Moderator: Do you think it’s racial?] I think the computer thing was racial...But when it comes to courtesy, they’re not going to give it to me. And I don’t know if it’s racial, or just because maybe they don’t know me, or they don’t like what I was wearing. But I just don’t count. (Feagin et al., 1996, p. 64)

As this quote illustrates, lack of recognition, being regarded as if one were invisible, not only implied one’s not counting, being worth less than other students, but a racial order that gave preference to whites at the expense of blacks. Thus, just as “race” suggests a socially constructed set of understandings about group membership based almost exclusively on discernible physical attributes, “racism” implies a social order that privileges notions associated in the common imagination with whiteness or being white.

### *The Scourge of Race/Racism*

That black students attending traditionally white universities contend with a highly charged racial climate, poor and tenuous relationships with white faculty, and racial affronts by both faculty and fellow students is well established. However, what impact, if any, might this

have on their overall well-being and academic achievement on these campuses? Perhaps in response to this question, Henderson (1988) writes: “Adapting to a predominantly white university is threatening for a majority of black students. Four years of hostility, isolation, insensitivity, and sorrow are almost certain” (p. 349).

Indeed, studies document the profound impact of a racially-charged climate on black student expectations, morale, achievement and retention (Feagin et al., 1996; Feagin & Sikes, 1995; Allen, 1988; Fleming, 1984;). According to Fleming (1984), exposure to prejudice and discrimination on campus has a significant effect on black students’ cognitive and affective development at predominantly white institutions. Feagin and Sikes (1995) assert: “The pervasiveness of white culture on campus brings subtle pressures to conform to white standards of dress, language, and group behavior” (p. 97). Feagin et al. (1996) note that misrecognition and racialized spaces combine to erode a sense of belonging black students would otherwise feel toward their institutions. In fact, 92% of black students identified feelings of alienation and loneliness as reasons for dropping out of the predominantly white university (Mow & Nettles, 1990). Bennett and Okinaka (1990) found dissatisfaction and alienation to be the norm as black students persist to graduation. Even though black students may graduate from an institution, the isolation and alienation they face from peers and faculty leaves them dissatisfied with their overall college experience (Bennett & Okinaka, 1990).

Minority students, especially black students, face unique and demoralizing stresses at PWIs, including “experiences with racism and questions about their right to be on campus” (Smedley, Myers & Harrell, 1993, p. 435). Such stresses can undermine students’ academic confidence, as well as their academic and social integration (Steele, 1997; Fleming, 1984; Tinto, 1993). Furthermore, black students at PWIs experienced stress on five separate factors, including

social climate, interracial stress, racism and discrimination, within-group stresses, and achievement stresses (Smedley, Myers, & Harrell, 1993).

Subsequent studies have confirmed these views. For instance, Malaney and Shively (1995) measured the difference between students' initial expectations upon entering college and subsequent perceptions after one academic year. Here, black students indicated a significant decrease in feeling like the institution was making an effort to make them feel comfortable, a decrease that was more significant for black students than for their Asian, white, or Latino counterparts.

Other studies linked the predominantly white campus to diminished levels of achievement and retention of black students (Fleming, 1984; Allen, 1988). Steele (1992) writes:

At one prestigious university I recently studied, only 18 percent of the graduating Black students had grade averages of B or above, as compared with 64 percent of whites. This pattern is the rule, not the exception, in even the most elite American colleges. Tragically, low grades can render a degree essentially "terminal" in the sense that they preclude further schooling. (p. 68)

Significantly, Bowen and Bok (1998) found African American college students' class ranks continued to be lower than white students at PWIs, even after controlling for variables such as SAT scores, high school GPAs, and socioeconomic status. At almost every selective college in their sample, black students' academic performance registered below that of white students and at levels lower than predicted by their SAT scores.

Recent research challenges the prevailing assumption that inadequate academic preparation alone is the primary reason for low academic achievement and persistence rates among African American students at PWIs (Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedorn,

1999). These studies suggest that black students face challenges beyond academic preparation and ability. Steele (1992) confirms this view:

More than half of Black college students fail to complete their degree work—for reasons that have little to do with innate ability or environmental conditioning. The problem, a social psychologist argues, is that they are undervalued, in ways that are sometimes subtle and sometimes not (p. 68).

Indeed, scholars (Steele, 1997; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986) have long implicated race in seeking to explain the academic performance of African American students vis-a-vis their white and Asian counterparts. Accordingly, Steele (2003) concluded: “This situation forces on us an uncomfortable recognition: that beyond class, something racial is depressing the academic performance of these students” (p. 111).

Research comparing the experiences of black students attending PWIs with their counterparts at HBCUs (Fleming, 1984; Allen, 1988) also supports a link between campus race relations and academic performance. Fleming (1984) observed that black students who enter PWIs with academic credentials equal to those of their white peers experience “academic deterioration” (Fleming, 1984) due to the racial stressors in the college environment. Academic deterioration became evident in the fact that GPAs and academic performance of blacks often declined at PWIs (Fleming, 1984). Too many black students exhibit a marked decrease in performance from their high school grades over and beyond what is generally expected for adjustment to college-level work (Allen, 1985). Revealingly, “students who attended historically black universities reported better academic performance, greater social involvement, and higher occupational aspirations than black students who attended predominantly White institutions” (Allen, 1992, p.39). To be sure, research consistently finds that students attending HBCUs report



higher cognitive gains than their counterparts at PWIs (Allen, 1992; Fleming, 1984). Furthermore, HBCUs produce a disproportionately greater number of black college student graduates when compared with PWIs (Allen, 1992). As these studies would suggest, campus experiences on predominantly white campuses appear to widen, not narrow, between-group achievement gaps, to distance black students from academic success.

### *Acting White*

“Acting White” emerged as an explanation for the relative low achievement of black students at PWIs. Fordham and Ogbu (1986) identified two factors impeding the achievement and relative underperformance of African American adolescents: an oppositional collective or social identity, “a sense of peoplehood in opposition to the social identity of white Americans because of the way white American treated them”, and an oppositional cultural frame of reference that identifies certain activities, including doing well in school, as “white activities” (p. 181). As they noted:

Subordinate minorities regard certain forms of behavior and certain activities or events, symbols, and meanings as not appropriate for them because those behaviors, events, symbols and meanings are characteristic of white Americans. At the same time they emphasize other forms of behavior as more appropriate for them because these are not a part of white Americans’ way of life. To behave in the manner defined as falling within a white cultural frame of reference is to “act white” and is negatively sanctioned (p. 181).

Although black adolescents identify a number of behaviors as “acting white,” including, “being in honors or advance placement classes, speaking Standard English, dressing in clothes from the Gap or Abercrombie and Fitch rather than Tommy Hilfiger and FUBU, and wearing shorts in the winter” (Neal-Barnett, 2001, p. 82), the term is most often associated with

indicators of academic performance and success (Neal-Barnett, 2001). Indeed, academic success falls among those behaviors more often perceived by black students as the province of Whites (Tatum, 1997). Fordham and Ogbu (1986) contend that a dilemma develops when academically promising black students identify academic success as “white.” Here, black students face a choice between either striving for academic success, a presumably “white” aspiration, or representing an authentically “black” self (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). This dilemma, this burden of acting white, contributed to impairing the academic performance of black students (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986).

While a growing body of literature challenges the validity of “acting white” among black youth (see Ainsworth-Darnell and Downey, 1998), contending that Blacks have long regarded education as a means of advancement and mobility in a racist society (Anderson, 1988), at least two studies support the hypothesis. For instance, Fryer (2006) writes: “My analysis confirms that acting white is a vexing reality within a subset of American school...The evidence indicates that the social disease, whatever its cause, is most prevalent in racially integrated public schools” (p. 54). Likewise, Neal-Barnett (2001) investigated the psychological impact of the “acting white” accusation, finding that some adolescents react with anger and frustration, or experience anxiety and depression.

The burden of “acting white,” then, might be understood in terms of opportunity costs. According to Howe (1997): “As education is presently structured, doing well in school exacts greater ‘opportunity costs’—in terms of one’s identity and continued participation in one’s cultural group—from members of certain groups than from members of others” (p. 5). Extending this reasoning to traditionally white campuses, academically successful black students may feel pressured to choose or alternate between either separatism and strict group affiliation, or

assimilation with white culture (Fordham, 1996). Accordingly, Fordham (1996) found that academically successful black students felt compelled to adopt a “raceless” persona, distancing themselves from attributes and cultural traits associated with black culture. Fordham and Ogbu (1986) also found, interestingly, that black youth emphasized allegiance to group in instances involving conflict and competition with Whites. As we shall see, group loyalty or separation serves as a popular coping mechanism for black students in predominantly white contexts. Thus, paradoxically, black students’ academic achievement competes with their need to maintain group affiliation, even as group support may be perceived as necessary for academic success.

### *Stereotype Threat*

Stereotype threat emerged as yet another potential threat to black student achievement on traditionally white campuses (Steele, 1997). Here, stereotypes can function in the academic environment for black students to undermine their ability to achieve on particular academic tasks. While the notion of racial stereotyping is certainly not new to Blacks in general and black collegians in particular (Feagin et al., 1996; Young, 1990; Howe, 1997;), Steele’s (1997) stereotype threat underscores the extent to which racial stereotypes impair the academic functioning and performance of black students. Research suggests that negative stereotypes casting doubt on black students’ academic competence play a role in this underperformance (Aronson, Fried & Good, 2002). Steele (1997) defined stereotype threat as:

... the social-psychological threat that arises when one is in a situation or doing something for which a negative stereotype about one’s group applies. This predicament threatens one with being negatively stereotyped, with being judged or treated stereotypically, or with the prospect of conforming to the stereotype...It is a situational threat—a threat in the air. (p. 614)

The basic notion behind stereotype threat analysis is that “in situations where a stereotype about a group’s intellectual abilities is relevant—taking an intellectually challenging test, being called upon to speak in class, and so on—Black students bear an extra cognitive and emotional burden not borne by people for whom the stereotype does not apply” (Aronson, Fried & Good, 2002, p.114). Although Steele (1997) contends that stereotyping transcends race, black students may be more vulnerable given the ubiquity of negative stereotypes about black people (Aguirre & Turner, 2004). To be sure, empirical evidence supports the salience of the stereotype threat for African American students relative to their white counterparts in standardized test performance (Steele & Aronson, 1995).

Poor campus climate, racial attitudes of indifference by faculty and students, and racial discrimination all emerge as challenges that African Americans deal with at PWIs. As the foregoing literature suggests, these challenges interact and build upon one another to undermine overall well-being and academic achievement of black students. Ultimately, the literature suggests the need to understand the extent to which experiences on the predominantly white campus implicate context of choice, racialized space, student-faculty relations, lack of recognition and invisibility, racism or racial discrimination, “acting white,” and stereotype threat, and whether the experiences reported in a Southern state might also apply on a predominantly white campus in the Midwest.

#### Negotiating the Predominantly White Campus

The distinctive challenges faced by Black students at PWIs call for effective coping and other adaptive behaviors (Tatum, 2004). “Depending upon the nature and magnitude of discrimination, as well as upon other social conditions, several responses are possible: (1) passive acceptance, (2) marginal participation, (3) assimilation, (4) withdrawal and self-

segregation, (5) rebellion and revolt, and (6) organized protest” (Aguirre and Turner, 2004, p. 16).

According to the literature, racial separation or self-segregation is a common response to both individual and institutional racism. As hooks (1995) observes:

Those of us who remember living in the midst of racial apartheid know that the separate spaces, the times apart from whiteness, were for sanctuary, for reimagining and remembering ourselves. In the past, separate space meant down time, time for recovery and renewal. It was the time to dream resistance, time to theorize, plan, create strategies and go forward. (p. 6.)

In addition, Tatum (1997) notes:

That life is stressful for Black students...on predominantly White campuses should not come as a surprise, but it often does. White students and faculty frequently underestimate the power and presence of overt and covert manifestations of racism on campus, and students of color often come to predominantly White campuses expecting more civility than they find. ... Black students on predominantly White college campuses must cope with ongoing affronts to their racial identity. The desire to retreat to safe space is understandable. (p. 76)

Black students have also often sought solace in black student organizations. For instance, Black Culture Centers (BCCs) represent safe and affirming spaces for black students at PWIs, providing a sense of historical and personal identity (Patton, 2006). Black students value student organizations that validate their frustrations, assist in establishing alternative connections with faculty, and provide opportunities to give back to other Blacks (Guiffrida, 2003).

Home and community provide yet another supportive space for students of color at PWIs (Guiffrida, 2005). For example, Latinas and Chicanas at a predominantly white university perceived their families as among their most important assets at college. Families and home communities provided cultural connections, strategies for dealing with and negotiating oppressive contexts, and strong encouragement to succeed (Bernal, 2002). Clearly, this was the case in Feagin et al.'s (1996) study as well.

Ultimately, understanding black students' coping mechanisms requires understanding their value system and cultural orientation (Asante, 1991; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). According to Asante (1991), African Americans tend to construct their social values more from a family or group orientation than do Whites. Hence, in a context of alienation, hostility and racial invalidation, some black students resort to their social values and seek out other black students to create allies and social networks (Fleming, 1984).

Despite empirical support for the benefits of self-segregated communities, and the need for black students to carve out supportive, affirming and counter-hegemonic spaces (Perry, 2003), some view such student communities with suspicion. For instance, Bloom concluded that "the black presence has become 'indigestible' because of the black student desires for self-segregation and political power" (Bloom, cited in Feagin et al., 1996, p. 2), a position that not only lacks sensitivity to racial challenges on the predominantly white campus, but implicitly endorses black student assimilation. Villalpando (2003) observes that when students of color are observed associating with each other, "their same-race affiliations are lamented in the public and private discourse as the cause for racial balkanization of college campuses" (p. 619).

Thus, an emerging debate in the literature concerns whether separation from, or integration into, the college culture is the best course for black students attending traditionally

white campuses. Tinto (1993) linked student progression and retention with the extent to which a student academically and socially integrated into campus life. Other scholars report limitations with this view and argue that Tinto's theory of student retention fails to account for certain cultural variation, such as the importance of peer groups, parental roles and community commitment in the lives of black and other students of color (e.g. Guiffrida, 2003). These scholars posit that connection, not integration, presents a more effective retention model for black students, as connection does not imply a conceding of black identity and culture. Scholars have also contended that Tinto's theory places excessive emphasis on the need for students to adapt to the college environment rather than focusing on systemic or institutional change that creates a welcoming environment for students from diverse backgrounds (Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000). Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson and Allen (1998) further suggests that while student agency often drives institutional change, accountability for change ultimately rests with the institution itself.

After reflecting on this literature, I began to wonder about the various challenges encountered by black students, the impact of these challenges and experiences on personal well-being and academic achievement, and whether the specific strategies employed to cope and deal with such challenges, such as joining a black student organization, facilitate integration (Tinto, 1993), connection (Guiffrida, 2003), or alienation from mainstream campus life. Ultimately, I began to question why black student experiences on predominantly were what they were. For instance, why were black students particularly vulnerable to racial discrimination and profiling? And moreover, what were the everyday racial dynamics like on the predominantly white campus?

The foregoing questions suggest the need for a lens—a theory, if you will—through which we might account for black students’ experiences on predominantly white campuses. Such a lens would take into account some important criteria. First, the framework must be sensitive to the unique history and plight of black and other historically oppressed people of color in the United States. Next, the perspective would operate from the premise that race continues to be a salient issue in this country. Finally, given the prominence in the literature to themes of recognition and invisibility, a useful lens embraces the voice, perspectives and experiences of those on the margins. With these parameters in mind, I believe that Critical Race Theory is the most appropriate and practical analytical tool for investigating black student experiences on predominantly white campuses. In what follows, I explore the origins and tenets of Critical Race Theory, as well as its relevance to this study.

#### HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF CRITICAL RACE THEORY

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a contemporary theoretical framework that challenges the ways in which race and racial power are understood, constructed and represented in American law. The formulation of progressive legal scholars (Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, Delgado, Kimberle Crenshaw, Patricia Williams and others), CRT emerged in the mid-1970s in response to two observations of American society and law. First, Delgado and Stefanic (2001) note concerns among progressive legal scholars with the “subtler forms of racism that were gaining ground” in the years following *Brown v. Board of Education* and other constitutional precedents theoretically aimed at addressing the effects of racial oppression and discrimination (p. 4). Indeed, Bell (1995) and others cautioned against uncritically basking in the triumphalism of *Brown v. Board of Education*, noting how quickly de facto segregation became the order of the day.



A second observation concerned the field of Critical Legal Studies (CLS), the intellectual school from which Critical Race Theory originated and drew inspiration. In particular, scholars questioned the capacity of Critical Legal Studies to address race and racism in its critique of American jurisprudence. Given the significance of this latter observation, and the contribution of Critical Legal Studies to Critical Race Theory, further discussion is in order.

Critical Legal Studies (CLS) is characterized by skepticism toward the liberal vision of the rule of law, by a focus on the role of legal issues in capturing human consciousness by the agreement that fundamental change is required to attain a just society, and by a utopian conception of a world more communal and less hierarchical than the one we know now. (Matsuda, 1995, p. 64)

According to Cook (1995), “CLS has unabashedly challenged the accepted values of classic liberalism by undermining the interpretations of private property, individual rights, equality of opportunity, meritocracy, and governmental power which have sustained and reproduced oppressive hierarchies of wealth and power” (p. 85). In so doing, CLS appeals to scholars of color and others concerned with issues of equity and social and economic disparities. Indeed, CLS resonates with minority scholars “because its central descriptive message—that legal ideals are manipulable, and that law serves to legitimate existing maldistribution of wealth and power—rings true for anyone who has experienced life in nonwhite America” (Matsuda, 1995, p. 64).

That identification with CLS notwithstanding, critical race scholars grew increasingly wary of the movement’s direction, specifically its failure to challenge the specific racialized nature of the law and its impact on persons of color. For instance, although scholars agree on the importance of drawing upon the insights of those victimized by racial oppression (Williams,

1995), Cook (1995) notes that CLS fails “to acquaint itself with the history and perspective of those who have, in different contexts, endured the problems of most concern to CLS—problems associated with hierarchy, powerlessness, and legitimating ideologies” (p. 85). The implication of this failure was not lost on Williams (1995): “If we cannot conclude absolutely the victims of racial oppression are always the best architects of its cure, we must assume that the best insight and inspiration for its amelioration will come from those most immediately and negatively affected” (p. 192).

Similarly, Crenshaw (1995) argues that CLS fails to consider racial domination and white race-consciousness in its analysis and critique of mainstream legal ideology. Given the centrality of white race-consciousness (i.e. white good/black bad) to both black racial domination and Whites’ investment in hierarchy and meritocracy, this is far from being a trivial matter (Crenshaw, 1995). Indeed,

White racial consciousness reinforces whites’ sense that American society truly is meritocratic, and thus it helps to prevent them from questioning the basic legitimacy of the free market. Believing both that blacks are inferior and that the economy impartially rewards the superior over the inferior, whites see that most blacks are indeed worse off than whites are, which reinforces their sense that the market is operating “fairly and impartially.” (p. 116)

Thus, in failing to interrogate racial domination and white race consciousness, CLS, albeit unintentionally, legitimates the racial status quo, in effect reproducing racial inequality in American society.

## CRITICAL RACE THEORY DEFINED

Mari Matsuda (1991) has defined critical race theory as "...the work of progressive legal scholars of color who are attempting to develop a jurisprudence that accounts for the role of racism in American law and that works toward the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of eliminating all forms of subordination" (p. 1331). Specifically, CRT views racism as endemic (Bell, 1995); challenges liberal ideologies, rejecting notions of meritocracy and color-blind justice (Crenshaw, 1995); highlights the centrality of "experiential knowledge" in order to posit that "reality" is situational and socially-constructed (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 11); posits Interest-Convergence in explaining the circular nature of racial reform (Bell, 1995); theorizes Whiteness as property (Harris, 1995); and focuses on praxis as well as theory (Crenshaw, 1995; Cook, 1995). Each of these tenets will be discussed in turn.

### The Centrality and Permanence of Racism.

Consistent with DuBois' (1995) prescient observation about race, CRT begins from the premise that race (and by inference, racism) is embedded in American society (Bell, 1995). For critical race theorists, racism permeates every aspect of life in America, "from minute, intimate relationships (legacy of anti-miscegenation laws which prohibited people of differing races to marry), to the neighborhoods we live in (inner-cities, barrios, and reservations), and the schools we go to (low achieving vs. high achieving), all the way to the macro-economic system (white male domination of ownership of the means of production)" (Zamudio et al., 2011, p. 3). According to Zamudio et al. (2011), race is also embodied in our systems of beliefs and ideologies. Indeed, the "very notion that race no longer matters is part of an ideology that justifies and legitimates racial inequality in society" (p. 3). Marable (2002) described American racism as largely and fundamentally structural, one "maintained through the pervasive power of

white privilege” (p. 56.). Thus, a central concern of CRT is the dismantling of the pillars of structural racism and of the prejudice, power and privilege that support and perpetuate it (Marable, 2002).

#### Debunking Meritocracy and Colorblindness.

CRT interrogates and critiques the mutually-reinforcing concepts of meritocracy and colorblindness. Specifically, CRT challenges the prevailing view that “continued educational inequality has more to do with individual choices rather than discrimination in schools, which continues to place whites at the top and people of color at the bottom of the educational hierarchy” (Zamudio et al., 2011, p. 26). According to Crenshaw (1995), the history of racial domination and white race consciousness have combined to give whites decided social, economic, and political advantages over communities of color—advantages that appear colorblind and meritocratic rather than racially-based. To be sure, given the greater wealth in white communities and thus greater funds for their local schools, white students enjoy “racially based advantages that appear colorblind” (Zamudio et al., 2011, p. 29).

At the same time, the rhetoric of meritocracy and colorblindness functions to stigmatize and disadvantage communities of color (Crenshaw, 1995). For instance, when Blacks are unable to achieve at levels comparable to Whites, some implicate black culture (as did McWhorter, 2000), not a history of racial discrimination and oppression. Indeed, the color blind ideal holds that America extends equal opportunity to all, regardless of race. Thus, “if blacks are on the bottom, it must reflect their relative inferiority (Crenshaw, 1995, p. 116).

#### Interest Convergence.

Despite being hailed as the panacea for state-sanctioned racial segregation in American public schools, precedents such as *Brown v. Board of Education* have had, at best, a marginal

impact on desegregation (Bell, 1995). Indeed, students of color are more segregated than ever before (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Bell (1995) posits that such re-segregation (read: the reversal of gains made by civil rights legislation) is inevitable, owing to interest-convergence, the idea that whites will support racial “progress,” so long as this progress converges with their interests:

...the interest of blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of whites. However, the Fourteenth Amendment, standing alone, will not authorize a judicial remedy providing effective racial equality for blacks where the remedy sought threatens the superior societal status of middle and upper-class whites. (p. 22)

Importantly, the notion of interest-convergence accounts for “two steps forward, one step back” nature of racial reform in this country, and hence for the reproduction of racial inequality (Zamudio et al., 2011).

Whiteness as Property.

The racialization of property has been a central and enduring theme in American history (Harris, 1995). As Harris (1995) notes, the system of slavery facilitated the conflation of race and property, whereby white and black became synonymous with free and slave. In other words, whiteness signified the “presumption of freedom,” whereas blackness signified the “presumption of slavery”.

Because whites could not be enslaved or held as slaves, the racial line between white and black was extremely critical; it became a line of protection and demarcation from the potential threat of commodification, and it determined the allocation of the benefits and

burdens of this form of property. White identity and whiteness were sources of privilege; their absence meant being the object of property. (p. 279)

The right to possession, the right to transfer, the right of use and enjoyment, and the right of exclusion are essential attributes associated with property rights, and thus whiteness (Harris, 1995). Whiteness as property is exemplified in almost every sphere of human endeavor, including education. For example, the use of standardized tests to sort students, guide curriculum, and ultimately determine who is worthy of a college education is one such tool serving the property interest of whiteness (Zamudio et al., 2011). In terms of higher education, whiteness as property reveals itself in the notion of racialized space, “which encompasses a number of cultural biases that help define specific areas as white” (Feagin et al., 1996, p. 16).

Emphasis on Experiential Knowledge/Counterstorytelling.

Solorzano and Yosso (2002) describe majoritarian stories as the “bundle of presuppositions, perceived wisdoms, and shared cultural understandings persons in the dominant race bring to the discussion of race, and which privileges people in positions of domination” (p. 28). In such accounts, black people are often rendered invisible or treated as objects, not as subjects or agents capable of naming their own reality (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). With regard to black students at traditionally white institutions, majoritarian stories are evidenced in the view that black students are faring well and content with their learning and living experiences. CRT seeks to counter these erroneous characterizations. “By recognizing that experiential knowledge of women and men of color is legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination,” and “drawing explicitly on person’s of color lived experiences,” CRT facilitates the production of counter-stories, thus challenging the dominant discourse on race (Solorzano, 1998, p. 122). Indeed, “those who have

experienced discrimination speak with a special voice to which we should listen” (Matsuda, 1995, p. 63).

Praxis: Social Action and Change.

A final tenet of CRT emphasizes the importance of praxis and a commitment to social justice (Crenshaw, 1995). Critical race theorists argue that it is not enough to theorize about race, but to use theory as a catalyst for critically informed social action and change. In this way, CRT draws on the insights of Martin Luther King’s critical theology, which combined theory and practice into a radical vision for social change (Cook, 1995). Notably, CRT’s social justice agenda is not limited to race. Rather, critical race theorists are committed to the elimination of all forms of oppression and subordination, including racism, sexism and poverty (Yosso, 2005).

#### CRITICAL RACE THEORY IN K-12 AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) were among the first scholars to consider CRT’s relevance in and application to educational settings. “A critical race theory in education challenges the dominant discourse on race and racism as they relate to education by examining how educational theory, policy, and practice are used to subordinate certain racial and ethnic groups (Solorzano, 1998, p. 122). With particular regard to Black students, Ladson-Billings (1998) conceptualizes CRT in education as an approach for understanding how race, racism, and racial power affect “the educational experiences of African American students (i.e. instruction), the educational outcomes of African Americans, the allocation of resources, the content of the official school curriculum and school desegregation” (p. 18-21). Specifically, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), suggest that in utilizing a CRT perspective to analyze educational inequity, the curriculum, and, specifically, access to a high-quality, rigorous curriculum has mostly been the province of White students. In this regard, curriculum represents a form of intellectual property,

whereby the quality and quantity of the curriculum varies with the “property values” of the school (p. 54). Thus, CRT can also be used as a tool to critique multicultural education programs (ethnic studies vs. the “canon” debate, in the case of higher education) and assist students in exploring their personal biases and prejudices, and for assisting them in developing liberatory approaches. As well, CRT can also be applied in efforts to both challenge and broaden the academic canon to include diverse perspectives.

Increasingly in higher education, several scholars have begun to apply CRT as a tool to examine the dynamics of race, racism and racial power (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solorzano & Yosso, 2000; Solorzano, 1998). According to Solorzano and Villalpando (1998),

...the overall goal of Critical Race Theory in higher education is to develop a pedagogy, curriculum and research agenda that accounts for the role of race and racism in U.S. higher education and work towards the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of eliminating all forms of subordination in higher education” (p. 213). “From a critical race theoretical perspective, higher education reflects structural and ideological contradictions that exist in society. (p. 220)

For instance, Soloranzo and Villalpando (1998) apply Critical Race Theory to understand the apparent paradox of marginality on traditionally and predominantly white campuses. Marginality

...is a complex contentious location and process whereby people of color are subordinated because of their race, gender, and class. Moreover, those on society’s margin do not have the power to define who is at the center and who is at the margin; what is considered privileged and valuable knowledge and experience and what is not; and who has social status and related privilege and who does not. (p. 212)



Although marginalization represents an oppressive condition for students of color, Soloranzo and Villalpando (1998) nevertheless contend that it potentially serves as a source of empowerment. For example, students may exploit their marginalized position to create affirming and supportive networks, to develop the skills necessary to cope and succeed on campus and, importantly, to reflect on and critique their marginalization.

Solorzano (1998) applied critical race theory as a framework to examine how racial microaggressions affect the career paths of Chicana and Chicano graduate students. To recall, microaggressions are subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) directed toward people of color, often automatically or unconsciously (Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000, p. 60). Solorzano's (1998) findings confirm that microaggressions are a reality for students of color on a predominantly white campus. Students in his study felt out of place in the academy because of their race, felt their teachers/professors had lower expectations for them, and experienced both subtle and overt racism.

Similarly, CRT will help me to understand and explain the salience of race in predominantly white universities. For example, the literature highlights the phenomenon of racialized spaces on predominantly white campuses, wherein certain spaces are understood to be "white" or the province of white students (Feagin et al., 1996). CRT scholars have posited the notion of "whiteness as property" (Harris, 1995), which could help in understanding why and how racialized spaces develop, and their potential effect on black students.

Having discussed research about the experiences of African American students at PWIs, their responses to these campus experiences, my rationale for centering this investigation on such students, and the need for an analytical lens through which to parse and make sense of these

experiences, I now turn to discussing issues of social justice, equality of educational opportunity, and nonoppression.

#### ENSURING EQUITY AND EQUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

I begin this discussion of equality of educational opportunity with the following excerpt from the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education, Topeka* decision:

Today, education is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments. Compulsory school attendance laws and the great expenditures for education both demonstrate our recognition of the importance of education to our democratic society. It is required in the performance of our most basic public responsibilities, even service in the armed forces. It is the very foundation of good citizenship. Today it is a principle instrument in awakening the child to cultural values, in preparing him for later professional training, and in helping him to adjust normally to his environment. In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity, where the state has undertaken to provide it, is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms.

(Warren, C.J.E., 347 U.S. 483,1954)

Yet, ensuring equality of educational opportunity remains one of the most persistent and vexing social justice issues confronting this country. As Howe (1992) observes: “In 1954, the landmark *Brown v. the Board of Education* decision thrust the concept of equal educational opportunity center stage and it has retained a central role in educational policy and research ever since” (p. 456). Significantly, race appears to be a subtext to the pursuit of equality of educational opportunity, suggesting the following question: How might race account for persisting disparities in educational opportunities?

As noted (see previous section), CRT scholars implicate structural factors (racism, in this case) as impediments to educational equality. Bell's (1995) assertion that racism is a permanent feature of American society that undermines the distribution of educational opportunity is a case in point. Other scholars have advanced the notion that equality of educational opportunity remains elusive for certain racial groups (African Americans, for example) because of some genetic or cultural deficiency. In *The Bell Curve*, a book widely denounced for promoting scientific racism, Herrnstein and Murray (1994) advanced a troubling thesis concerning black people, intelligence, and equality of educational opportunity. In their view, disparities in educational opportunity exist and are justified because black people, relative to Whites and Asians, lack the intelligence to compete with their counterparts on such standardized instruments as the Scholastic Aptitude Test. Herrnstein and Murray (1994) thus favor a dramatic disinvestment of government in such compensatory programs as Head Start. In a similar vein, McWhorter (2000) posited that black students engage in academic self-sabotage by their so-called anti-intellectualism, victim mentality, and tendency to separate themselves. For McWhorter (2000), inequality results from deficiencies in black culture, not racial discrimination or historical disadvantage. However, by contrast, Hilliard (1978) contends: "The problems of educational inequity are not problems which arise as a consequence of some defect in a particular population. These problems arise under varying conditions of oppression" (p. 110).

In recent years, the quest for equality of educational opportunity has been complicated by two developments: the systematic dismantling of affirmative action and, more recently, the notion of a post-racial (read: color-blind) society, suggesting a critical question: If race is no longer significant, as post-racialism implies, then might the pursuit of equality of educational opportunity be a valid and meaningful one? Here, bolstered by empirical research on Blacks at

PWIs and my personal experiences in these institutions, I develop an argument against post-racialism and defend equality of educational opportunity as a standard against which to assess racial injustice.

The ongoing pursuit of equality of educational opportunity specifically and social justice in general begs several questions relevant to this review: First, what are the prevailing conceptions of equality of educational opportunity and why do they fall short of ensuring the very equality of educational opportunities they purportedly seek to attain? Second, what alternative conceptions exist to challenge these conceptions? Lastly, in the context of a so-called “post-racial” and post-affirmative action society, might the quest to ensure equality of educational opportunity be a relevant and worthwhile one?

Following Gutmann (1987), I explore equality of educational opportunity in K-12 and present her critique of three prevailing conceptions of the equality of educational opportunity debate, a point of departure I believe provides a useful context for understanding educational opportunity issues in higher education relative to African American students. I then present Gutmann’s alternative to these conceptions. Next, I consider Kenneth Howe’s (1997) critique of the formal and compensatory interpretations of educational opportunity and present his rejoinder to Gutmann’s nonrepression principle. As part of this discussion, I examine his case against Gutmann’s non-repression principle and his alternative nonoppression principle. Lastly, I connect and extend these ideas to Young’s (1990) five faces of oppression.

#### Interpretations of Equality of Educational Opportunity

Gutmann (1987) considers three prevailing interpretations: maximization, equalization, and meritocracy. The maximization perspective suggests that equality of educational opportunity can best be attained by maximizing the distribution of educational resources in such a way that

improves the lot of all students. Put another way, it “requires the state to devote as many resources to education as needed to maximize children’s life chances” (p. 129). Importantly, under this scheme, all children stand to benefit, not just the disadvantaged or under-served, for example.

Ostensibly, maximization may seem reasonable as a means of ensuring equality of educational opportunity. As Gutmann (1987) explains, “maximization supports the fundamental liberal values of free choice and neutrality among different ways of life, and distributes the chance to benefit from these values as equally as possible among all citizens” (p. 129). However, closer scrutiny of this approach reveals one critical limitation. Suppose we follow this prescription to maximize and invest all available resources in distributing educational opportunities. What, then, to do with health care, or food, or other equally vital issues which also directly or indirectly affect a child’s life chances? Therein lies the principal weakness of maximization, the notion of opportunity cost, or as Gutmann describes it: “The price of using education to maximize the life chances of children would be to forego these other goods “(p. 129).

Whereas maximization proposes a kind of indiscriminate and unrestrained spending on educational goods irrespective of differences among groups, equalization recognizes inequality in educational opportunity (goods). Equalization, thus, advocates for a compensatory distribution of educational opportunities “so that the life chances of the least advantaged child are raised as far as possible toward those of the most advantaged (Gutmann, p. 128) More precisely, equalization holds that

...the educational attainment of children should not differ in any systematic and significant manner with their natural or environmental and natural causes of differential

educational attainment, since these causes of social inequalities are beyond people's control, and therefore "arbitrary from a moral perspective. (Gutmann,1987, p.131).

In this way, equalization appears to offer a more egalitarian perspective than maximization.

As a potentially viable means of eradicating inequality, equalization is not wholly without merit. Indeed, there is clearly the recognition of inequality, that certain groups—for instance, those historically and/or systematically denied access to educational opportunities—are deemed worthy of compensatory treatment, at least to the extent that such treatment brings the disadvantaged to the level of the advantaged. This is an important advance over maximization, which ostensibly trivializes differences between students. Nevertheless, equalization falls short in one important respect: If the ultimate objective of equalization is to bring the disadvantaged to the level of the most advantaged, should there not be consensus as to whether the standard to which the least advantaged will aspire is deemed a worthy one? Suppose, for example, that the disadvantaged find the standard to be lacking, culturally-negating or otherwise insufficient. The difficulty with equalization, then, is that it presumes a consensus among the disadvantaged that the most advantaged represent a standard worth pursuing, in a sense depriving the disadvantaged of agency and deliberation and giving rise to one of Gutmann's (1987) fundamental objections: "To equalize educational opportunity, the state would have to intrude so far into family life as to violate the equally important liberal ideal of family autonomy" (p. 132).

Unlike equalization and maximization before it, the meritocratic perspective conceptualizes equality of educational opportunity in a way fundamentally at odds with the egalitarian ideal upon which equality of educational opportunity depends:

A meritocracy is dedicated to distributing all educational resources in proportion to natural ability and willingness to learn. In principle, therefore, meritocracy must provide

those children with relatively few natural abilities and little inclination to learn with the fewest educational resources and the least educational attention, and those children with the greatest natural abilities and motivation with the most. (Gutmann, 1987, p. 134)

Besides the obvious question of who would determine the standard for “natural ability” and “willingness to learn,” meritocracy raises another, far more problematic issue. Whereas with equalization a case can be made for redress to historically disadvantaged or oppressed groups, meritocracy seemingly distributes educational opportunities upward to the already privileged and advantaged or, in this case, “children with a natural ability or willingness to learn,” often at the expense of the disadvantaged. As Gutmann observes:

A meritocracy does not require—it may even preclude—educating less talented and less motivated children up to a socially basic level of literacy. [Furthermore] nothing in the meritocracy interpretation of equal educational opportunity secures an education adequate for democratic citizenship to children who happen to have (whether by nature, nurture, or their own free will) little intellectual talent or motivation.” (p. 134)

In this way, meritocracy stands to reproduce and likely deepen the very inequality of educational opportunity it ostensibly seeks to resolve.

#### Deliberative Participation and Nonrepression

Given the limitations and deficiencies inherent in earlier interpretations of equality of educational opportunity, what sort of interpretations might serve as a more viable alternative? Or, put another way, how might we fashion social justice and equality of educational opportunity in ways that distribute educational opportunity equally and ensure that all have a voice in determining what constitutes an educational good? To this end, Gutmann (1987) proposes an

alternative interpretation of equality of educational opportunity, one founded in deliberative participation and nonrepression.

In contrast to previous interpretations of equality or educational opportunity, in which the state has exclusive authority to determine what constitutes an educational and social good, the priority of that good relative to another good (maximization), and to whom that good should be allocated. (meritocratic, equalization), Gutmann's (1987) alternative interpretation gives prominence to the capacity of all citizens in a democratic state to deliberate and participate meaningfully in the shaping of society :

Deliberative democracy underscores the importance of publicly supported education that develops the capacity to deliberate among all children as future free and equal citizens. The most justifiable way of making mutually binding decisions in a representative democracy—including decisions not to deliberate about some matters—is by deliberative decision making, where the decision makers are accountable to the people who are most affected by their decisions. Deliberative decision making and accountability presuppose a citizenry whose education prepares them to deliberate, and to evaluate the results of the deliberations of their representatives. A primary aim of publicly mandated schooling is therefore to cultivate the skills and virtues of deliberation. (p. xii-xiii)

A democratic state is therefore committed to allocating educational authority in such a way as to provide its members with an education adequate to participating in democratic politics, to choosing among (a limited range of) good lives, and to sharing in the several subcommunities, such as families, that impart identity to the lives of its citizens. (p.42)



Ultimately, a truly democratic society strives toward conscious social reproduction, “the ways in which citizens are or should be empowered to influence the education that in turn shapes the political values, attitudes, and modes of behavior of future citizen” (p. 14).

However, realizing this ideal of ‘conscious social reproduction’ requires that society resolves a fundamental problem: How do we ensure equality of educational opportunity in a way that remains true to and consistent with democratic ideals? Accordingly, Gutmann (1987) proposes a process model equality of educational opportunity with two aspects: authorization principle and threshold principle. The democratic authorization principle determines the priority of education relative to other social goods. The threshold principle, in turn, limits the discretion which may be exercised under the authorization principle by “imposing a moral requirement that democratic institutions allocate sufficient resources to education to provide all children with an ability adequate to participate in the democratic process” (p. 136).

The authorization principle addresses Gutmann’s (1987) central question of a democratic education: Who has the authority to determine what constitutes an educational good and how this good should be distributed? Specifically, this principle “recognizes the mistake in maximization by granting authority to democratic institutions to determine the priority of education relative to other social goods.” (p. 136). It may be recalled that maximization proposes the unrestrained commitment of the state’s resources for education, without regard to other, equally salient, social goods such as health care. Addressing this flaw in maximization, the democratic authorization principle enables stakeholders (schools, families, other governmental institutions) to determine how and for what purpose resources will be allocated.

While the authorization principle addresses itself to the issue of authority and control over the distribution of educational goods, the threshold principle seeks to resolve the question

concerning the minimum of an educational good appropriate for students in a democratic society. Specifically, the threshold principle:

...avoids the mistakes in both equalization and meritocracy by specifying that inequalities in the distribution of educational goods can be justified if, but only if, they do not deprive any child of the ability to participate effectively in the democratic process (which determines, among other things, the priority of education relative to other social goods). The democratic threshold principle thus places limits on the legitimate discretion of democratic decision-making established by the authorization principle. (Gutmann, 1987, p. 136)

To recall, equalization and meritocratic interpretations of equality of educational opportunity presuppose that benefits (educational goods) accrue to one group often at the expense of another group. Alternatively, the democratic threshold principle proposes that all children are entitled to a non-negotiable threshold education, one that is “socially relative as it insists that school provide all educable children with an education adequate to participate effectively in democratic processes” (Gutmann, 1987, p. 138). “Although education above the threshold may be democratically distributed according to meritocratic principles, education below the threshold must not be” (p. 137).

But are these principles sufficient in themselves to achieve conscious social reproduction of which Gutmann (1987) speaks? For instance, can those entrusted with authorizing education be counted on to ensure that appropriate and, say, culturally relevant education are distributed equitably to all children, and that these same children (and their families) have a voice in determining what constitutes an appropriate and culturally-relevant educational good? Is this feasible in the diverse society in which we live, and especially the majority-minority context that

is the United States? Gutmann believes not and thus advocates establishing principled limits or constraints on democratic authority: “To integrate the value of critical deliberation among good lives, we must defend some principled limits on political and parental authority over education, limits that in practice require parents and states to cede some educational authority to professional educators” (p. 44).

The principle of nonrepression “prevents the state, and any group within it, from using education to restrict rational deliberation of competing conceptions of the good life and the good society” (Gutmann, 1987, p. 44). “This principle is therefore compatible with the use of education to inculcate those character traits, such as honesty, religious toleration, and mutual respect for persons, that serve as foundations for rational deliberation of differing ways of life” (p. 44).

Significantly,

...repression has commonly taken the more passive form of discrimination in schooling against racial minorities, girls, and other disfavored groups of children. The effect of discrimination is often to repress, at least temporarily, the capacity and even the desire of these groups to participate in the processes that structure choice among good lives. (Gutmann, 1987, p. 45)

To be sure, systematic efforts to repress and undermine the capacity of black students to attain an education, and thus their capacity to deliberate and effectively participate in democratic processes, have been well-documented (Feagin et al., 1996; Feagin & Sikes; 1995; Anderson, 1988). Thus, the nonrepression principle functions to preempt efforts by those with the authority to restrict one’s capacity to deliberate.

## Implications for Higher Education

Questions concerning deliberative participation, authority in education, and the need for principle constraints on this authority are not limited to K-12 education. Indeed: “Schooling does not stop serving democracy, however, when it ceases to be compulsory—or when all educable citizens reach the democratic threshold. Its purposes change” (Gutmann, 1987, p. 173). In fact, “many of the same arguments for teaching primary-school students to deliberate hold for college students” (p. 174). To be sure, “while not a substitute for character training, learning how to think carefully and critically about political problems, to articulate one’s views and defend them before people with whom one disagrees is a form of moral education to which young adults are more receptive and for which universities are well suited” (p. 173). That is, institutions of higher education are ideal for cultivating the kind of critical deliberative capacity of which Gutmann speaks. As well,

Control of the creation of ideas—whether by a majority or a minority—subverts the ideal of conscious social reproduction at the heart of democratic education and democratic politics. As institutional sanctuaries for free scholarly inquiry, universities can help prevent such subversion. They can provide a realm where new and unorthodox ideas are judged on their intellectual merits; where the men and women who defend such ideas, provided they defend them well, are not strangers but valuable members of a community.

Universities thereby serve democracy as sanctuaries of nonrepression. (p. 174)

Nonetheless, some argue that nonrepression is an inadequate principle for guaranteeing that all citizens can participate as equals in democratic deliberative processes.

### Critique of Nonrepression and Defense of Nonoppression

Consistent with Gutmann (1987), Howe (1997) challenges conceptions of equality of educational opportunity that tend to reinforce and reproduce the very inequality they ostensibly purport to correct. For instance, the formal (or legal) interpretation “identifies equality of educational opportunity with the formal structure of educational institutions. In its purest form, it requires only the absence of formal, legal barriers to participation based on morally irrelevant criteria such as race and gender. In a slightly stronger form, it also requires equalizing resources among schools, at least up to some floor” (p. 27-28). This conception of equality of educational opportunity is weak from Howe’s standpoint because it requires only the absence of formal barriers, and nothing more. As such, it fails to account for the social factors which may prevent some students from making use of those opportunities.

For the most part, however, the formal interpretation falls considerably short of the goal to which the principle of equal educational opportunity should aspire. It is far too often insensitive to the profound influence that social factors can have on educational opportunities, even when formal barriers are absent and resources such as funding are equalized. (p. 28)

Howe’s (1997) argument is compelling, particularly when one considers the history of American slavery. It is well documented that after the passing and ratification of the thirteenth amendment, most African Americans found themselves in the very conditions of servitude which the amendment putatively abolished. Though legally and theoretically “free” (the absence of formal barriers) to take advantage of the freedom accorded Whites, African Americans lacked social and other resources (white cultural capital, for instance) to exercise their freedom.

This is not to suggest, however, that the formal interpretation is wholly without merit. Even Howe (1997) concedes that “the formal interpretation can serve a progressive function, for banning legally sanctioned racial barriers to educational opportunity was surely a moral advance, and removing such barriers for children with disabilities and for females was an advance as well” (p.28). The question becomes whether this is in itself a sufficient function. As Howe’s argument suggests, it is not. As the example of American slavery illustrates, removing formal barriers is an insufficient means of achieving equality of educational opportunity. Social, economic and cultural factors, in this case the previous condition of servitude, and everything suggested by it, must also be addressed for equality to begin to be realized.

By contrast, the compensatory interpretation takes into account the historical or social conditions rendering certain groups disadvantaged. As Howe (1997) writes: “In contrast to the formal interpretation, the compensatory interpretation is sensitive to the importance of how interactions between the characteristics of individuals and the features of educational institutions can function to increase or diminish the worth of formal educational opportunities”(p. 28). Despite its advantage over the formal interpretation, Howe finds compensatory conceptions similarly lacking. The compensatory proposition, like its predecessor equalization, corrects for inequalities by compensating the disadvantaged, which in Howe’s perspective is a virtue. However, compensatory conceptions beg a critical question, and one posed by Gutmann: Who should have the authority to shape the education of citizens in a democratic society? According to Howe, the compensatory conception presumes that the standard to which the disadvantaged are compensated—a Western or White standard, in this case—is a universal and mainstream one. Such a standard remains one the disadvantaged group had no part in shaping, resulting in what Howe terms “ensconcing the status quo.” “It is vulnerable to the criticism that it implicitly adopts

the status quo regarding what is of educational worth and how this is to be determined. It therefore fails to afford educational opportunities of *equal worth* to individuals who have had no part in shaping the educational practices and curricular content that are deemed educationally worthwhile” (p. 31, italics added).

Extending this reasoning to black students at predominantly white institutions of higher learning, it is useful to reflect on DuBois’ (1995) observation that African Americans must not only look at society through their own eyes, but also they must look at it through the majority culture’s eyes in order to survive in the majority-dominated society. This “double consciousness” of which DuBois (1995) spoke may manifest in the phenomenon of “acting white” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986), where academic achievement is perceived to be the exclusive province of white students, and black students who aspire to achieve must conform to standards established by whites, even if said standards are inimical to their interests. For Howe (1997), this is tantamount to oppression, because black people (students, in this case) must essentially negate themselves to accommodate to a culture they had no part in shaping.

That certain groups are subject to oppression calls into question the adequacy of Gutmann’s nonrepression principle. Like Gutmann (1987), Howe (1997) favors principled limits on “legitimate democratic authority” (Gutmann, 1987, p. 45). Such limits are critical in their view because they work to prevent “any single group from monopolizing educational authority and in part by permitting (indeed, obligating) professional educators to develop in children the deliberative capacity to evaluate competing conceptions of good lives and good societies” (p. 46). However, although nonrepression is clearly worthy in Howe’s view, it fails to go far enough.

Nonrepression is too weak to adequately protect marginalized and oppressed groups in negotiating the participatory ideal. So far as I can tell, one could faithfully employ Gutmann's principles—allow everyone to have a say and make sure schools are equally open to all group of children—and wind up with something very akin to Hirsch's (1988) “cultural literacy” as the threshold. (p. 67)

In Howe's (1997) view, the nonrepression principle suggests merely tolerating diverse groups, perspectives and values, not their acceptance or full inclusion or integration into the decision-making process, thus intentionally or unintentionally reproducing the status quo. Howe thus proposes grounding equality of educational opportunity within a principle of nonoppression, “in order to protect groups that are threatened with marginalization and exclusion from meaningful democratic participation” (p. 67). Such an approach speaks directly to Marable's (2002) concern that:

... the great challenge of any democracy is to ensure that all of its citizens are “stakeholders” in a common project called civil society. Millions of racialized “Others” are today experiencing “civil death”—the destruction of their social, legal and economic capacities to play a meaningful role in public life. We must find creative paths to reinvest in citizenship to build civic capacities within the most disadvantaged sectors of our society. Combating civil death is the key toward revitalizing democracy for all of us. (p.xiv)

That is, given that oppression marks certain groups—racial, in this case—as subject to forces that constrain, curtail or prevent their capacity to self-determine, to effectively deliberate and participate in processes that shape their choices of “good lives” (Gutmann, 1987), a principle of nonoppression must replace nonrepression as the principled limit on authority. As it pertains to



black students on predominantly white campuses, then, we must consider the ways in which this deliberative capacity specifically, and equality of educational opportunity more generally, might be hampered by oppression, a subject to which I now turn.

#### Five Faces of Oppression

In *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, Iris Marion Young (1990) posits five faces of oppression relative to the lives and experiences of oppressed groups: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence. Drawing on the literature as well as my personal experiences and observations at a traditionally and predominantly White campus, I consider each of these “faces” in turn and for their relevance to Black students’ experiences on predominantly White campuses.

Young (1990) conceptualizes social justice thusly:

Justice should refer not only to distribution, but also to the institutional conditions necessary for the development and exercise of individual capacities and collective communication and cooperation. Under this conception of justice, injustice refers primarily to two forms of disabling constraints, oppression and domination. (p. 39)

In Young’s (1990) view, “oppression is a structural phenomenon that has the effect of immobilizing or diminishing a group” (p. 42). In an extended sense,

...oppression refers to the vast and deep injustices some groups suffer as a consequence of often unconscious assumptions and reactions of well-meaning people in ordinary interactions, media and cultural stereotypes, and structural features of bureaucratic hierarchies and market mechanisms- in short, the normal processes of life” (p. 41).

According to Young, five dimensions or “faces” constitute the oppression experienced by oppressed groups.

*Exploitation*

“Exploitation occurs through a steady process of the transfer of the results of the labor (or other efforts) of one social group to benefit another” (Young, 1990, p. 49). Young (1990) extends this view of exploitation, asserting that “the injustice of class division does not consist only in the distributive fact that some people have great wealth while most people have little. Rather, exploitation enacts a structural relation between social groups” (p. 50). Viewed in this way, exploitation implies “social rules about what work is, who does what for whom, how work is compensated, and the social process by which the results of work are appropriated” (p. 50). With particular regard to exploitation and oppressed groups, Young raises an important and, in the case of this study, relevant question: Is it possible to conceptualize a form of exploitation that is racially-specific? Accordingly, Young affirms that “wherever there is racism, there is the assumption, more or less enforced, that members of the oppressed racial groups are or ought to be servants of those, or some of those, in the privileged groups” (p. 52).

To be sure, instances of racially-specific exploitation, where members of oppressed racial groups were servants of those in more privileged positions, abound in my African American history. The enslavement and subsequent domination of African Americans is but one notable case in point. But in extending Young’s (1990) conceptualization of exploitation to include the idea that members of oppressed racial groups’ rightful place is beneath, and not alongside, those in comparatively privileged positions, several examples emerge to illustrate such exploitation on traditionally white college campuses. For instance, blacks and other people of color are often overrepresented in the service sector, positions that also tend to be low wage. Invariably, in my experience as both student and employee at a traditionally white university, the more “servile” and “undignified” the position, the more likely it was occupied by African Americans and/or

other people of color. I also recall the uneasiness that I experienced interacting with the Black “help” at my traditionally white alma mater, alternating between a sense of kinship and solidarity and, most ashamedly, detachment and condescension. (The latter case had me feeling complicit in their exploitation.) Though some of my fellow white students, particularly those involved in the anti-racist struggle, empathized with the apparent ambivalence, most seemed oblivious to the racialized nature of exploitation on the campus.

Exploitation on predominantly white campuses was also exemplified in the practice of tracking (Oakes, 2005). As Feagin et al. (1996) and others have observed, black students on traditionally and predominantly white campuses are often steered into majors with less prestige and earning potential, and away from majors, such as engineering, that tend to be more prestigious and higher-paying. Such structural exploitation ensures that income disparities and inequalities along racial lines persist.

### *Marginalization*

A second face of oppression, marginalization, persists as the most dangerous form of oppression, in that “a whole category of people is expelled from useful participation in social life and thus potentially subjected to severe material deprivation and even extermination” (Young, 1990, p.53). According to Young (1990), “while marginalization definitely entails serious issues of distributive justice, it also involves the deprivation of cultural, practical, and institutionalized conditions for exercising capacities in a context of recognition and interaction” (p. 55), an issue of particular relevance to this present discussion.

Marginalization figures prominently in the literature. To be sure, scholars have long noted the sense of alienation experienced by black students on traditionally white campuses, as well as the often inadequate effort put forth by traditionally white campuses to facilitate black

student integration (Tinto, 1993) or connection to (Guiffrida, 2003) the institution. For instance, traditions of predominantly white campuses—some with blatant racial themes and subtext— were often born without consideration from blacks and other students of color, who were systematically excluded from any decision-making. Football games at many universities, as well as racially-restrictive membership requirements of traditionally white sororities and fraternities, are notable examples of practices that have the effect of marginalizing and alienating students of color.

As well, marginalization reveals itself in white classrooms. In these contexts, black history or culture receive little notice or are viewed from a decidedly Eurocentric vantage point (Asante, 1991, 1996). As a case in point, in many of my political science classes, topics of historical, social or political import to black people often were treated as footnotes, or covered from a perspective of cultural deficiency, suggesting that black people fell short in some fundamental way. Unfortunately, an American history class taught by a renowned historian reinforced for me and for classmates the notion of black marginality in American history. Such experiences with also reinforced a felt sense of powerlessness (Who decides and defines my history as an African American?) and thus led me to courses which I felt would affirm and validate my status as a black coed on a predominantly white campus.

### *Powerlessness*

According to Young (1990), “the powerless are those who lack authority or power even in this mediated sense, those over whom power is exercised without their exercising it; the powerless are situated so that they must take orders and rarely have the right to give them” (p. 56). As noted, black powerlessness seems most evident in traditionally white classrooms, where an already hierarchical relationship between teacher and student can be complicated by race.

Feagin et al.'s (1996) study highlights this view, as do studies by Kobrak (1992) and Allen (1988), who found that black students feel powerless and unsupported in the face of white faculty. Black students, for instance, might find themselves wondering if a particular comment would be negatively received by white faculty, who in turn might unfavorably rate black students' work. In my own experience at a predominantly white university, the sense of powerlessness I felt extended beyond the classroom to the dormitories, administrative offices, and even the two student organizations with which I had been affiliated. The largely African American student base notwithstanding, the fate of both organizations ultimately depended on the university (which served as host), underscoring not only a sense of powerlessness but powerlessness at the hands of a white power structure—a power structure indicative of cultural imperialism.

### *Cultural Imperialism*

“Cultural imperialism involves the universalization of a dominant group's experience and culture, and its establishment as the norm” (Young, 1990, p. 59). Thus, “to experience cultural imperialism means to experience how the dominant meanings of a society render the particular perspective of one's own group invisible at the same time as they stereotype one's group and mark it as the Other” (Young, 1990, p. 59). To recall, traditionally white institutions enshrine Eurocentrism, which, like cultural imperialism, assumes that a particular culture or race—white, in this case—is the ideal, a standard against which all other races are judged.

Traditionally white campuses express Eurocentric ideas and values in ways both subtle and overt. The tacit glorification of everything European, the primacy accorded European history and languages, the decidedly Eurocentric perspectives in the classroom—evident in faculty lectures, class discussions and textbooks— and even the ubiquitous statues of (mostly) white men

adorning college buildings illustrate but a few ways Eurocentrism asserts itself on traditionally white campuses, contributing to a racial bifurcation where white represents all that is great and significant, and “others” represent all that is not great and significant (Crenshaw, 1995). Lisa Delpit (1995) defines this cultural imperialism as a “Culture of Power” and writes: “To provide schooling for everyone’s children that reflects liberal, middle class values and aspirations is to ensure the maintenance of the status quo, to ensure that power, the culture of power, remains in the hands of those who already have it” (p. 28).

Significantly, cultural imperialism involves a paradox of invisibility, in that aspects of their ways of life and contributions to society are rarely seen or heard in academic life, and visibility, in the sense that oppressed groups are stigmatized, stereotyped and or otherwise marked as different. In other words, dominant meanings of a society render the particular perspective of one’s own group invisible at the same time as they stereotype one’s group and mark it out as the “Other” (Young, 1990).

Black invisibility occurs “when dominant groups fail to recognize the perspective embodied in their cultural expressions as a perspective. These dominant cultural expressions offer simply little place for the experience of other groups, at most only mentioning or referring to them in stereotyped or marginalized ways” (Young, 1990, p. 60). Black students in predominantly white educational settings are relegated “to the realm of the invisible” (hooks, 2008, p. 93) when their perspectives fail to be reflected in mainstream academic life (Feagin et al., 1996); when they are disproportionately underrepresented in coveted educational tracks and programs (Feagin et al., 1996; Oakes, 2005); and when their individual and disparate voices are taken as monolithic and representative of the race (Feagin et al., 1996).

At the same time, black people and other oppressed groups are objectified and represented as inferior “others,” thus becoming easy, conspicuous “targets.” Aguirre and Turner (2004) observed that “more than any other ethnic population in the United States, and perhaps in the world, African Americans have been the victims of negative beliefs and stereotypes” (p. 69). A persistent stereotype concerns black academic competence and intelligence (Hilliard, 1994). Thus, on traditionally white campuses, black students may be collectively marked less as “real” students and more as affirmative action cases (Feagin, 2006). Hooks (2008) explains that to stereotype black people is to fail to see them as fully human. When dominant groups perceive oppressed groups more as objects than as real people, violence against members of this group becomes acceptable.

### *Violence*

Ultimately, violence becomes a face of oppression less because of particular acts, “than the social context surrounding them, which makes them possible and even acceptable” (Young, 1990, p. 60). As we have seen, this social context is one in which black life is devalued and “othered.” According to hooks (1995), violence against black people is promoted, encouraged and condoned in white supremacist contexts.

As history has shown, predominantly white campuses are hardly insulated from broader societal violence. To the contrary, these institutions of higher learning have been sites of intense racial conflict. The upheaval attending James Meredith’s desegregation of Ole Miss and racial unrest at Olivet College (Michigan) are two notable and infamous examples of the violence (or threats thereof) to which black students have been subjected on majority white campuses. In the case of Olivet College, African-American students decided to leave the campus in mass because of fear for their safety (Feagin, et al., 1996).

As a coed at one of these institutions, I, too, encountered this fifth face of oppression. However, unlike the physical violence visited upon Meredith and others daring to desegregate exclusively white educational institutions, the violence to which I and my fellow coeds were subjected appeared more psychological in nature. For instance, during my freshman year, a flier circulated under the door of black sorority pledges announcing “open season on porch monkeys.” Later that same year, other provocative fliers circulated admonishing black students to “stay in their place.” Though unspoken, the “or else” implied in such fliers clearly came as a threat of violence. Here, violence occurs when one worries that such events *could* happen, even if they do not.

Ultimately, these conceptions of equality of educational opportunity and different aspects of oppression provide an analytical lens to evaluate the experiences of black students on a PWI.

In chapter 3, I defend a research methodology for this study.



## CHAPTER 3

### METHODS

#### INTRODUCTION

Feagin and Sikes (1995) argue that a deeper examination of the experiences of black students requires listening to and valuing what “black American students tell us about what happens to them and how they feel, act, and think” (p. 91). According to Ragin (1994), qualitative methods are ideal if the task is to explore phenomena on an in-depth level. Thus, I propose a methods framework that combines qualitative methods with a naturalistic (Critical Race Theory) research paradigm to facilitate developing a deeper understanding of the learning and living experiences of black graduates of a predominantly white university.

As highlighted in chapter one, there is a significant gap in our knowledge about black students of predominantly white universities. Specifically, little is known about how black students are faring today, in the wake of post-racialism and post-affirmative action. As discussed in chapter two, the literature suggests the need for more specific insight into the choices and experiences of black students. In particular, there is a need to understand the motivations and reasons underlying black students’ decision to attend a predominantly white university; the nature and impact of learning and living at these institutions; whether and the extent to which racial challenges exist; how students negotiate these challenges, and how experiences might be characterized when considered against concepts of race, equality of educational opportunity, and oppression. To this end, I propose the following questions:

1. What figured into Black students' decision to choose to attend a predominantly White university?

2. How do Black students describe their own experiences learning and living in a predominantly White university?
3. To what extent might such experiences impact Black students' sense of well-being and academic achievement?
4. In what ways might Black students cope and deal with learning and living at a predominantly White university?
5. To what extent might race be implicated in the experiences of Black students at PWIs, and how do students conceptualize, describe, and make sense of race/racism?
6. What is the range of educational opportunities afforded Black students, and to what extent might these opportunities be perceived as being on par with those afforded White students?
7. To what extent might the learning and living experiences of Black students exemplify different forms of oppression?

#### THE NATURALISTIC PARADIGM

“All research is informed by particular worldviews or perspectives held by the researcher and scholars within his or her discipline. These perspectives are called paradigms” (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999, p. 41). Paradigms speak to how we perceive reality (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). Specifically, paradigms address such ontological, epistemological, and axiological questions as: What is the nature of reality? How is knowledge generated and understood by the knower and the known? What roles do values play in research? (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe the ways in which the naturalist research paradigm differs from the positivist view on these key questions. In what follows, I discuss these competing perspectives

and approaches to research, argue why a naturalistic research paradigm is most appropriate for this study, and expand on this view in a discussion of the researcher's role.

How are reality and truth conceptualized in research? For positivists, the goal of any research is to get at the truth so that this truth may ultimately be predicted, and to control the everyday world and minimize confounding aspects. In their view of the world, there is only one reality, one absolute truth, and that reality is "single, tangible, and fragmentable" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 37). Truth or reality can be disaggregated as either a "this or that," but not a "this and that." Conversely, for the naturalist, "There are multiple constructed realities that can be studied only holistically; inquiry into these multiple realities will inevitably diverge (each inquiry raises more questions than it answers) so that prediction and control are unlikely outcomes although some level of understanding can be achieved" (p. 37). Because naturalist researchers view reality as holistic and unbounded, they are open to any and all understandings emerging from their research.

It is this open, holistic view of reality, one where multiple realities coexist, that makes the naturalist perspective especially appropriate for this study. To be sure, there is more than one reality for black students on a traditionally white campus. For instance, one may be black and female; black, female, and gay; or black, female, and economically disadvantaged. If we are to fully understand the experiences of black students on predominantly white campuses, all of their identities or "realities" must be considered.

Positivist and naturalist inquiry also differ on the question of epistemology. In the positivist view, for example, the knower-known, or researcher-participant relationship, is dichotomous, independent, and linear (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Here, the emphasis is not on participants' voice or subjectivity –their ability to share perspectives and offer insights –but

whether a given participant's data support or refute the researcher's hypothesis. In fact, in positivist inquiry, it is the researcher who is privileged with "voice," and who thus drives the researcher-participant relationship. The naturalist perspective, on the other hand, encourages an interactive and reciprocal researcher-participant relationship; that is: "The inquirer and the 'object' of inquiry interact to influence on another; knower and known are inseparable" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 37). Here, the researcher-participant relationship is a shared and egalitarian one—voice and subjectivity are extended to both knower and known.

An ideal paradigm for this study is one that not only takes into account the unique challenges faced by black students on white campuses, such as marginalization and invisibility, but also one that encourages black students to share their stories in ways that illuminate and deepen understanding. This opportunity to name one's own reality and generate "counter-stories" provides for the "psychic preservation of marginalized groups," who often internalize white oppression (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 14). Given its emphasis on participant voice and subjectivity, and thus an implicit respect for participant knowledge (i.e. their realities, their truths), the naturalist paradigm is most fitting for this study.

The role of values in research is yet another point of contention for the positivist and naturalists. Under positivism, attempts are made to keep the researcher's values, preconceived ideas, biases, or convictions at bay, lest they "corrupt" the study. For their part, naturalists make no such claims of objectivity. In fact, the naturalist not only actively reports his or her values and biases, but also acknowledges a point that seems lost on the positivist researcher: Because values are inherent to the researcher, and thus difficult to suppress or keep at bay, they will consciously or unconsciously feed into the various phases of the inquiry process, from "choice of the

problem” to “choice of major data-gathering and data-analytic methods.” (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p.169).

In the section that follows, I lay bare my own preconceptions, biases, and convictions with respect to the present study. That I am able to do so—unfettered, without concern that these biases and convictions will “corrupt” the study—reinforces why the naturalist paradigm is most appropriate for this study.

### RESEARCHER’S PERSPECTIVE

According to Twine and Warren (2000), qualitative researchers ground their studies in areas of their own life that they find problematic. Similarly, Ladson-Billings (2000) advises that research reflects a researcher’s most cherished ideals and social commitments. Specifically, she stresses the need for researchers to work in “racialized discourses and ethnic epistemologies” in order to “challenge the hegemonic structures (and symbols) that keep injustice and inequity in place” (p. 271). This study reflects both perspectives. In this particular case, it is my experience as an African American woman in traditionally white educational institutions, and later as a student activist, that serves as the backdrop and inspiration for this study.

In this study exploring the living and learning experiences of black graduates of a predominantly white institution, I am in many ways very close to this group. First and foremost, I feel a deep kinship with and personal commitment to the black community—in the U.S. and beyond. As a college student, I specifically sought membership in organizations aimed at supporting black students and challenging the institutional barriers hampering black student advancement. Both the Black Student Organization (pseudonym) and the Coalition Against Racism (pseudonym), a multiracial, anti-racist student organization, were central to my college experience. Later, while a graduated student in International and Comparative Education, I twice

served as a volunteer teacher in Africa. I am also an avid reader of African and African American history, and continue to involve myself in projects and programs supportive of youth, particularly youth of color.

In addition, I expect to relate to any struggles or feelings of ambivalence they may have experienced as black students in a predominantly white context. As noted, black students in predominantly white educational settings often experience academic self-doubt, a phenomenon known as stereotype threat (Steele, 1997). As a coed, I too harbored the usual doubts about college, especially my ability to excel and thrive in such an openly competitive environment, one in which black students were not expected to achieve at levels comparable to white students.

At the same time, I expect a certain social distance. For instance, there is certainly, and most obviously, the generational divide. My study participants are the oft-cited, ahistorical “Millenials,” who may relate little, if at all, to the social struggles of the past. For me, coming of age in the era of Roots, Ronald Reagan, and later Rodney King, race loomed large. For example, in 6<sup>th</sup> and 8th grade, respectively, I was spat upon and taunted by classmates during a showing of Roots. Later, as a freshman in high school, I was greeted in one of the bathrooms with the inscription “Roz is a nigger.” As an undergraduate, I was spurred to activism by the circulation of a racially inflammatory and threatening “open season on porch monkeys” flier, which had been placed under the door of some black sorority pledges. Such personal encounters with racism might ring unfamiliar, if not shocking, to participants of this study.

Finally, my age-mates and I would not have imagined a day where a black man would one day become Head of State. Energized and empowered as we were by the 1988 presidential bid of Jesse Jackson, we nevertheless regarded his bid as a more or less symbolic gesture.

However exceptional Obama's presidency may prove to be, today's black students have this historic event as a testament to black potential and possibilities.

In the interest of transparency, I must also lay bare two biases and preconceptions of black college students, and of white educational institutions, respectively. First, I believe racial self-consciousness is intensified in predominantly white contexts, and that blacks students experience ambivalence about expressing themselves in ways that might be perceived as stereotypically "black." Confirming this view, Cokley (2000) found that racial salience, or the extent to which race figures prominently in the minds of black students, was higher among African Americans attending PWIs than at historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs). Similarly, Guiffrida (2004) found that black students were hyper-conscious of their clothes, hairstyles, and mannerisms, and how those behaviors might be perceived as not in line with white college culture.

Second, I believe that despite well-meaning attempts by some traditionally and predominantly white universities to challenge the "ideologies of imperialist, white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy [that] form the basic founding principles of culture in the United States" (hooks, 2000, p.129) these institutions remain fundamentally Eurocentric. Eurocentrism is predicated on assumptions of European superiority, of the universality and neutrality of European views and ideas, such as meritocracy, and of European culture as the standard and norm against which other cultures or races are measured and judged (Ani, 1994; Asante, 1991). With particular regard to predominantly white educational universities, Eurocentrism is reflected in curricula and pedagogy, evident in traditions such as when students at the University of Mississippi sing "Dixie" and wave the confederate flag, apparent in the conspicuous and ubiquitous iconography of "founding fathers" and other white historical figures, evidenced in

campus programs and activities that assume a white cultural frame of reference, and revealed in overt and covert acts of racism (Asante, 1996).

These preconceptions aside, my closeness to the subject matter, “insider status,” and personal regard for the study participants confer a certain advantage. For instance, I expect to bring a deep level of sensitivity and understanding to the processes of data collection and analysis. Tillman (2002) highlights the importance of culturally-sensitive approaches and the ways in which African American researchers may use their cultural knowledge and experiences to build rapport with study participants.

At the same time, I am ever cognizant that such closeness may have an unintended “blinding” effect. Thus, I was mindful to not take the more obvious themes emerging from this research for granted. In addition, I actively sought, and did not overlook or trivialize, aspects of participants’ experiences that did not mesh with my views. Ultimately, as the “human instrument” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), my goal was to convey black graduates of predominantly white universities as they are, not as I would desire them to be. Any tendency to do otherwise was guarded against by using the strategies outlined in the trustworthiness section of this chapter.

#### SITE SELECTION

The site selected for this study is a large, public research and teaching institution in the upper Midwest, henceforth referred to as Selective University. Selective University is located in a mostly white, traditional college town, but near a large, racially-diverse urban center—a city which has played a central role in diversifying Selective and other universities in the state.

Selective University boasts a highly diverse and academically-talented student body, with students hailing from all 50 states and 114 countries and high average ACT scores ranging from 28 to 32. According to the Office of Undergraduate Admissions (2010), 25% of undergraduates



are African American, Hispanic American, Native American, or Asian American. Interestingly, an article in one of the school's newspaper advised caution when interpreting admissions and enrollment data, citing the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOC, 2008), which revised the way institutions of higher education collect and report demographic data. Effective 2010, students are no longer counted by their primary race/ethnicity, as they had been in prior to 2010, but by each and every race category they deem applicable. Although this change should not have a direct bearing on the present study—participants will have already graduated—it is certainly noteworthy in light of recent challenges to affirmative action.

Significantly, in November of 2006, voters in the state approved a constitutional amendment banning affirmative action in university admissions. Like the anti-affirmative action amendments adopted in other states, this one prohibited Selective and other public universities from considering a student's race and ethnicity as part of their admissions criteria, thus undermining efforts to ensure a racially diverse applicant pool.

For their part, Selective University responded as creatively and aggressively as possible to minimize effects. For example, admission criteria were broadened to include such variables as "special skills and talents" and "unique personal background." In addition, the President and other University officials expanded their outreach by hosting speaking and recruiting engagements at various black churches, schools, and community organizations, most of them located in the nearby urban center of the state. Finally, the University expanded its urban satellite center and empowered staff to increase recruitment of underrepresented minorities. Still, like many major public universities operating under similar amendments, Selective's minority (and specifically, black) enrollment dropped for African-American first-year students by about 35% between 2005 and 2009.

According to one of the University's leading news outlets, the anti-affirmative action amendment was one of many factors complicating minority access to Selective University. The article also cited the state's fragile economy, the cost of tuition, and disparities in pre-college educational opportunities as barriers to entry for underrepresented minority groups. Significantly, while access to Selective remains a problem, anecdotal evidence suggests that black student progression and retention have seen marked improvement.

Like many traditionally white universities with a history of racial unrest and student activism, Selective University appears committed to meeting the social, cultural, and academic needs of students of color, as well as promoting racial openness and tolerance. The University hosts several black social, civic, and political organizations, such as the Black Student Organization (pseudonym), sororities and fraternities, and pre-professional associations, each serving as a critical source of support and community for black students. The University is also home to an array of academic support and leadership initiatives. These programs are aimed at supporting and encouraging academically struggling students, many of whom are African American. Finally, Selective requires all undergraduates to complete a course focused on race, racism, and diversity. This mandatory course is intended to raise racial awareness and understanding, and to encourage students to question and challenge their assumptions about race.

Although Selective may be commended for its commitment to students of color and racial tolerance, room for growth remains. For instance, black faculty continue to be underrepresented in most departments and programs, excepting African and African American studies. As a result, black students have a limited pool of faculty from which to draw support, encouragement and mentorship.

## PARTICIPANT SELECTION

LeCompte and Schensul (1999) stress the need for ethnographic (qualitative) researchers to “operationally define” the population they wish to study (p. 115). Operationally defining a group means identifying a specific group whose characteristics are of interest to the researcher (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). Because the purpose of this study was to explore the post-racial, post-affirmative action learning and living experiences of recent graduates of a traditionally and predominantly White university, the ideal participant was a recent graduate of the university (2006-2011), a former resident of university housing, and a former participant or member of a predominantly black student organization.

Negotiating entry and gaining access to participants was one of several considerations when locating a social situation to study (Spradley, 1980). LeCompte and Schensul (1999) and Hatch (2002) discuss a number of sampling strategies or ways of identifying and enlisting study participants. Snowball sampling—a purposeful sampling process in which the researcher identifies one or more potential participants who, in turn, assist in identifying others—is especially useful when participants are difficult to reach (Willie, 2003). Thus, I began the participation selection process by initiating phone and/or email contact with a pre-existing lead and recent graduate of Selective University. (I met this lead through a family friend and current student of Selective University.) Upon securing informed consent (Appendix A), I then requested the lead to assist me in identifying another potential participant. Upon securing that participant’s informed consent, I asked him/her to identify another potential participant. This “snowball” process was repeated until I had secured a gender-balanced pool of 10 participants.

## Protocol, Ethics, and Protection of Human Subjects

Ethical standards from the Wayne State University Institutional Review Board were followed in the execution of this study (approval form in Appendix A). The participants were informed about the study through the use of an informed consent. The consent form included all IRB required elements, such as describing the purpose of the study, the identity of the researcher, the rights of participants, a description of their responsibilities, and the potential risks and benefits to participation. In addition, code names and pseudonyms served to protect the confidentiality of participants.

## DATA COLLECTION

An overall goal of my data collection and analysis was to deepen understandings about the learning and living experiences of recent graduates of a predominantly white institution as they relate to the research questions and the purpose of the proposed study. To align with this goal, and in the interest of constructing a comprehensive portrait of black students' experiences, this study drew upon four data sources. Semi-structured and focus group interviews constituted the primary data sources in the study, as these provide the best approach for gaining access to the students' personal experiences (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). Secondary sources included cultural artifacts and a researcher's journal. Data collection proceeded over two phases: first with individual, semi-structured interviews, and then with focus group interviews, to provide for reinforcement of the findings.

### Semi-Structured Interviews

LeCompte and Schensul (1999) describe qualitative interviews as special kinds of conversations used by researchers to explore informants' experiences and interpretations. Individual interviews allow the researcher to explore questions and topics in great depth, and

thus to gain a deeper understanding of participant's thoughts and experiences. Another benefit of interviews is that they enable researchers to capture non-verbals. For instance, a participant may appear sullen or misty-eyed when recounting a particular experience. Interviews allow the researcher to capture these expressions and thus enrich the data.

I conducted one-hour, semi-structured interviews (in-person) with five women and five men participants. LeCompte and Schensul (1999) suggest a semi-structured or unstructured interview format that allows for a free exchange between the interviewer and the interviewee. To this end, interviews included a series of open-ended questions and began by focusing on the participant's perspectives and experiences (Appendix C). Audio recordings of interviews were transcribed for analysis.

In addition, I accounted for informal conversations throughout the data-collection process. Thus, when there were opportunities to talk with a participant before or after the scheduled interview, I made notes as soon as I was able following these conversations, about issues germane to the research.

#### Focus Group Interviews

Following Feagin et al. (1996), I conducted a focus group interview to "encourage participants to cover issues not anticipated by the researcher, to move back and forth between issues of importance, and to build on each other's ideas by associating personal experiences and opinions with what has been described by others" (p.18). In this particular case, group interviews served as a complementary data source, a kind of "member check" to semi-structured interviews, whereby "data, analytic categories, interpretations, and conclusions are tested with members of those stakeholding groups from whom the data were originally collected" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314).

Focus group interviews were conducted with the six participants, three men and three women, interviewed individually during phase two of data collection. Again, to preserve its integrity, the focus group meeting was audio-taped for analysis. I posed questions to follow up on ideas presented previously by the participant during semi-structured interviews, phone or email communication (Appendix D). For example, I asked participants to further explain a comment made during interviews.

### Artifacts

Artifact collection is yet another data source considered for this study. Artifacts are useful because they can tell their own story independent of the interpretations of participants, and they can be gathered without disrupting the natural flow of human activity (Hatch, 2002). Cultural artifacts gathered for this study include fliers, brochures of the Black Student Organization (pseudonym) and other student organizations, articles from the University's student newspaper, as well as an exploration of related campus websites. In addition, artifacts were solicited directly from participants and institutional contacts.

Lastly, I maintained a field journal to record personal reflections, insights, notes about informal conversations with study participants, and any pitfalls encountered during the course of data collection.

## DATA ANALYSIS STRATEGIES

LeCompte and Schensul (1999) describe data analysis as a systematic and recursive process, wherein data collection and analysis cycle back and forth until patterns emerge that make sense. As detailed in the previous section, data sources for this study included individual and focus group interviews, informal conversations, cultural artifacts, and a researcher's journal. To most effectively identify emerging patterns and themes in these data, I employed analytic

procedures that drew on Spradley's (1980) definition of analysis: the "systematic examination of something to determine its parts, the relationship among parts, and their relationship to the whole" (p. 85). Specifically, this process involved identifying cultural domains, breaking these domains into smaller categories or sub-domains as I sought patterns of sameness in the data. I also identified dimensions of contrast between and within cultural categories and then sought overarching themes.

Domain analysis involves three steps. First, the researcher identifies cultural domains and then assigns a cover term. Second, the researcher lists the included terms, or "smaller categories inside the domain" (Spradley, 1980, p. 89). The third step involves linking together the cover term and included terms to form a semantic relationship. To illustrate this process, a researcher might note the perceptions participants have of their traditionally white university, and assigns this as her cover term. Specific perceptions in the data become the included terms. For example, a participant may perceive a given university as cold and unwelcoming. "Cold" and "unwelcoming" thus serve as included terms. Lastly, the researcher forms a semantic relationship by linking "cold" and "unwelcoming" to the "Perceptions" cultural domain with the phrase, "is a kind of" or "is an example of." Thus, "cold" and "unwelcoming" are kinds of perceptions about a predominantly white university.

After identifying domains and discerning all possible included terms in the domain, the next step is to undertake a taxonomic analysis. A taxonomy "shows the relationship among all the included terms in a domain" (Spradley, 1980, p. 113). In so doing, taxonomies deepen the researcher's understanding of a social situation or culture by looking both for within domain subcategories and by working out relationships among sub-domains and domains, respectively.

Componential analysis was then used to “systematically search for the attributes associated with cultural categories (Spradley, 1980, p. 131). This analysis assisted the researcher in identifying dimensions of “contrasts among the members of a domain” (p. 131). Returning again to our example, “cold” and “unwelcoming” may be similar in that they are kinds of perceptions participants may have of a university, but upon closer scrutiny, the researcher may see that they are also different, depending on the context. For instance, “cold” may present differently in the classroom than in the residence hall, the counselor’s office, or at a football game. These different contexts, then, represent dimensions of contrast for this “Perceptions” cultural domain.

Finally, the analysis process involved discovering cultural themes. A cultural theme is defined as “any principle recurrent in a number of domains, tacit or explicit, and serving as a relationship among subsystems of cultural meanings” (Spradley, 1980, p. 141). In our hypothetical case, the researcher might discover, as had Feagin, et al. (1996), that racialized spaces exist on a predominantly white campus.

#### TRUSTWORTHINESS IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

A key issue in qualitative research is assessing and establishing the trustworthiness of a study. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the basic issue in ascertaining trustworthiness is this: How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences (including self) that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to, worth taking account of? Lincoln and Guba propose four criteria for evaluating the trustworthiness of a research study: Credibility (internal validity), Transferability (external validity), Dependability (reliability) and Confirmability (Neutrality). Each of these will be considered in turn.



Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe the implementation of the credibility criterion, the conventional inquirers analog to internal validity, as a twofold task: first to carry out the inquiry in such a way that the probability that the findings will be found to be credible is enhanced and, second, to demonstrate the credibility of the findings by having them corroborated by the constructors of the multiple realities being studied (p. 296). To this end, credibility will be established by means of triangulation and member-checking. Triangulation is important to improving the probability that the findings and interpretation of a study will be found credible (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Findings derived from multiple participants (triangulation of sources) and from different kinds of data (triangulation of methods). In this study, in-depth and focus group interviews, as well as artifacts and a researcher's journal combined to strengthen credibility. In addition, I incorporated member-checking items, whereby study participants engaged in discussions serving to corroborate nascent findings, to fill gaps, and to clarify confusions.

The transferability criterion was met through expanded accounts (counter-stories, in this case), as these provided the thick descriptions "necessary to enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether the transfer of findings from this study to another site can be contemplated as a possibility" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 316). Here, the goal is not generalization, as it is for the conventionalist, but to generate a body of knowledge upon which other researchers may build.

Dependability was addressed by maintaining an audit trail. Maintaining an audit trail implies explicitly indentifying the data source (participant, type of data, page numbers within data) for included items on analysis worksheets, the taxonomy, and the findings report. This audit involved "a thorough examination of the data, findings, interpretations and

recommendations, and attesting that it is supported by data and is internally coherent” so that the “bottom line” may be accepted (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 318).

In addition to the dependability audit, Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend keeping a reflexive journal as a technique for establishing confirmability. To ensure a proper confirmability audit, I maintained organized files of all data, including personal notes, observations, and insights gleaned from the field. Via the reflexive journal, I captured personal observations, values, and insights emerging from the field. In addition to providing a log of research activities, the reflexive journal proved especially critical (and useful) during data collection and analysis phases. Here, by tracking my own sense of events, I was continuously reminded to check these against research participants’ data. Thus, the journal served as an important check on researcher bias. Finally, the journal allowed me to record my impact on the field and its impact on me.

**CHAPTER 4:****LEARNING AND LIVING AT SELECTIVE UNIVERSITY—****THE MORE THINGS CHANGE, THE MORE THEY REMAIN THE SAME**

In 1988, legendary civil rights activist and Rainbow/PUSH Coalition founder, Jesse Jackson, made his second and perhaps most impressive bid for president of the United States. A then Selective University junior, I vividly recall the excitement and euphoria (among black students, that is) that marked the occasion. Implausible as it seemed to me at the time, Jesse Jackson was making history (much like Shirley Chisholm before him), and black students at Selective were beyond hyped. Perhaps, this historic event signaled a nascent post-racialism. Perhaps, it marked the beginning of the end of being judged by the color of skin as opposed to the content of one's character. Surely, it was reasoned, if Jesse Jackson had shattered the proverbial glass ceiling and been accepted as a viable contender in presidential race, then maybe, just maybe, a broader trend of racial acceptance and reconciliation was on the horizon— Willie Horton political ad debacle and other racially-charged events of the time, notwithstanding.

Learning and living on campus, however, I was soon disabused of my youthful idealism. Indeed, less than a year before Jackson was to make his bid, racially incendiary fliers declaring “open season on porch monkeys” and warning black students to stay in their place began circulating on campus. (Revealingly, these fliers resurfaced the year Jackson announced his candidacy). Then, there were the inflammatory editorials in the student newspaper assailing affirmative action and calling into question the academic credentials of black athletes. Clearly, race remained a troubling issue.

But 1988 was a different time, and a great deal has changed in the intervening years to shape my thinking about race and racial matters. Putting aside for a moment the Obama

phenomenon, one trend brought home over a decade ago upon my return from overseas merits particular attention. Somewhere along the way, white and black students appeared to have found common ground in popular culture, specifically with hip-hop music. In the days of my youth, rap (now Hip Hop) was, for all intents and purposes, unique to the black community. (It would have been odd, indeed, to see white youth connecting to Public Enemy's "Fight the Power," or other popular rap of the day). Today, with the genre having crossed racial boundaries, it is nothing to see young black and white alike enjoying its rhythms and beats. Needless to say, this trend, combined with other observations which seemed to signal changing racial dynamics, set me to thinking: Might race relations on the predominantly white campus reflect this seemingly growing trend of cross-racial connection, albeit on the popular culture front? And, more broadly, how might this and other significant developments over the years translate on the predominantly white campus? For instance, to what extent did race figure prominently in black students' reflections of their time on campus?

To be sure, based on my own personal experiences at Selective University and reading of the literature, I harbored no illusions about race in American society. Still, given the social, cultural, and even political changes over the past few decades, I maintained a cautious optimism. Certainly, I was curious about the experiences of black students today and wondered if they resembled those in Feagin et al.'s (1996) landmark study. I reasoned (justifiably, in my mind) that learning and living on the white campus might be an altogether better proposition than when I was an undergraduate student at Selective. But alas, my hopes proved overly optimistic and a tad premature.

Revealingly, as captured in the field note excerpt that follows, data from this study stand as a sobering and painful reminder that while much has changed, much has, regrettably,

remained the same. Moreover, this revelation came very early in the data collection process, following my first interview with Vida, a political science and African American studies major and 2009 Selective University graduate.

Ok, this is like *déjà vu*! Will we ever reach a time when black students no longer have to defend their right to be on campus? Or be subject to subtle and always demoralizing racism? Vida is certainly one formidable young woman. Looking back, I don't think I would've had the guts to challenge that student's comment the way she did---- and in a large lecture hall? No way! I can't help but be in awe. Not sure how she mustered the courage, but it sure took a great deal of it to do what she did. Still, it's a shame that black students are still being challenged and put on the defensive in this way. (Field note, January 30, 2012)

Vida, a bright and articulate law student, who was completing her last semester at the time of our one-on-one interview, is one of ten voices upon which this study draws to deepen our understanding of black students as they choose, matriculate, and ultimately negotiate their way through the predominantly white university. Like Vida's, the voices constituting this study not only reveal a great deal about the perils and promises of learning and living on the predominantly white campus, but also about those pre-college experiences that shape black students' expectations about life at Selective. Their profiles (see table 1) and stories follow.

Table 1: Interview Participants' Admission and Graduation Year, and Major(s).

Pseudonym	Year Admitted	Year Graduated	Major(s)
Brittany	2003	2007	African American Studies
Craig	2006	2010	Kinesiology/Pre-Med
Eric	2006	2010	Sociology
Jason	2005	2009	Psychology
Keith	2006	2010	Psychology/Pre-Med
Kiara	2004	2008	English
Lisa	2006	2010	Cognitive and Brain Science
Shamar	2006	2010	Business Administration
Sheila	2003	2007	Social Work
Vida	2005	2009	Political Science/African American Studies

## COLLEGE-GOING DELIBERATIONS

*“It was apparent that the life I wanted to have wouldn’t come so easily to me being in (city), going to (hometown community college), maybe not even going to (hometown university). I knew I should set my sights on something bigger.” (Vida, recorded interview, 1/27/2012)*

Senior year of high school was an exciting time for me, as I pondered a future beyond my all-girls, Catholic high school and the all-black, urban community from which I hailed. Though I applied to four schools in all (one of them local, as a contingency in case my application to my three top choices did not pan out) my decision to ultimately attend Selective was a no-brainer: I would follow in the footsteps of Cheryl, my “big sister,” who began Selective three years before.

Cheryl, the big sister assigned as my high school mentor, was a role model par excellence. A senior when I was a freshman, she represented all I hoped to be as a young black woman finding her way in a predominantly white high school. A member of the National Honor Society, and highly regarded by classmates and teachers alike, Cheryl was the consummate star student. Thus, when it was announced that she would attend Selective University—then as now, one of the most prestigious universities in the state—I knew that I would cast my lot likewise.

#### Choosing Selective

Similarly, for the ten students in this study, choosing Selective among the vast array of possibilities, was a no-brainer. In their view, Selective’s appeal lies not only in its educational offerings, but in its prestige and reputation as a top university, as Craig, a graduate of a predominantly black, suburban high school, explained:

I just made a decision on the simple fact...because of Selective’s prestige. Because they had a lot of good majors, and they had a really good reputation, it would be silly for me to go to another. If I wasn’t going to get a full athletic scholarship to a division 1 basketball sport and what not, then I should choose (Selective). That’s how I went about deciding, because of the education. (Recorded interview, 3/10/2012)

Lisa, also a graduate of a predominantly black, suburban high school, also placed a premium on prestige and status, finding Selective's reputation as a top school to be its greatest appeal:

But I wanted to go to Selective, because they said... All I would hear is that Selective is the top school. (Recorded interview, 1/28/2012)

Even Keith, considered "a superstar just for going to college" and initially indifferent to Selective, ultimately settled on the university because "it was the highest ranked school I got into, like the best school" (Recorded interview, 3/23/2012).

In some cases, however, choosing Selective over other options was viewed as a high-stakes decision. In this regard, Vida offered an insightful perspective. For her, a second-generation college student, any college education would not suffice. Rather, the college must be of such caliber that it would provide a "ticket out of the hood." She explains:

It was apparent that the life I wanted to have wouldn't come so easily to me being in (hometown city), going to (hometown community college), maybe not even going to (hometown, less competitive university). I knew I should set my sights on something bigger, like that was my ticket out of the hood, you know, that was my chance to kind of shine and to have a better life. And I didn't see myself having those opportunities so hugely readily available if I had of gone to (hometown, less competitive university), or if I had gone to, stayed in (hometown city) and gone to (hometown community college) for two years and gotten an Associate's degree. (Recorded interview, 1/28/2012)

Shamar, a second-generation college-going student and graduate of a predominantly white high school, made a similar point. In recalling his initiation to college in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade, he made clear that not all post-secondary options are alike:

The only option for us was what college. It was never are you going to decide to go to work first, or even a community college or a two-year vocational training. That was never, ever part of any discussion I had with my parents. So yeah, about 7th grade was when I knew. (Recorded interview, 5/19/2012)

Implicit in both Vida and Shamar's comments is the notion of opportunity cost: attend and possibly forfeit the "ticket out of the hood," or set one's sights higher and have a chance at a better life.

### On Not Choosing a Historically Black College or University (HBCU)

Following my first interview with Vida, in which the theme of black identity and consciousness figured prominently, I became increasingly curious about the role of historically black colleges and universities in black students' deliberations about college. Specifically, I wondered why historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) were not reflected among Vida's choices for college, even though her comments suggested an affinity to such institutions.

Though I, like most of my friends, personally ruled out HBCUs for reasons of cost and distance, I nevertheless regarded them as places otherwise equal to their predominantly white counterparts, and certainly more welcoming and supportive of black students. Indeed, back in my day, HBCUs were highly regarded, viable alternatives to white universities—and very much relevant in a country still grappling with racial discrimination and oppression. However, as Briana's comment that “the real world isn't all black” (Recorded interview, 3/17/2012) suggests, other considerations are at play.

In subsequent interviews, an interesting theme began to emerge. Not only were HBCUs absent from college planning and decision-making, but the reasons suggest that HBCUs may have lost much of their status and relevance. Sheila, a graduate of a predominantly black, urban magnet high school, wondered with friends about the quality of education at HBCUs. In a similar vein, Keith, a product of a mostly black, suburban high school, had this to share when asked about the role of HBCUs in his decision-making:

No. Like my grandma, she's kind of like, she's kind of, you know, from a different generation. So I guess she...I don't know. She has a lot of interesting ideas about race. But she kind of like beat in my head that if I went to a HBCU, it would be like a huge disadvantage, and white employers aren't going to respect the HBCU. Like I know it's not true now, but at the time, that's what I thought. (Recorded interview, 3/23/2012)

Equally revealing and ironic is Briana's comment. A graduate of a predominantly black, urban magnet school, she minced no words:



The only thing I did know was that I didn't want to go to a predominantly African American college or a historically black college, because to me the real world isn't all black. I just wanted to get experiences. I come from a predominantly black city. I wanted to get an experience, you know, mixing in with the Caucasian race. So I applied to Selective. (Recorded interview, 3/17/2012)

For Briana, and also Lisa, who shared a similar sentiment, HBCUs, like their predominantly black high schools and communities, are not the "real world." That is, HBCUs were not sufficiently racially and culturally diverse to compete in a racially and culturally diverse world.

Not all respondents perceived HBCUs as deficient, however. For instance, Kandace, whose family moved from a predominantly black urban community to a predominantly white suburban community when she was in the sixth grade, recounted an initial interest in HBCUs. Having found the transition from an all-black to a mostly white school and community to be a particularly challenging one, Kandace longed to return to her to the mostly black context of her youth. She explains:

Kandace: I thought I wanted to go to an HBCU. I wanted to go to Spelman. I wanted to go to Hampton. I don't know. It came on me like my junior year of high school to go to Selective.

Roz: What made you think about or consider an HBCU?

Kandace: I think at that point, I didn't...I missed the experience of going to school with all black students, and I used to always say that I'm moving back to [urban city] once I finish with college. And my mom would be like, "ok, if that's what you want to do. If you want to go Hampton, if you want to go Spelman, then do it." So I looked into them, you know, and went to the website, even thought about taking a visit. But when I started researching the top universities, Selective was the top university at that time. And so, I'm like, well, I'll just go to Selective. And that's how I made my decision on that. (recorded interview, 3/14/2012)

With Shamar, a similar story emerged. A second-generation twin whose parents were both products of an HBCU, Shamar's decision to attend an HBCU was not without ambivalence. Given his upbringing in a predominantly white suburban community, Shamar wondered whether Morehouse College would be an appropriate choice. He explains in the following exchange:

Roz: Why Morehouse?

Shamar: My dad, he just wanted us to, I think, look into it, because that's... I mean he graduated from an HBCU and, you know, we, being from (Midwest state), we didn't really... That's not so much a part of the culture here, so I don't think I knew anyone going.

Roz: By "part of the culture here," what do you mean?

Shamar: So we're pretty much from an all-white neighborhood. We tossed around the idea of #1: Would we fit in at a school like Morehouse? I think the question was prompted by my dad.

Roz: Tell me more about that.

Shamar: Yeah, so like from his remembrance, the kids that he went to school with fit a different profile than what we fit, you know. And so he wanted to know, I think, for myself and my twin, whether we felt like we'd be comfortable in that sort of environment. (Recorded interview, 5/19)

The ambivalence experienced by Shamar, his twin and father, himself a product of an HBCU, was revealing, and struck me as both curious and ironic, as reflected in the following field note:

How telling that, in this day and age, a bright, self-confident, college-bound black man, one whose father and mother attended an HBCU, would find a predominantly white university more fitting than its black counterpart. Just saying. (Field note, 5/19)

Fitting in was not Shamar's only reservation with HBCUs. Like Sheila, Briana and Lisa, he questioned their competitiveness and relevance in an increasingly diverse and global marketplace. He commented:

I think for me, and I can't speak for my brother, the question was do I feel like, like that is going to help me in the real world. And what I mean by that is, the people that I'm meeting in the real world; they're different genders, different races, come from different backgrounds. And I just felt like...I think at that point, going to an all-male college, you know, 90 or whatever percent African American, Black. I think that was for me probably the biggest reason why I decided to cut that from my list of schools. (Recorded interview, 5/19)

Here, as with Vida before, the notion of opportunity cost emerged as subtext for the choices available to the black college-bound student. In this case, however, the question was not a less selective institution over a more selective one, but a predominantly white one over a historically

black one. To gain the presumed advantage of learning and living in the “real world”, black students forfeited the presumed support and affirmation afforded by the HBCU.

#### Choosing Selective Amid Challenges to Affirmative Action

*“I’m like, guys, they’re not just letting people into Selective with a 2.0 gpa. Like where does that happen? You have to be legitimately smart.” (Recorded interview, Kandace, 3/14/2012)*

For most college-bound students, college-going is a heady time, with a great deal of well-wishing by parents, teachers and classmates. I certainly recall such well-wishing. Unfortunately, I also recall the more discouraging tune struck my high school counselor, a white nun. Despite my respectable grade point average and ACT scores, she expressed grave concern about my decision to attend Selective, suggesting that I would be in over my head. I remember leaving her office dejected and full of self-doubt, a far cry from how I began my senior year. As it happened, I was not the only black student cautioned against applying to Selective. Others, I would soon learn, were also advised to apply to less selective colleges; and almost always, the college suggested happened to be a local one, in a predominantly black urban city.

Unfortunately, such negative, demoralizing experiences were not uncommon among participants in this study. Jason, an outspoken psychology major from a racially-diverse high school in a racially-diverse urban community, recounted a similar experience with his high school counselor, a white female. As in my case, Jason had been advised to apply to a less selective school, one that presumably would be a good fit because it would be attended by several of his classmates. When asked to infer her motivation, Jason was pointed:

Honestly, what I think, what I thought then and what I still think is the case is that she didn’t think I could succeed at Selective. I really think that’s the case. What’s funny is that she’s now my little brother’s counselor, and she kind of said something similar to my little brother. (Recorded interview, 3/24/2012)

As I had over two decades before, Jason sensed the counselor's motivation was racial; that Selective was perhaps too good for someone like him, someone black. Furthermore, the advice was not wholly without impact, as he explains:

So with my counselor, it was kind of unsettling to have her kind of try and steer me away from Selective. I wanted to succeed for that reason. I didn't really necessarily subscribe to what she was saying, but on some level, her alluding to what I perceived as her believing that I can't succeed at the university...it kind of, you know, stuck in the back of my mind. (Recorded interview, 3/24/2012)

Not all negative experiences originated from high school personnel, however. To be sure, friends, classmates and other white high school students were also implicated in dampening the spirits of black students as they headed off to Selective. Perhaps even more demoralizing than Jason's encounter with his school counselor were the experiences of Kandace and Shamar, both graduates of predominantly white high schools. Rather than a cause for celebration, as typically occasions such good news, their acceptance into Selective aroused an intense negative reaction, from friends and strangers alike. With Shamar, who earned a scholarship as well as admission to Selective, the reaction came from a most unlikely source: his closest friends. He explained,

You know, the few concerns I had were when I told everyone that I got in. And I actually told a few people that I thought were friends at one point that I had been awarded a scholarship. That caused a lot of problems, a few problems with people, like I said, that I thought were friends. They basically accused me of leveraging the fact that I was Black to get a scholarship. (Recorded interview, 5/19/2012)

Similarly, for Shamar's twin, admission to Selective was greeted with intense scrutiny and criticism. In his case, however, doubt was cast on his fitness for a high-caliber school like Selective. Recalling the reaction by white friends, Shamar noted:

I don't know if accusing is the right word, but basically they were saying that he didn't deserve to get in, based on what they thought to be his qualifications. So we had to basically cut off 3 or 4 friendships from people that we were fairly close with, just because of that. (Recorded interview, 3/19/2012)

For Shamar, true friends would revel in, not negate, this achievement. And as with Jason, who headed out to Selective with the words of his counselor “stuck in the back of my mind,” Shamar wondered what he would encounter at Selective in terms of prejudice and judgment. Indeed, if friends would cry foul about his admission to Selective, then what would stop strangers from doing the same? He explained:

And I think moving into our freshman year made me realize, like, how real it is, like how it might be here, at a school where there are mostly ... there are mostly white people. And some of them might be, might just see me and think. And they probably don't know. They don't know my qualifications, but just from seeing me, they might have the same perspective that we, that I, personally, don't deserve to be here; that my brother doesn't deserve to be here. (Recorded interview, 5/19/2012)

Like Shamar and his twin, Kandace's admission to Selective aroused intense negative feelings from her white friends. Having attended a predominantly white high school, she was hardly oblivious to racial conflicts and discrimination. Indeed, negative experiences predominated in transitioning from a mostly black grade school to a mostly white one. Still, as she described the reaction of her peers upon hearing of her acceptance to Selective, the shock and disappointment were palpable:

It was really hard. I dealt with a lot of hate. And it was hard for me because a lot of that was during like the affirmative action, like the lawsuit was first like becoming an issue. And I caught a lot of heat from my white and, well, non-black classmates. I caught a lot of heat. They were like you don't deserve to go. A lot of people were feeling like, in my high school, that black people got into Selective because of affirmative action, and not because they were smart. But I always maintained over a 3.7. (Recorded interview, 3/14/2012)

Here, Kandace laid bare a common misconception of affirmative action initiatives: that Selective (and institutions like it) admit black students indiscriminately and without regard to merit. In her view, and as she reaffirmed on many occasions during the interview, Selective would not admit students who were not competitive, be they black or white.

Friends were not the only source of “hate.” As Kandace related, random students also took the liberty of questioning her admission to Selective. On one noteworthy occasion, the random student was not himself a Selective applicant, but the brother of an applicant whose admission was denied. She stated:

So it was obvious that nobody was happy for me. A lot of people came to speak that I didn't even know, like this one guy who was a twin; and his twin sister applied to Selective, and she didn't get in. And he came up to me like... I didn't even know this kid. “Yeah, my sister applied, and she didn't even get in. You got in because you were black. You're not smart, and I don't understand why you got in.” (Recorded interview, 3/14/2012)

It should be noted that Jason, Shamar, and Kandace's experiences were not without a specific context. Like their fellow participants, they applied and/or matriculated to Selective in the midst of a resurgence of anti-affirmation ballot measures. As explained in chapter one, the early 2000s were marked by systematic efforts to dismantle affirmative action, particularly in higher education admissions. As I will discuss and explore in chapter five, the experiences of Jason, Shamar, Kandace and others choosing predominantly white, selective universities in the midst of anti-affirmative action efforts calls to mind Howe's (1997) notion of context of choice, the idea that the context in which black parents and their college-bound students weigh options for higher education differ substantially from that of their white counterparts.

Thus, participants chose Selective primarily for its reputation as a premier public university. For Vida, all colleges were not the same; the college of choice would have to be sufficiently prestigious to elevate her from “the hood.” In addition, Selective could offer what HBCUs presumably could not: a “real world” experience; that is, an opportunity to learn and live within a racially and culturally diverse community. Unfortunately, graduates of predominantly white high schools began their tenure at Selective predisposed to the anti-affirmative action rhetoric of the time, having had negative encounters with their classmates and friends.

And, as the next section details, participants' initial impressions and experiences at Selective proved racially charged.

#### FIRST ENCOUNTERS: MEETING THE PREDOMINANTLY WHITE CAMPUS

*“And then when I started school, I was kind of like...I wasn't feeling it. I was very uncomfortable. And I also felt like... I was also in the residential college at (residence hall) and I was always the only black girl in all of my classes, and that was a complete shock. I was used to being like friends with everybody in all of my classes, in middle school, high school. The jokes, the camaraderie was always kind of black culture, and so I was completely not used to being in that kind of situation” (Recorded interview, 3/3/2012)*

At the end of my second grade, following the recommendation of her co-worker, my mother transferred me and my brother from a predominantly black to a predominantly white parochial school. Despite being surrounded by a predominantly black city, Queen of Angels (pseudonym), was far from welcoming and hospitable to black students. There, I was no longer the bright, promising student that St. Paul's had imprinted in my mind, but rather a black token to be tolerated. Queen of Angels was where I got my first taste of racism.

Thus, having experienced the “real world” from 3<sup>rd</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade—my high school was also predominantly white—the transition to Selective was a fairly uneventful one. For me, and I unwittingly suspected others, Selective would be an extension of what I had grown accustomed to at predominantly white schools: a kind of second-class citizenship. Surprisingly, it had not occurred to me that Sheila and others hailing from predominantly black high schools would experience what she described as “culture shock.”

#### Culture Shock: Black Meets White

Indeed, for some black students, the first encounter with an overwhelmingly white campus brought significant culture shock. In Sheila's case, not having had many cross-racial experiences before Selective, the shock was especially intense. She explained:

My very first experience was at summer orientation, and that completely kind of blew my mind. It was my first time being there, especially overnight, and it was really just a completely different environment, in terms of the racial/ethnic make up. And the cultures were so completely different from anything that I was used to in (hometown city). And I was really sort of uncomfortable. I think that was the first time that I really kind of felt like, you know, wow, this is going to be really different. It's not going to be like high school and like I anticipated it being. (Recorded interview, 3/3/2012)

For Sheila, the culture shock experienced extended beyond orientation through her first year.

During the group interview, Sheila reiterated the discomfort and challenge of adjusting to a predominantly white environment:

Even when people weren't saying things specifically like racially motivated to me, I just felt uncomfortable being the black girl in the class. And if anyone said anything about (hometown city), I just kind of got on alert, like what are they saying; are they saying it in a negative way? Do they know I'm from (hometown city)? Do they think I'm a certain way because of that? All of these thoughts would kind of go through my head without anybody really even saying anything negative. So that was probably my biggest challenge, just dealing with what I referred to as culture shock earlier. (Recorded group interview, 6/23/2012)

Although Sheila was aware that attending Selective would mean transitioning to a predominantly white context, she admitted to not having given much thought to the implications:

I had thought about it (predominantly white), probably not a lot though, honestly. I had thought about it because I had other friends who were going to black colleges, and we had that conversation about the fact that, you know, this is a predominantly white university and that it's going to be different. But I didn't really think about it that much. I kind of thought about the fact that I had a ton of friends who would be going there with me, and I just kind of assumed, yeah, it's going to be ok with my friends. (Recorded interview, 3/3/2012)

Unfortunately, experiences like Sheila's were not uncommon. However, for Craig, a graduate of a predominantly black, suburban high school, and sibling of a Selective graduate, race was but one aspect of culture shock. It was the conspicuous absence of black men in the classroom that most troubled him. He explained:

When we'd have discussion with like psychology or sociology, and that's when I would I see it more, more apparent, the fact that I am the only black male in this class. At least with the 300 room full of students, you know, they're only paying attention to the lecture... There's not that much... Nobody's really paying attention to what's going on



around them. But then like a 25-30 room-filled classroom, during the discussion time, that's when it really became apparent to me that, wow, I'm really the only black male in this class. That made me feel kind of like, "Wow." It didn't like, like I never felt necessarily intimidated, but I don't think there was ever a day when I didn't necessarily think about it. It always came to my head like, "Wow, I'm really the only black male." And I feel like there was more of an eye on me than any other of my classmates, I guess, who were white. (Recorded interview, 3/10/2012)

Noted here is Craig's emphasis on being black and male in the Selective classroom, which I captured in the following field note:

What an eye-opener, my interview with Craig! I mean it doesn't take a rocket scientist to know that black men and women would experience campus life differently, and have a different perspective on things. However, I couldn't help but be struck by Craig's several references to being a black male at Selective. It was never being black or African American; it was always being a black male. I found this to be curious. And though Sheila spoke of being the only black woman in the class, it was not expressed as often or emphatically as when Craig spoke of being a black male. I wonder if this will be the case for the other male participants, this seeing oneself in terms of race and gender, not simply race. (Field note, 3/10/2012)

Like Craig, Jason's self-consciousness reflected the conspicuousness of race and gender in the predominantly white classroom. He noted:

I'm the only black guy in a lot of classes! There would be a lot of times, I guess in discussions, I would be more so the only black guy. I mean there were classes where there would be 300 people in the classroom, and there would be 2 or 3 black guys in the class. (Recorded interview, 3/24/2012)

Eric, by contrast, related a different experience adjusting to Selective. The adoptive child of white parents, and a graduate of a mostly white but racially-diverse high school, he had grown accustomed to being one of a few black males in predominantly white settings. Reflecting on his high school experience, he commented:

Culture-wise, I pretty much had the same demographics... Like in all my classes in high school, I was probably 1 of 2 black males. So when I got to Selective, it was pretty much the same thing.

Though Eric may not have experienced shock in the way that Craig and Jason had, it is worth noting that he, too, found race and gender to be significant. As I will discuss in chapter five, data

show that for black males, more often than their female counterparts, race and gender are equally salient.

Significantly, not all experiences of culture shock were black meets white. For instance, what most struck Jason, a product of racially-integrated, semi-urban high school, who enjoyed many interracial friendships in high school, was the phenomenon of “self-segregation,” or the seeming social compulsion to gravitate and stick exclusively to one’s own racial group:

So it became increasingly important... So, as I said, you know I came from a school where I had probably just as many white friends as I had black friends. So the whole like, keeping to your own and all that jazz, as far as like only hanging out with black people, or something along those lines, it was kind of new to me, and it was kind of forced on me. (recorded interview, Jason, 3/24/2012)

Despite his initial “shock,” Jason theorized that self-segregation is a perfectly natural phenomenon on the predominantly white campus. He offered the following insight:

Because I think everybody, for the most part, kind of falls back into shells. Once you come to school, you naturally regress, and I think for a lot of people, they regressed to people who looked like themselves. (Recorded interview, 3/24/2012)

In a similar vein, Briana, who came to Selective seeking to expand her friendship network across racial lines, expressed surprise by what she characterized as the overt, in-your-face black consciousness of a certain black student organization. She noted:

It was kind of weird for me. I remember... Like black Welcome Week, like what the heck? It was crazy. They gave us shirts that said like (Selective motto). And like why do I always want to put it out there that I’m black . Like I already know I’m black, and they know I’m black. So it was kind of weird to come to Selective and really have to stick together. I could hang out with everybody. (Recorded interview, 3/17/2012)

Culture shock was far from a universal experience. Lisa, a graduate of a predominantly black, suburban high school who chose Selective in part for its diversity, was brimming with excitement at the possibility of cross-racial friendships. As she described her hopes as a first-year student at Selective, her enthusiasm was palpable:

And when I got to Selective, there were so many different people. There weren't just white people; it was like everybody, people from different countries, and I was looking around at all the people I could meet. (Recorded interview, 1/28/2012)

Kandace, too, had a favorable first impression upon her arrival on campus. Like Jason, Kandace enjoyed many interracial friendships prior to Selective; and despite having negative encounters with white students her senior year, she came to Selective undeterred and with an open mind.

The excitement as she recounted her experience at orientation was evident:

At orientation, that's who I connected with. Were there 4? There were 4 black girls. There were 5 of us at orientation. There were more, but the 5 of us connected. And we did everything with each other those 3 or 4 days, and we all graduated together, which was nice. And we had a ball. It was almost like we knew each other when we met each other. (Recorded interview, 3/14/2012)

Still, the culture shock experienced by her black peers, particularly those from predominantly black high schools, was not lost on Kandace, as she speculated:

If I didn't go to high school in (her hometown city), I think I would've had an experience similar to my peers that were African American, who went to school in (predominantly black, urban community) and came to Selective and had culture shock and didn't really know how to deal with being around people of other cultures. I didn't have that issue because I had all kinds of friends. I had friends in every race at (high school). I think I had like...I did hang out with some black people, but my closest friends were Chaldean, Phillipino, you know. So for me, it was like, ok, you know, like I was used to that. (Recorded interview, 3/14/2012)

Here, it is worth pointing out the irony in Kandace's recollection. On the one hand, she began her time at Selective having had many fulfilling, interracial friendships. On the other, what made her orientation, and thus her first impression of Selective, so memorable is the connection made with the four black women, begging a question: Had there not been four black women with whom to bond, would her first impression have been so memorable?

Academic Shock: Black High School Meets the White University

*"The workload was so much; I couldn't take it. It was just so much, and I always felt, like the second semester, like I was stupid. I got to the point where I felt like I wasn't smart enough to be there."* (Recorded interview, Lisa, 1/28/2012)

Unfortunately, the shock of black meets white, or culture shock, was only part of the story. In many cases, black students experienced what could best be described as academic shock, a phenomenon whereby academically talented black students, most of whom hail from highly regarded, mostly black high schools, experience the shock and adjustment of encountering the academic side of the predominantly white university. Accustomed to being at the top of her class, and regarded as the “best and brightest,” Sheila described her “shock” as follows:

And that was also when we took a lot of our placement exams and things for like languages and things like that. And I kind of...I think I had always been very confident in myself academically, and that was the first time that I think I sort of started second-guessing my, you know, abilities. I had 5 AP classes on my course load my senior year of high school, and I'm thinking I'm going to college and do what I've always done. And then I'm taking placement exams and I'm like, yeah, I'm thinking I'm going to place out of all of these intro level classes and I haven't, I didn't place out of them. And so it was really just kind of like, you know, it shook my confidence a little bit (Recorded interview, 3/3/2012)

From Briana, also high-achieving, a similar picture emerged. In her case, however, she went against the advice of Selective counselors, who suggested starting with an introductory course.

She explained:

My orientation for college was on a Tuesday. So then I went up there, enrolled in all of my classes and picked them out. And I had counselors there tell me, “Ok, you shouldn't mix these two classes; you shouldn't do calculus.” They said start with pre-calc, and I said, no, I'm starting with calculus. And I was very adamant. I'm starting with calculus because I had pre-calculus, and I was very smart, and I knew math very, very well. I was going to take calculus first semester. Got up there and I didn't know that calculus. (Recorded interview, 3/17/2012)

The shock was not confined to orientation and placement exams. Sheila, Briana and others were equally disoriented by their first-time experiences in the classroom. Sheila recounted her experience first semester, and the shock of being in a class where she felt she did not quite measure up:

I was used to being in a classroom and feeling really confident and answering questions and speaking and doing all of this stuff, and got there and I really just felt like... I think the one thing that really stands out about that first semester is ... I was in the residential

college at Selective, and they have a huge focus on language, and that's one of the reasons I chose the residential college. But I was in a classroom with other students who, I mean, by far were way beyond me in terms of their level and their abilities, in terms of speaking and understanding, and I just... I just completely clammed up. I felt like I was always slower understanding what the teacher was saying. I felt like I was never able to kind of phrase things, and you're immersed in the language, and so it's really kind of sink or swim. (Recorded interview, 3/3/2012)

So intense was the disorientation that Sheila and others wondered if Selective was the right choice, such as when she reflected on her first year and reaction to the combined effects of both culture and academic shock:

Sheila: The one thing that I always remember from my freshman year is that I tried to leave campus as much and as frequently as possible.

Roz: Why?

Sheila: Because I was very uncomfortable. I just felt completely out of place. (Recorded interview, 3/3/2012)

Similarly, Briana began to question whether she really belonged at Selective:

They (white students) were definitely smarter than me. I was...I felt like it... That one boy in the calculus class was always getting A's. My mother suggested I ask him for help, and I said, no, I can't. I didn't know what he would think of me, maybe that you don't belong here. (Recorded interview, 3/17/2012)

Even Keith, self-described as the smartest kid in most of his high school classes, was not immune to the disorientation accompanying academic shock:

I guess always growing up, I was always like the smartest person in my class, and I just, it was kind of like a pride or ego thing, to be smarter than the next person next to me. I realized once I got to Selective, I'm not the smartest person in class anymore. (Recorded interview, 3/23/2012)

As Lisa, Sheila, Briana and Keith's comments suggest, academic shock, because it engenders intense feelings of self-doubt and inadequacy, may be more grievous than its culture shock counterpart. For the first time in their academic careers, high-achieving black students of predominantly black high schools not only ceased being "the smartest kid in the class," but perhaps worse, they ceased being recognized as smart at all, especially in comparison to their

white counterparts. Keith, who began as an engineering major, reported being in awe of white students who could party all night, yet still manage to fare well in class. He explained:

I don't know... It was kind like, "Oh, my God! What's wrong?" So it was just like, I don't know. It was just kind of like I felt like I was trying my hardest, and the best I could get was like a B+, whereas my other classmates, they were out partying and stuff and getting A minuses and As in these classes. Like mostly white, like you know the kids in the dorms and stuff, and you know I felt I was working 5 times as hard as they worked, and still not being able to match them. (Recorded interview, 3/23/2012)

Indeed, a recurring theme in the interviews of graduates of predominantly black urban and suburban high schools was the disjuncture between their high school preparation for the college and the realities of learning on Selective's campus. In their attempt to make sense of and account for what they perceived as gaps in their knowledge, several students openly questioned the quality and rigor of education afforded at their mostly black, albeit "magnet," high schools, as

Briana noted:

I was really scared, because I didn't know what I was doing. And for me to come from [high school] and to get into Selective, I was mad. I felt I was not prepared for college. Like I felt like my high school did not prepare me enough.

Keith, a graduate of a predominantly black, suburban high school, struck a similar note, in both the individual and group interview. He noted in turn:

I had AP Calc, like probably after my freshman year. I was kind of pissed at (high school). I'm like they didn't prepare us for college at all. And I took like all AP classes, for the most part, when I was a junior, and senior year. Except for English, AP classes didn't help me at all. Like my friends from different schools, more prestigious schools, like they'd be like oh, I just took regular this or that class, and they would have more of a background in their non-AP class than I would have in my AP, honors, intensive class. It kind of made me, like, jealous, mad that I didn't go to a harder high school. (Recorded interview, 3/23/2012)

Well, I felt the same way, like academically... Like when I got to the harder classes my freshman year, like it was like harder than anything I ever had to do at [high school]. Like I had AP Calc like my senior year at [high school], so I thought I'd be cool with that. But it was like totally different. It was like really hard, like learning how to study versus like... I don't know, like in high school like just being smart could probably get you an A... You pay attention in class and do the homework and you get an A, because that's all you had to do. Selective was like just doing the homework and paying attention in classes

wouldn't be enough to get a good grade. You have to know everything in and out... If it's a problem that's hard, you have to do it a thousand times. Like I was never challenged like that in high school, so it was kind of an adjustment. (Recorded group interview, Keith, 6/23/2012)

Lisa, also a graduate of a predominantly black, suburban high school and forewarned by recent Selective grads of the potential for academic struggle, registered surprise at the extent of the disconnect. She explained:

But I would talk to some people who graduated, and I would ask them, "Like how is Selective, like I'm anxious" And they were saying that (high school) didn't prepare them for it. And it's like... I even took an AP Calculus class at (high school). I'll put it this way: I took AP Calculus in high school, and I had to take pre-calculus in college—and pre-calculus was difficult. What did I learn in AP Calculus? And the same thing with Spanish. (Recorded interview, 1/28/2012)

It is worth pointing out that while black students were adamant in their critique of their high schools, they expressed satisfaction with their overall experience, most notably the support of high school personnel. Several students spoke appreciatively of the teachers and counselors that guided and nurtured them throughout their high school years. Likewise, they credited their high school for instilling a sense of racial pride and confidence. These observations notwithstanding, Craig lamented what he considered to be an inherently unfair deal for black students of predominantly black high schools. Here, he speculated as to why white students have a comparatively easier academic transition than black students:

I wonder how they have it so easy. And I don't know why I didn't bring up, but my roommate and I, we would always talk about this, and like I really felt that if we were a little bit more prepared at the high school level, Selective would be like so much easier. But because we came...we weren't as prepared, we had to work 10 times as hard as some of our white students. (Recorded interview, 3/10/2012)

My reflection summarized my growing concern:

I see that not much has changed with respect to working twice as hard. Growing up and having attended predominantly white schools, my black classmates and I were repeatedly counseled—by family, mostly—to work twice as hard as our white classmates, in hopes of being regarded as equal. But unlike Craig, my transition from high school to college was fairly uneventful. Though hardly the superstar student, I felt fairly prepared for the rigor.

I had also resigned myself to the fact that I and my black peers would never rise beyond a sort of second-class status at Selective. For Craig and others of predominantly black high schools, well, I can only imagine. (Field note, 3/10/2012)

Overall, participants' sense of both their suburban and urban high schools' lapses regarding their educations were very clear and seemed grounded in issues of predominantly black K-12 schools.

#### Summer Bridge Program: Buffering Culture and Academic Shock

Among other fortuitous events senior year, Selective lost my application — a seemingly unfortunate event that turned out to be the proverbial blessing in disguise. Had my application not been lost, I may not have had the good fortune of participating in the summer bridge program, an alternative admission program aimed at acclimating promising students of color to university life.

For Craig, Eric and Shamar, the summer bridge program served as a kind of initiation and early buffer to the culture and academic shock experienced by non-summer bridge participants.

Craig found the connections and friendships made to be especially helpful. He noted:

I'm glad I had (summer bridge program) because I got to know a lot of freshmen that were going to be there in the fall; so I had a lot of connections. And I guess the difference... I would say, was like I came from a pretty much 90% or above African American high school. I don't want to say it was culture shock—for a lot of my friends it was culture shock. (Recorded interview, 3/10/2012)

Eric, too, felt that the summer bridge program gave him a decided edge. In his case, the opportunity to take classes in advance of fall semester was an important benefit. With more than a little pride, he commented:

It was exciting, you know, kind of did feel like we had an upper hand, just a little bit, because we knew how to operate, like the systems, you know. That was cool, and it definitely made us feel more comfortable, more at ease, because we had a couple of classes in the summer as well. (Recorded interview, 4/21/2013)

For Shamar, a graduate of a predominantly white high school whose participation in the bridge program was voluntary, the experience was a mixed blessing. On the one hand, it afforded him



the opportunity to gain friends and “get on the right foot socially.” On the other, the program created an illusion about social and academic life that was not borne out by experience. With great insight, he explained:

Got on campus, most of the kids were black. Enjoyed it. Still have a lot of friends still from that program. However, (summer bridge program) gave a little bit of a false impression of what the rest of it would be like— 80 percent were black. So it’s like you go from that environment to the dorm freshman year, which had 4 or 5 other black people... So (summer bridge program) made me, so I knew that classes weren’t going to be easy, but (summer bridge program), I felt, was easy. And then once I got into real classes I think, I don’t think it helped me, because I didn’t study for (summer bridge program), and I did really well. And so when I came out, and it’s like, this is college and I don’t have to study that much more than I did in high school. And I was studying to get into the business school, because they admit you after your freshman year. So I was taking like Econ 101, 102. I think I took Econ 101, some sort of math, and like 2 easier classes to help my gpa. And I remember I got an F on my first Econ exam. (Recorded interview, 5/19)

During the group interview, Eric echoed this concern. In his view, the program’s curriculum was not sufficiently rigorous, leaving students underequipped for the more exacting fall semester course load. He commented:

[Summer bridge program], that was really like a powder-puff course. But like the classes weren’t... A lot of my high school classes were harder than those. They could definitely up that category if they want the college kids to, you know, really take it seriously. (Recorded group interview, 6/23/2012)

Thus, even the summer bridge program seemed an opportunity lost, in its deficient preparation of intelligent, hard-working black students for the rigors of academic life. In fact, the issues at Selective (and its white students and many white faculty and white staff) were primarily related to a lack of academic preparedness among the black students, a point I return to in a subsequent section.

As participants detailed, black graduates of predominantly black high schools—urban and suburban—experienced intense culture shock in acclimating to Selective’s campus. As Craig and Jason’s accounts suggest, the shock was most acute for black men participants, who felt

especially underrepresented and thus conspicuous in mostly white classrooms. Significantly, academic shock emerged as a concern for graduates of black urban and suburban high schools. Sheila, Briana, Keith, and Lisa were among those commenting on the self-doubt engendered by academic shock, and questioning the quality of their high school education. Lastly, the mostly black summer bridge program was noted for buffering both culture and academic shock. In Craig's case, the friendships born of that experience helped to facilitate his adjustment to campus. For Shamar and Eric, the program's academic component, while less rigorous than non-campus courses, nevertheless supported students' academic goals.

Unfortunately, while taking classes and living in the dorm post-orientation and summer bridge program, the depth of campus climate issues grounded in race became evident in participants' interactions with white students.

#### PROBLEMATIC EXPERIENCES WITH WHITE STUDENTS

Another aspect of being black on Selective's campus concerns the often difficult experiences with white students. Indeed, negative encounters—in the classroom, residence hall, and public campus spaces—were cited as the greatest source of angst and frustration for black students in this study. Significantly, many reported having to contend with white students' negative racial assumptions regarding their admission to Selective, their ability to thrive and excel academically, and other stereotypical ideas about black people.

#### Contending with Anti-Affirmative Action Views/Rhetoric

*“Yeah, it would come up in classes sometimes. We would discuss it. Some people... I've had discussions with some classmates who felt strongly that I was there because of affirmative action and because... I think the perception is that, from what I experienced, is that you're here because you are black, not because you are smart. And that bothered me, because it's like this is Selective. Selective doesn't let in people who are not intelligent.” (Recorded interview, Kandace, 3/14/2012)*

Significantly, of the many negative assumptions white students held about black students at Selective, the most persistent and offensive is the idea that black students have an unfair advantage over comparable white students because of affirmative action. Indeed, several students indicated that white students openly opposed affirmative action, and thus the black students they felt it unjustly benefitted. Shamar recounted his experience with anti-affirmative action sentiments in a sociology class, which called to mind his experiences in high school:

I know I was taking a sociology class. That definitely, my freshman year, provided some of my negative experiences at Selective. I don't know how we got into it, but we had a discussion in class one day about like, whether like... One kid, I remember, he's talking about how some blacks are taking his friend's spot—admissions, basically. Like he didn't think it was fair that kids whom he knew had lower gpas...From what he was saying, his friend had like a 33 on the ACT, and like a 4.0 and didn't get in. He was certain that there were black students here that had less than that. So what I said...I was in class. I just responded. I was like, "There are also several white people and Asian people and Indian people that also probably got less than the qualifications you described, so I'm not sure how you could direct that to one group of people."And then that like ignited even more widespread class discussion, and I just remember... I don't think any of the other responses were what I viewed as ignorant as what he said, but it just kind of got to me, mostly because of what happened in high school, with the friends there. (Recorded interview, 5/19/2012)

As noted, experiences such as Shamar's are not without consequence. In his case, the affirmative action debates being waged in the classroom and elsewhere on campus conjured up memories of senior year, when white friends accused him of leveraging race to gain Selective admission and a scholarship. He commented:

Yeah, (ballot initiative) was not fun for me, because it made me sort of relive everything that happened in high school. I'd hear people say (anti-affirmative things)... They might be in the (popular campus space) having a conversation about it. (Recorded interview, 5/19)

Kandace, who had also been subject to the anti-affirmative action views of her high school classmates, echoed this experience:

But the affirmative action thing really hit home for me, because of what I experienced in high school. And it was hard because people blamed that on me getting in. (Recorded interview, 3/14/2012)

Vida was also subject to the anti-affirmative action sentiments of a fellow white student. In her case, however, the affront occurred not in small discussion groups but in a large lecture hall, with well over two hundred students. In recounting the incident, Vida revealed that while she could only hear, but not see the, male voice assailing affirmative action, she nevertheless felt compelled to speak up and rebut the offending student. Emphatically, she related the following:

And I remember telling him... I said I graduated from high school with a 3.8 gpa, and I'm here on a full academic scholarship. And I said for you to think I have not earned my way into this university... It completely blows my mind that people like you think like that, and I didn't, and that's because my mom raised me in a world where everyone's equal, and as long as, you know, you do your work, you succeed. (Recorded interview, 1/27/2012)

When asked how she could summon the courage to not only defend her place at Selective, but to do so in the context of a large lecture hall, Vida pointed out that this incident coincided with an emerging black awareness and consciousness. She continued:

And my last comment before I sat down, because I was angry, was I deserve to be here, and there's no reason why you or anyone else or even myself should feel like I don't, or I have to prove to you. The last thing I said to him was "You speak of affirmative action as if it were a handout to black people, but your mother and sister, they benefit more from affirmative action than I ever will." I had just learned it. This was the second semester in my first year, and so I'm getting a little power, a little black power, because I was going, you know, to (black student organization) meetings. I felt so proud of myself after I sat down, because I silenced the room. I commanded that attention, and I got it. And I got that respect. And it wasn't even that I wanted that respect. I was just so angered, without even thinking I shot my hand up and wanted to respond. (Recorded interview, 1/27/2012)

For Vida, then, speaking out was about exercising personal agency, and the effect was empowering, as she described:

I remember feeling smart, one of the few times that whole year feeling smart in the classroom, when it comes times for discussion. I felt just as smart as the next person, even though and despite the fact that I was a black skin on a predominantly white campus. And from that point on, I didn't have a problem speaking in class. You need to know how to be so comfortable in your own skin to be able to talk about certain things when you get around people who don't look like you. In (hometown city), I talked in front of big groups and, you know, church and community events and all different things, but I was around people that looked like me, so I was comfortable. (Recorded interview, 1/27/2012)

Noted in both Sheila and Shamar's comments is the decision to speak up and challenge anti-affirmative rhetoric. Though I will explore this further in chapter five, it is worth noting here that, owing to the prevailing anti-affirmative action rhetoric, black students are regarded as people who do not belong on Selective's campus. Perhaps worse, they are compelled to defend and justify their right to belong. Thus, attending Selective came with greater opportunity costs for black students.

Such anti-affirmative action affronts were not confined to the classroom, however. Keith, a then engineering major, related an incident between a black female friend and a white female engineering student, which occurred in a public space outside of the engineering residence hall. Still incredulous, he recounted:

[Ballot initiative]? Yeah, this brought back... This white girl... It was funny, because she's like a white girl. She's an engineer, and she had some sign saying vote yes on (ballot initiative). I worked hard to get in here; you should too. It was something like that. And then like my black friend says, "Yeah, you're a woman and you're an engineering major." She said you might have gotten in without affirmative action, but you know women are not as represented in engineering as men are. So my friend was trying to explain, she's trying to explain to this girl that affirmative action just isn't about black people, that like you're a woman in engineering, so part of the reason you got into engineering is because you're a woman. And she said no, I got a 3.5 and blah, blah, blah. And then my friend was like, "Do you think they like just let anybody in because they're black?"

Residence halls were also sites where anti-affirmative action views were openly expressed and debated. Sheila, then a residence hall peer advisor, recalled the tension generated by discussions on the anti-affirmative action ballot initiative. Although trained to lead these dorm discussions in a neutral and impartial way, Sheila revealed the difficulty of maintaining composure in the face of such strong and vehement opposition to affirmative action:

I was actually a [residence hall peer advisor] when that [ballot initiative] was going on, and it was our job to hold educational forums with students in the res hall. We were not to take any stance one way or the other, because we were a resource to all students. We could not take any political stance, so as to not alienate any student. And so, for that reason, we could not explicitly say one way or the other what we personally felt, you

know, our views. We were to kind of facilitate these types of conversations with the students. And so, I participated in a number of those, and pretty much every single time, it was very difficult. A lot of times, they would match us up so that we were not facilitating, so that we were facilitating with someone who was different from us, in terms of ethnicity or gender. But I always felt like, you know. I always felt uncomfortable, because as a facilitator, it would be difficult. I don't think staying unbiased was a problem for me, but hearing it and knowing that these are things that specifically and personally affect me, and that this person holds these very, these particular views about something that is so personal to me. I mean it was just always difficult. (Recorded interview, 3/3/2012)

As noted previously, anti-affirmative action views were pervasive, often extending beyond the classroom and into personal and more public spaces. Such comments also tended to originate from anonymous students. However, in some cases, the anti-affirmative action views derived from more familiar sources, even white students considered friends, as Sheila explained:

One of my best friends, her roommate was a white female and they ended up having to switch rooms because they could not get along. But her roommate had made several comments to her about, just very blatantly saying that she was there because... my black friend was there because of affirmative action. This is during heated conversations and arguments with her. And we both knew the girl very well. And so, even in her relaying it back to me, it just reinforced to me that there are people here who think that about me. There are people here who look at me and think that... I may never have an argument with them, where they actually get so off-kilter that they say it out loud, but that they're thinking it. And that I never know who's thinking it. I never know, cool as I can be with you, because I got along very well with her roommate. I considered her a friend, and it was really was just kind of like, if she would say that to my black friend, she would say it to me. She thinks it of my black friend, she thinks it of me. (Recorded interview, 3/3/2012)

Similarly, for Jason, the revelation that a trusted friend held antithetical views on affirmative action, and by implication the black students that purportedly benefitted from it, came as a great disappointment. He recalled:

So there were people who were like, "You're my first black friend," like you know, would just come about and say it. And so those people, we ended up getting really close. And then, after [ballot initiative] passed, I remember somebody saying, "You know what, I voted for [ballot initiative] to pass," and I was like, "I thought we were friends." I was mortified and I was like, "Why?" And so it was difficult to reconcile like having a friend... I think I was personally offended because I thought that her having a higher consciousness than most white people have, that she would understand the necessity to still kind of level the playing field for people. And I think a lot of people with that

discussion always thought that affirmative action was giving somebody else like a head start--which is funny, because it's actually countering the head start that, you know, the last 300 hundred years or so has given people. (Recorded interview, 3/24/2012)

That affirmative action was such a personal and deeply felt issue for most black students was clearly evident. As a result of the anti-affirmative action rhetoric, to oppose affirmative action was to oppose African American students, which seemed the only plausible interpretation given that the prevailing rhetoric was that *every* black student was a product of affirmative action, and thus had admission qualifications regarded as less than.

### Racial Stereotyping

*“There was this really, really obnoxious guy in my [residential college] language class my freshman year. And we were like cool and would talk occasionally, but he came up to me one day (and this was actually the last time I interacted with him) and did this really, this whack ‘Yo, yo, yo my sister’-type thing, trying to dap me up or something. And I was just like... I just looked at him and walked away... To even make that type of assumption that that’s how I speak to my friends, and furthermore that that’s how I would speak to you. I say hello to my friends when I see them. (Recorded group interview, Sheila, 3/3/2012)*

In addition to the anti-affirmative action views openly expressed by their white peers, black students also found racial stereotyping to be part of the learning and living experience at Selective. Specifically, white students assumed that black students were not as academically engaged and competent, were confrontational or violent, were loud and “ghetto” and, in the case of African American males, were more athletically than academically-inclined. Importantly, white students also harbored negative, stereotypical assumptions about the large urban community from which many in this study hailed.

#### *Academic Incompetence*

Perhaps a function of their anti-affirmative action views, white students at Selective failed to see black students as academically competent and on par. Craig, a pre-med student, spoke to this perception as he related an incident in a physics course.

And even the students, like they're already on guard: "Oh well, this guy is probably not going to say anything worth hearing, or that has any substance." I remember I was in a physics discussion. This was like a study group, and this girl...They separated us into groups, and this is one of my first days, and we're just going over assignments, and each group had a question to complete. And while doing the question, she answered the question and I said, "No, I actually think it's this because this, that and the other." And she just kind of ignored me, and then said, "No, I don't think it's that," kind of ignoring me, like you don't know what you're talking about. I'm thinking it's funny. I can't wait until the professor goes over this because she's going to be wrong. And I was right at the end, and she didn't say sorry or anything, but it was kind of just like, wow. (Recorded interview, 3/10/2012)

When asked to reflect upon this experience and speculate as to why the white female student felt compelled to ignore and discount his input, Craig offered the following insight:

I guess it just goes back to like stereotypes. Obviously in the classroom, the stereotype is that a black male isn't as educated as a white male or an Indian male, and so, therefore, there's no point in interacting with them if you are going to focus on your education, if you're going to do well at Selective, when it comes to studying for exams and what not. However, if you want to have a good time, and this goes to the stereotype of black guys as rappers, as entertainers, actors and what not, then it makes sense for me to hang out with them. (Recorded interview, 3/10/2012)

In another instance, one also involving Craig, Keith, and Eric, the academic incompetence stereotype operated on a more subtle level. Here, Craig recounted this encounter with an obviously intoxicated white coed:

I remember walking back from a party, and we were walking back, and this white girl was kind of drunk. And we were talking, we were going back and forth, my friends and I, and she goes, "You guys, so where are you guys from?" "What do you mean where are we from?" "It's like where do you guys go to school?" It's like, "We go to Selective; we stay in (residence hall)." She's like, "No, really?" And it was like, "What do you mean by that?" You guys, like you guys go to (neighboring, less competitive university), and I was like, "What?" (Recorded interview, 3/10/2012)

Though both examples imply that black males lack sufficient academic competence (read: are not good enough to be at Selective), the former reveals another side of this coin. From Craig's perspective, while black males may not make for suitable study partners, they can certainly be counted on for a good time, an observation upon which he felt compelled to elaborate.



But it's interesting when I moved to like central campus and when I was at (residence hall). I didn't actually have any bad experiences either, but I think it was because, like, (residence hall) and (residence hall), with the black males being athletes and stuff—not only athletes, but it's almost the cool thing to hang out with black guys. It's really interesting. I really don't know necessarily know how to explain it, but if you're like a white girl...So, for instance, they would always want to go out to parties. Whenever they would stop by our rooms, you know, to say, "Hey, how are you guys doing," come in and we'd interact with them. We'd watch tv or something like that. It was just like the cool thing to have a black friend, just to hang out with black dudes. But as soon as it came to academics, it was like, you know, we really think there's not value for us almost in a sense, when interacting with white students or what not. (Recorded interview, 3/10/2012)

Or, as Keith put it:

I always think, like with a fraternity, particularly when white people know that we're in fraternities, they're like, "Can you step for us?" Like that's all they think we know how to do. "Yeah, teach me how to Dougie." (Recorded group interview, Keith, 6/23/2012)

Thus, racism seemed not as confrontational in the residence halls and social spaces as it was in the classrooms. However, Craig and Keith described how the black-as-entertainer stereotype proved to be quite prevalent, which certainly defines how the use of race stereotypes about black men further denied their academic credentials and reinforced the anti-affirmative action rhetoric.

### *Loud and "Ghetto"*

Jason recalled being conscious of another stereotype held about black students at Selective, one that perceived black males as loud and "ghetto." He explained:

I'm walking down the street, and people who literally like if you're walking with white friends, they'll look at you; but if you're not or if you're walking with other black people, they'll kind of like walk around you. I mean I've had experiences where I've felt that... So if I'm being loud with a group of white kids or mixed group of kids, it's perceived completely differently than if I'm being loud with a bunch of black people, because there are a lot more stereotypes with regards to black people. Yeah, I think a lot of people have perceptions of black people being loud and ghetto, especially for people who haven't had many experiences with black people. (Recorded interview, 3/24/2012)

Jason's observation of racial and group dynamics is revealing, particularly the view that when black students are in their own company, having a good time, they are perceived as loud and

“ghetto.” Yet, when these same students are in mixed company, the stereotype appears to not be at play. As I wrote at the time:

Jason is such the keen observer... When Blacks deign to stick together, however, they invite suspicion and are perceived as loud, rabble-rousing and otherwise out of control. “Ghetto” was not part of the lexicon when I was at Selective, but the connotation, one that is uncultivated and unruly, was definitely a perception [Jason noted]. (Field note, 3/30/2012)

Here, as Jason suggests, the same behavior becomes marked as “okay” for a racially-diverse group, but “ghetto” for an all-black group. Again cultural insinuations emerged that harked back to black men’s lack of academic credentials, sentiments that flow from and reinforce the anti-affirmative action rhetoric.

*The Angry, Violent, Criminal Black Male*

Another stereotype stigmatized black males as angry, potentially dangerous and violent. During our interview, Keith recounted an experience he noted as typical:

I remember one time I was walking down (campus street) with (friend), and this white girl liked clutched her purse and walked, not to the opposite side of the street but like she was trying to avoid us. And my friend was like, “Buga, buga, buga.” He did like that to her, but she just liked walked away looking embarrassed. (Recorded interview, 3/23/2012)

For Keith and other males in this study, the projection of the angry and violent stereotype is a uniquely black male experience. Speculating as to why this is the case, he commented:

I don’t like the use of the term ghetto to describe the way black people dress, but I guess if a black girl dressed ghetto, like no one is going to be afraid of her, like they might like look down on her or something but they’re not going to be like “Wow, we can’t let her into our party because she might start shooting us,” you know. But if a black guy dresses hip-hop or ghetto or whatever, then it’s sort of like, we have to be afraid of you; whereas if I were wearing a Polo or something, they ignore me, you know. Yeah, like I’d be on the bus with one of my other black friends and like there would be an open seat next to us and it would be like the guy would be afraid to sit in the seat in between and stuff like that. Yeah, it would be like you know, like people would be acting like we were waiting for someone to give us a reason to kick their ass. That would be a lot of people’s perception. People were like afraid of us. (Recorded interview, 3/23/2012)

Though Keith believes that much of the stereotyping is the result of dressing “ghetto,” other accounts suggested that black male students were subject to stereotyping irrespective of their attire. Jason’s observation was a case in point:

Like I said, I’ve been around a group of guys that were different—some white guys, some Asian guys, a couple of black guys—and I’ve seen how people interacted, how people like walked around us or what not or just, you know, if we’re in the middle of the street or if we’re on the sidewalk, how people would say excuse me and walk and what not, versus black people. I’ve literally seen people walk across the street. I think a lot of people, like I said, associate black males with criminals, and so for some of them, that is all they are able to see, because that is what’s portrayed in the media and what not. And I think for me, when I’m in a group of black males, I’m just a big threat, potentially that’s 5 threats or 5 potential criminals, versus if I’m with 4 other white people; it’s just a group of kids. (Recorded interview, 3/24/2012)

As Jason’s experience suggests, black males are subject to stereotyping by virtue of their race and gender, not their wearing apparel. And here, again, we see nuance in the stereotype. Black males in mixed company are given the proverbial pass, not perceived as threats. However, black males in their own company are regarded as potential criminals. Such stereotypes work with added force to call the academic credentials of black male students into question.

#### *Black Male Student As Athlete*

In both individual and group interviews, the black male as athlete, not student, emerged as a pervasive stereotypical view held about black males on campus. As the following accounts revealed, black males, regardless of physical build, living quarters or other indicators suggesting an athletic affiliation, are routinely asked about athletics and whether they are athletes. Still incredulous, Jason recounted the following:

Oh, so this was funny, because a lot of students thought I was an athlete, which is hilarious. I’m 5’8”. I’m not like athletically-sized. You would think... People were like, “Oh, do you play football, are you on the basketball team?” “And after a while, I would be like, “Yes.” Especially if I’m wearing a hoodie or something like that, and people would be like, “Oh, I think he’s an athlete.” I mean people would literally ask me like multiple times, because they assume that for me to black and to be on Selective’s campus, it’s probably because I’m an athlete. Being a black male, because black females, there are more black females than there are black males, and I mean athletics for women maybe

are not as popular. So I think for me as a black male, that is something that's unique to black male-hood, or at least more dominant in black male-hood, where people just naturally assume that about black men. And I mean that was pretty much commonplace. We would talk about it in class and laugh. (Recorded interview, 3/24/2012)

Similarly, Eric added succinctly:

That was the most extreme, but it's like a couple of other things. Like people ask if you're on the football team, and you're like 5 foot 6. (Recorded group interview, 4/21/2012)

For Craig, coincidentally a star athlete in high school, the black male as athlete stereotype reinforced his view that black males gain greater acceptance in the social realm than they do in the academic. With characteristic insight, he noted:

Like, for instance, I would play basketball every Friday. This kind of goes with what we talked about earlier. I would play basketball every Friday, and that was a stress reliever for me. And I would interact with the white people, and I was like that guy, because I was pretty good at basketball. So, you know, they want to hang with me. So I had a lot of white friends when it came to that. But when it came to other things, I didn't have as many white friends. I can't honestly say that I really studied with any white friends, when it came to organic chemistry, or when it came to any of the other sciences. That's just the way it is. (Recorded interview, 3/10/2012)

Again, not lost on Craig or the other black males is the subtext message of the athlete stereotype: the black male is better suited for the basketball court or football field, not the classroom. Eric echoed this sentiment when he defended against a common assumption: that he is on campus for any reason other than to pursue his education. During the group interview, he stated:

I mean the sports thing. Even if I didn't have any Selective stuff on, or if I'm like in a mixed atmosphere, they'd say, "So like do you play any sports?" "No, I 'm solely here for academics." I don't know; it's just weird. (Recorded interview, 4/21/2012)

For Craig, Eric and other black males in this study, the pervasiveness of black male stereotypes conveyed a clear message that they do not belong on campus, unless the purpose is social or athletic, a message resulting from and consonant with the prevailing anti-affirmative action rhetoric.

*Stereotyping the Predominantly Black City*

In some cases, stereotypes were projected onto the demographically black city from which many Selective students hailed. Sheila recalled such stereotyping in an environmental course, noting:

I had an environmental course, and we were talking about...I can't even recall exactly what we were talking about, but I know someone made the comment that if people, and I don't necessarily recall if it was like in (hometown) or it was a particular area that we were studying, but I know it was a predominantly Black area that our course pack was focusing on, or that this particular article was focusing on, and they made the comment that if they would just keep their lawn cut and keep trash out of their yard, then, you know, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. This was a student who made the comment that if they would just clean up their yard, if they would just, you know, keep their grass cut. (Recorded interview, 3/3/2012)

In another incident, a white male classmate queried Sheila about a hometown street, made popular by a movie. She recounted:

Well, I can recall on one of my breaks from my Spanish discussion. There was a white guy from California, and we hadn't spoken pretty much the whole semester, and he leaned over and asked me, trying to figure out how to put it... Then he said something like, "Have you ever been on [popular hometown street], and is that what it's really like?" And it was around that time, I think, the movie [popular hometown street] had come out... probably a few years before that or a couple of years before that, and he knew I was from [hometown city] probably from, you know, the conversation that I had engaged him in class. And I was kind of like, I was not into it. I didn't want to have to answer it. I was kind of like, you know, it was just an irritating question to answer... I feel a lot of people have ideas about [hometown city] and people who are from [hometown city] and people coming from all over the country have these views of people in [hometown city], black people in [hometown city].

Roz: What views?

Sheila: Probably what they've seen on TV, the movie [movie]. I guess there are some people who have a particular impression of what it's like...One big ghetto, that it was one big... I don't know, a city with a lot of people who were uneducated, or that it was something that would be glamorized with rap stars. I don't really know what people ... I get the sense that people had negative impressions of [hometown city] and people from [hometown city], and the students on campus who are from [hometown city]. And I don't know if that was accurate or not. I don't know if that was really what people's impressions were, but that was sort of how I felt. And so I didn't want to have to answer questions about what [hometown street] was like. (Recorded interview, 3/3/2012)

Similarly, Briana was unsettled by the stereotypes projected onto her hometown. The offense taken was palpable as she recalled one instance:

I had a lot of stereotypes about [hometown city], period. And I remember an Asian person... She had said something negative about [hometown]. And [hometown], at the time, I don't even think it was as bad as it is today, but I really didn't like you talking about the city I was from, when you never really visited. (Recorded interview, 3/17/2012)

In both commentaries, the suggestion emerged that not only is demonizing the predominantly black city tantamount to demonizing the predominantly black people in that city, but also that every black student would somehow be an authority on the whole of the city, a large multi-faceted urban area with far more variation neighborhood to neighborhood than is the case for city in which Selective is located.

#### *Other Racially Offensive or Insensitive Experiences*

Though not all negative encounters with white students involved anti-affirmative action or stereotypical views, they were nonetheless regarded as racist or racially offensive. For instance, Sheila recounted a disturbing incident involving a white male hall mate, who donned a wig and referred to himself as a "wigger." She noted:

A guy who lived like a couple of doors down from me in (residence hall) came out of his room wearing like this wig. It was kind of like a curly kind of like wig. He was a really tall white guy. A bunch of us were in the hall way, and he said, "Check it out, I'm a wigger." I had never heard that term, and I got really, really upset. It was clearly racial. (Recorded group interview, Sheila, 6/23/2012)

In Lisa's case, the racial offense was not by an anonymous hall mate, but someone she regarded as a close friend. Furthermore, the event occurred during a difficult period in Lisa's life, when she felt that "all white people were racists." Describing the event that precipitated the end of her friendship with a gay white male, Lisa stated:

And freshman year, I had an incident with a ...He's a white male who's gay, and we were really, really close. And I had a scuffle with my parents. This was winter break, freshmen year. I went to Meijer's and I had Kool-Aid, and I had other things in there but I took everything out, and Kool-Aid was in there. He walked into my room, which is

not... I mean that's normal, and he was like "Hey, you have Kool-Aid. So you fit the stereotype now?" And that just made me like... He was joking, but it was just like I don't really need that right now. (Recorded interview, 1/28/2012)

Though admittedly a joke, Lisa nonetheless took exception to her friend's racially offensive reference. In another incident, one involving a dispute between her and her roommate, Lisa recalled the nonchalance of her residence hall student advisors, which she felt was racially-motivated. She gave the following account of events:

So I helped her move all her stuff in, because she came late, like after the move-in dates. Everything was ok, then I just got really irritated because I felt like she was just disgusting, to put it simply. Like her clothes were everywhere. She would leave out tomato soup, and it would be mold all over it, and it's like, "Clean it up." And so we got into a little argument, to say the least, and I just told her I don't want to live with you any more. I left for a football game, and I came back and my mirror, like a door mirror, and it was broke on the floor, and I'm like, "She didn't break my mirror. I don't think she did that." So I went to the front desk and I told them that I think my roommate, that we had an argument this morning and I think she broke my mirror. And they were like, yeah, she came in. She was really frantic, she was crying, she didn't mean to do it. She was just really upset with you, blah, blah, blah. So I just stood there and was like, "Ok, even if she was upset, does that give her the right to break any of my things?" Now if I were to do that, I feel like it would be a different issue. And I told them that "I feel like you guys are not taking this seriously because I'm black." (Recorded interview, 1/28/2012)

Briana recounted an experience that she and her black classmates found to be offensive:

Like I had this one class... I guess, maybe little subtle hints...But this one class, it was my English writing class. And so this one girl said, well, "Why do black people perm their hair." No, no this one girl, who was black, wrote a paper, and she wrote a paper about why she permed her hair...and, you know, because she wants it to be easier to manage and things like that. And then this white girl commented in the class and said, "No, black people perm their hair because they want to be white." (Recorded interview, 3/17/2012)

In some cases, comments by or encounters with white students were viewed as more racially insensitive than offensive. For instance, Shamar, then a resident advisor, recounted a racially-tinged incident involving a white hall mate. He described the event as follows:

I was a [resident advisor] at [residence hall]. So, in my hall, there were people who would put up Obama signs, and there were people who would put up McCain signs. And I remember one night...And I had an Obama sign up, and a guy came through our hall and like vandalized everyone who had Obama on their door, and would just write different

things, nothing that I remember being like racial...I mean he didn't say the N word or anything like that. It was just...Obviously, this kid put a lot of time into vandalizing everything that was put up. So I found out who it was and had a conversation with him. And I said, "Like I understand that you are, you know, into politics and you have your beliefs, but you crossed the line when you vandalized everyone's property." And he was like, "Are you accusing me of being racist. I'm not a racist." And I said, "I don't believe that to be the case. I'm just telling you that what you did, there are a lot of issues I have with it." (Recorded interview, 5/19/2012)

For Vida and other black females, racial insensitivity was exemplified in the many inquiries about her grooming regimen. She explained:

I remember when I was in the dorms, and I used to wear my hair in a bob. And so I would have to wrap it at night, and I remember one of my hall mates asking me, "Why do you do that; why do you tie your hair up at night?," but she said it in a way that...She was asking me, in general, why do black women wear this fabric on their hair at night...I had to educate her...That was one of the things I struggled with at Selective. And I remember talking about [female African American studies professor] about this, my frustrations with feeling like I have an obligation to educate every non-black with whom I come into contact at this university. That was what I struggled with, my question to [female African American studies professor] is what happens when we just want to be black, when we just want to exist and want to take care of our own damn business and do our own thing. You know what? It is not my obligation, my responsibility, nor my fault that you are deprived of an education in which you didn't come into contact with black people. (Recorded interview, 1/27/2012)

Noted here is not only Vida's frustration at fielding such questions, but of also having to educate her white hall mates on black culture and experience. Sheila, who recalled similar questions from hall mates and others curious about black students, held a similar view. During the group interview, she stated:

I don't have any problem with the idea of educating someone. The bigger issue is that you have the rapport with me to ask me the questions tactfully, and that we have a relationship prior to asking. I'm not just the black educator; I am your friend and you are asking me questions and we are learning about each other. And then the other side to it, too, is that when we are in situations where we are the minority, say at Selective, and we don't know something about quote unquote white culture, we're seen as ignorant, or we're seen as "You should know this or this is how things are, you're not as developed or as academic or as whatever as you should be." But when they don't know things about our culture, it's ok. Like why would I know what you do with your hair, why would I know what this pick is for. I mean, you know, it's ok for you to ask all of these questions of us and for us to educate you about ourselves, but we just have to kind of find our way



in your world. I think that's part of the bigger issue, the way that I saw it. (Recorded group interview, Sheila, 3/3/2012)

For Sheila, the frustration at having to educate white students about black culture was compounded when the inquiring student had not established sufficient rapport with black students. Also insightful was her suggestion that a burden exists for black students that does not appear to be the case for white students. Whereas African Americans on Selective's campus must be versed on white culture, lest they be perceived as being "ignorant," white students need not be aware or educated on black culture. Recalling the racial dynamics in a sociology class, where affirmative action and other such topics were openly debated, Jason echoed this sentiment:

I think probably a little more so for the white people than the black people, because again, the black people, we have to know about white culture but the white people don't have to know about black culture. (Recorded interview, 3/24/2012)

Although encounters with white students were viewed as largely problematic, black students' were not entirely devoid of fulfilling cross-racial relationships. Eric, for instance, recalled his friendship with a white roommate, Tony:

My roommate was white. His name was Tony. He was a cool, cool dude. It's funny: They're always curious about black people. Like I have a ritual in the morning; I always put lotion on my body. And he's like, "Why do you do that?" My best friend growing up was white, and he asked all of those questions before Tony ever did. And I don't fault him for being curious. You can kind of get from the tone how they ask...And what this university has taught me is that a lot of things aren't racist; they're just ignorant—they don't know. Unless it's like with a very derogatory tone or something like that, then I wouldn't raise an eyebrow at it. (Recorded interview, 4/21/2012)

Noteworthy in Eric's account is his assessment that such questions are more indicative of good-natured curiosity than racism. He expressed similar ambivalence over affirmative action, which he attributed to his unique upbringing. During the group interview, he commented:

I was kind of on the fence, because I saw both ways. But just my upbringing and my certain circumstances... I didn't feel like I needed to, I mean I could've fought for like the majority or the masses, but me coming from a background where I was raised by Caucasian parents, I had ample resources. If my parents want to send me to private school, they could have. I mean I can see both ways. (Recorded interview, 4/21/2012)

*Characterizing the Campus Environment*

Not surprisingly, given their negative experiences with white students, black students in this study described the campus environment as variously tense, divided and reminiscent of a bygone era, and white students as ignorant, racist, and entitled. Jason's characterization of the campus environment during the anti-affirmative action ballot initiative was typical of the participants interviewed. He observed:

Jason: I think for a lot of minorities or what not, especially around like the whole [anti-affirmative action ballot initiative] thing, I think it was really heated. And I think for a lot of the white people it wasn't...It didn't even show up on their radar, because they didn't have to know anything about it.

Roz: Please explain.

Jason: I mean that's pretty much white culture. When you are in the dominant culture, you don't have to know about the nuances of the minorities. I mean that's pretty much 101. And so I think they didn't really care because they didn't have to have any vested interest, because it didn't really affect them. (Recorded interview, 3/24/2012)

Also typical was Keith's assessment of the racial dynamics on campus, which he described thusly:

I mean it's kind of like everybody sticks to themselves. Like the Indian kids hang out with the Indians, the Asians hang out with the Asians, whites with whites, blacks with blacks. (Recorded interview, 3/23/2012)

During our interview, Vida commented that the heated exchange over affirmative action opened her eyes to a kind of racism she had not expected and assumed was a thing of the past:

It completely blows my mind people thought like that and I didn't. And that's because my mom raised me in this world where everyone's equal and as long as, you know, you do your work, you succeed blah, blah. I didn't know there were people in this country in 2005 that had never seen black people. I didn't know that there were people that still have these racist thoughts that were in [Selective's state]. I assumed they were somewhere down in Kentucky, Georgia, there in the backwoods of Mississippi or Georgia somewhere, where they keep to themselves. I didn't think that people... and I thought racism was just black or white; it was either extreme or nonexistent. I didn't know that, you know, racism, it's a continuum, and there are people all along that continuum. (Recorded interview, 1/27/2012)

Similarly, Briana commented:

...and I remember Facebook beginning when I was in college and becoming big, and when the proposal passed ending affirmative action, it was this one white girl who emailed a black male student and said, "You all got up here because of your color." And then it went around mass email to a lot of the organizations. Everyone knew who this person was, and it was just...I really didn't see the hatred or I didn't notice it or I didn't know people thought like that until then. I was like, "Wow, that was so mean for somebody to say that, and to say that knowing, well...I don't know if they really knew it would become something as big as it was, but it was definitely, "Wow, discrimination and hatred and things like that; they still exist" (Recorded interview, 3/17/2012)

Sheila reached a similar conclusion, following several instances of negative encounters with white students:

I think mostly among my group of friends it was more so like, "Wow, we're really seeing what the country is really like now. Like this is what it's like." We have been very sheltered being from schools where everybody's black, except for one student. I think it's kind of like, "Wow, we're seeing what it's like; we're really seeing what white people think of us." I mean in [hometown city] it was kind of like when you... I knew about racism, and I heard people say things about white people or police or whatever. But I don't think it was like, "Wow, this goes on in this day and age" I think it was like, "Wow, we didn't realize that this is what goes on, and this is how it is, and now we're seeing that." (Recorded interview, 3/3/2012)

As these participants' examples of racial stereotypes and displays of insensitivity toward racial differences suggest, life at Selective proved an eye-opening experience. Having arrived excited to be among the elite high school graduates, to be thought (at least in the black community) to be among the elite in the entering freshman class at Selective, participants found these notions of themselves as highly qualified college students challenged at almost every turn. Participants' dreams and hopes for a future where they might become a respected part of U.S. society were being challenged. The world was not *their* oyster, as they had earlier believed.

Participants revealed how as black students they often had negative experiences in interactions with white students. Specifically, black students had to contend with the anti-affirmative action views of classmates, hall mates, and other students not in their classes or dorms. For Shamar and Kandace, such rhetoric called to mind similar experiences in high

school. Though most students felt silenced by anti-affirmative action rhetoric, Vida and Charles mustered the courage to challenge their classmates' views and defend their right to be on campus.

Racial stereotyping emerged as another concern. White students' comments and actions gave the impression that they saw their black peers as academically incompetent; angry, violent, and criminally-inclined; and more athlete than student. Likewise, white students saw predominantly black urban areas as filled with blight and "folks too lazy to tend to their lawns." Significantly, black men bore the brunt of racial stereotyping.

Black students also noted other ways white students demonstrated racial offense and insensitivity. Sheila recalled the incident whereby a white male student donned a wig and referred to himself as a "wigger." Black women participants took exception to the questions concerning their hair and grooming regimen, especially when sufficient rapport had not been established between the two parties. Students also commented on the unfairness of having to educate white students on black culture.

Given the pervasiveness of anti-affirmative action rhetoric, racial stereotyping, and other offensive or insensitive conduct, black students came to view and describe the campus climate campus as tense and polarized, and white students as arrogant, entitled, and racist.

And, in such a climate, participants suffered from the effects of learning and living with anti-affirmative action rhetoric and stereotypical views expressed by white students.

#### NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF ANTI-AFFIRMATIVE ACTION RHETORIC AND RACIAL STEREOTYPING

*"This is one thing that I kind of struggle with in terms of speaking up and not worrying necessarily about how I would be perceived. " (Recorded interview, Craig, 3/10/2012)*

As noted, being black on Selective's campus meant contending with the anti-affirmative action rhetoric, stereotypical, and otherwise racial views and actions of white peers—views and actions that were not confined to the classroom but also expressed in residence halls and public spaces on campus. Not surprisingly, black students reported being negatively affected by these experiences. Specifically, beyond their sense of anger, frustration and even despondency, students commented on the psychological toll exacted by learning and living on Selective's campus, evidenced by their struggles with self-doubt and the pressure to assimilate and represent the race. Significantly, self-sabotage was also reported as an effect.

#### Self-Doubt and Fear of Speaking Up

Among black students in this study, feelings of intense self-consciousness, and the resulting fear of making one's voice heard, were not uncommon. In Craig's case, the hesitation to express and articulate his ideas in the classroom was rooted in his fear of potentially confirming stereotypes about black academic incompetence. Discussing his trepidation, he stated:

And so I guess that's probably what held me back from raising my hand and having a question, because all eyes are going to be on me. And I already felt like all eyes were on me, so if I were to raise my hand and say something, you know, it's going to be even worse, because I'm already black; I'm like the only black person in a room of 300 students. For me to raise my hand and have something to say. I just really didn't want all that attention on me. Or even a 25 or 30 discussion class...I'm really trying to get out of that, that whole mode of thinking. It's almost like a self... I forgot what the psychological term is called, but because of the stereotypes that people have for you, you almost play into that. I forgot what it's called. But that's kind of how I felt when I would even think about participating. I don't want to mess up and say something and people are really going to think like this dumb black guy or something like that. (Recorded interview, 3/10/2012)

Sheila, who "was used to being in the [high school] classroom and feeling really confident and answering questions and speaking and doing all of this stuff," echoed this sentiment. In her case, the anxiety was particularly acute when classroom discussions centered on race:

I got so tired of feeling uncomfortable and of feeling like, ok, you have to say something; you haven't said anything in class today, you have to say something, you have to like participate, and then kind of constantly second-guessing myself... Okay, but, you know, I don't want to sound stupid, or I don't know if, you know, how that's going to be perceived. I just got sick of the constant dialogue in my head, of having to kind of, you know, figure out what I was going to say and if it was going to be appropriate or intelligent. (Recorded interview, 3/3/2012)

Elaborating on this point, she continued:

I mean each time having that knot in my stomach...And a lot of times earlier in like the first couple of years of college, I either did not respond or I would brush it off, and a lot of times it would be...I would be very angry, but really not know how to respond to it. I wasn't used to having to respond to comments like that, and so I just, I didn't want to make a scene. I didn't feel comfortable enough to kind of call a person out, but then I also felt guilty and ashamed that I didn't call people out and that I didn't say something back when people made comments like that. (Recorded interview, 3/3/2012)

Shamar revealed his fear of speaking up in his business school classes, where he felt especially inhibited. He observed:

I remember that being the case quite a bit in the business school. Before then, sociology and stuff, I was definitely more free with what I was saying. But I feel like because of the students that I was with in the business school...It was very competitive and it just...I really held back quite a bit, I think, because I didn't want to say something that would make them think like, "How did this guy get into the business school?" And I felt at that time that people had...When they would see me, they would think that, because I was black. It didn't have to do so much with the gender; it was just the fact that I was black... I thought would make people, a lot of the white people, ask themselves when they saw me, "How did this guy get in?," and that's where the pressure, I think, came from. (Recorded interview, 5/19/2012)

Importantly, the self-doubt and intimidation experienced by black participants in mostly white classrooms was not unfounded. During his interview, Shamar recalled an incident in which he observed the critical, disapproving gaze of white students upon a less articulate black female classmate who deigned to speak up. He described the experience as follows:

I remember this, that sociology class. It was my freshman year, and I remember there were two of us: me, and then there was a black female. And I forget what public school she went to, but she was from a (large urban school district) school. And we were very different, I mean as far as our backgrounds, how we articulated things, and I think how people perceived us. So she would say things, and I would almost want to jump in to help her, because I would look at other people eyeing her in sort of like a very skeptical,

critical way, because she would articulate things not as eloquently or as ...She wouldn't use as big of words as some of the other people in class used. And I think for the most part when she would say things, she was really speaking from her experiences, and no one else in the room, no one else in the room probably experienced them. And I don't think most of the kids in the room understood them...And I just remember a lot of times she and I...I feel like she would do the same for me. (Recorded interview, 5/19/2012)

Shamar recognized that white students appeared more critical of the African American woman student, judging her less articulate and eloquent. Unfortunately, this was not news to me, as I had a similar experience as a Selective student, which I reflected upon in the following field note:

I am most struck by his experience in that sociology class, with a fellow black, female classmate, the one he felt white students perceived as less articulate. Perhaps the reason it resonated so was because I experienced something similar in undergrad. I too noticed that black students who differed from whites in their diction and manner of speaking were subject to more scrutiny than blacks who spoke the "King's English." As Shamar noted, his classmate spoke from her experiences, which, because they likely differed from those of her white classmates could have potentially enriched class discussion. However, because her speech was deemed suspect as "black" talk, whites seemed not to appreciate what she had to say. Here again, prototypes about race (here, racialized speech) conferred a sort of belonging on some blacks which was denied other black students. (Field note, 5/19/2012)

### Representing the Race and Assimilating

The fear of speaking up in class was also linked to black students' concern that their words and deeds would not just reflect on them as individuals, but on the black race as a whole, as Shamar explained:

As I start to think about it more, it did affect it in this sense that ...I feel like I did feel the need to represent the race and myself, but mostly the race, in a positive way. I think that may have actually restricted me from really saying anything in class. Now that I think about it, I probably, I do remember like formulating things to say that I thought were insightful, that I thought would be beneficial to class discussion. But not knowing what someone's response would be to that comment, I decided to withhold it from that conversation. (Recorded interview, 5/19/2012)

For Shamar and others, the pressure of having to represent the race was not confined to the classroom. In his case, the pressure to conform one's speech and dress such that they reflect

positively on the race was also in evidence in other spaces where white students outnumber blacks. Elaborating on this point, Shamar noted:

And I also felt, when it was close to those experiences as far as times, the want and need to prove myself more in experiences outside of class. Like I feel how I dressed, like how I would talk to people. Like I remember I would be very cognizant when I was talking with my black friends, if we were surrounding by a group of white people, because I didn't want to...I was definitely conscious about their perceptions...And so the way I would normally talk to my friends and not care, so be very loose with what we were saying—and like I said, have our inside jokes, and kind of like our slang. I feel like I would change up if I saw a group of white people approaching. Sometimes I remember even saying things to my friends, like, “Calm down, be a little bit more quiet.” (Recorded interview, 5/19/2012)

Here, Shamar not only tended to censor his talk and adjust his appearance as he felt the situation dictated, but also to impose similar restraints on his black friends. He continued:

...And I think it was directly related to some of those negative experiences, where like I felt the need to prove myself or even like represent... I sometimes felt like I was representing the entire race, like I was very aware of the fact that I might be someone's first time interacting with a black person, and that would sort of change how I would talk to them, how I would act with friends in front of them. So, yeah, I think it was more so of an issue outside of class, even at parties and stuff. I remember not inviting certain friends, because I knew that they would act a certain way with me, and I would act a certain way with them, and that might turn mostly white people off, because of how we're acting and their not being used to that. (Recorded interview, 5/19/2012)

In a similar vein, Keith recalled adjusting his style of dress in an attempt to avert stereotyping.

He explained:

...Like I dressed like, I don't know, I guess more “hood” when I was younger, you know. Like now, I don't wear my clothes as baggy and I don't wear shirts that are as loud and stuff like that. My freshman year, you know, I wore my Cartier's everywhere, and, you know, like looking back on it, I might have looked ghetto to somebody or whatever, but it's just like at the time, I felt like, out of place sometimes, I guess. I mean, and it's just like, like I don't know if it was being at Selective changed me to dress more conservatively and stuff, or, I don't know, if it's just I grew up, but it's like when I used to dress like that and stuff, like people would kind of look at me like, “Ooh,” like the one girl said it, “Like you don't go here, like what are you going here on campus” I guess they thought I was from (nearby urban city) or some (large urban city) thug, hanging out or something. But like I don't know if I was just like I quit noticing as much, or I started to dress more conservatively... By the time I was a junior or senior, either I didn't notice it or they weren't stereotyping me, one of the two... I don't know if it was me getting



older or me getting tired of people looking at me crazy... I kind of like I sold my glasses, I started wearing tighter clothes. (Recorded interview, 3/23/2012)

In some cases, the psychological effect of dealing with racism defied easy definition or categorization, as with Keith, who explained his coping strategy as follows:

It was sort of like any incidents or things that would make me mad or stuff... It's like when stuff bothers me, I'm good at blocking it out. So it's just like... There'd be times when I felt out of place like this or that, but it's like I didn't really let it weigh down on me. And I can't remember a time when I was sitting in my dorm room moping about being, you know, looked at funny. Every now and then, it is more like something would piss me off, I'd be mad for 20 minutes, and go back to my bed. (Recorded interview, 3/23/2012)

#### Withdrawal/Self-Sabotage

In addition, Shamar revealed an effect that he characterized as self-sabotage. In his case, the negative experiences and racism encountered in the classroom compelled him to withdraw from potentially beneficial relationships with white students. He noted:

A lot of it turned me off. But I think in some capacity, I used it as an excuse, as opposed to try to overcome it. For me it was like... I just couldn't... Like when I would explain to people why I wasn't doing well, I would use it as an example. And I would probably use it more as a crutch than I should have. That's what I remember in class, at least from my time at the business school. A lot of great professors, a lot of really smart students. It's just that some of those negative experiences, I think, turned me off in a way that didn't allow me to use those professors and the rest of those students, who were actually nice people, in a way that was beneficial. (Recorded interview, 5/19/2012)

Interestingly, Shamar also noted his failure to take advantage of academic resources geared to students of color, fearing that involvement in such programs would further stigmatize and subject him to the judgment of white peers. He explained:

I was scared of people finding out that I was in this program that helped me get in [business school]. They might look at me like, "Oh, he got in because he had help from this program." I think it was partly a racial thing, partly an ego thing, but I was just... Even with people that were in the program with me, even with them I felt a little odd about it. I was almost embarrassed because they know how I got in. So I feel like all the help that was available, and I didn't really... I knew that it was available, but I didn't want to use it because of the fact that I didn't want people to perceive that my success or admission to the program was a result of that help. (Recorded interview, 5/19/2012)

For Sheila, coping meant leaving campus as often as possible, a strategy she found to be both unsustainable and counterproductive. She commented:

But yeah, it was anger, frustration, it was annoyance at that I didn't particularly do anything about it in that time. I typically just vented to friends. But that was part of time when I really felt like I don't like white people. I went through this whole phase of like I don't like white people; they are very ignorant and they don't, they're very judgmental, and they don't understand a lot, and I don't like them, and I don't want to be around them. And so that's why I left campus a lot. I either came home to [hometown city] or I went to [nearby university]. I had friends who went to [nearby university] and I just felt very comfortable there. Yeah, or I would have my friends from [nearby university] come over to [Selective], and I would kind of hang out with them the whole weekend. But I tried to get away from campus as much as possible. I was just really upset at the level of ignorance and just constantly feeling uncomfortable...I didn't want to go through college leaving every time I could. I wanted to have that enjoyable college experience and stuff. (Recorded interview, 3/3/2012)

In Lisa's case, the consequence of withdrawing was more social than academic. She explained:

I withdrew from socializing with people that whole, like freshman year. I just stopped talking to people...I think even if you were black, they wondered like where did I go. I just stopped talking to people. I was in my own little bubble, my own little shell--like I don't want to talk to anybody. I felt like everybody was out to get me, and I don't know why, I don't know where it came from. I withdrew. I had to focus on me and my grades went up, but then junior year came and I realized I lost all the friends that I made because I stopped talking to them for a whole year. (Recorded interview, 1/28/2012)

Not having other strategies for coping with the realities of the campus climate, participants limited their interactions with other students, both socially and academically, often turning within as a way to focus on their own goals.

Participants revealed a wide range of negative effects that resulted from anti-affirmative action rhetoric and racial stereotypes on campus. Craig, Sheila, Shamar and others discussed how they grappled with self-doubt and often feared speaking up in class. For black students, the predominantly white classroom was described as variously tense and intimidating, given white students' views on affirmative action and the stereotypes held about their black classmates. Additionally, students also commented on the compulsion they felt to self-censor and assimilate when in the company of white students. Often, as in Shamar and Keith's case, the strategy was

employed in an attempt to deflect attention away from black students, whose ways of speech or dress or actions signaled their distance from white ways of life; and by deflecting attention and self-censoring, they hoped to avert stereotyping. Even so, Shamar expressed regret at having succumbed to the pressure to not only censor himself, but his friends.

In such a campus climate, participants developed strategies for dealing with the challenges of learning and living on Selective's campus.

### PERSEVERING AT SELECTIVE

*"Sometimes, I think if I didn't do [predominantly black, social student organization], I probably would have been stumbled, probably would've never come back, because that first semester was enough to stumble and not come back. Just having a good support system was important."* (Recorded interview, Briana, 3/17/2012)

Like Briana, quoted above, I too wondered what my fate might have been without the experience of the summer bridge program, the solace and support of friends with whom I could vent, or the involvement in both a leading black student organization and a multi-racial, anti-racist organization, which provided a safe, nurturing space for me to freely express myself. Similarly, students in this study drew upon an array of mostly or exclusively black support systems, on and beyond campus, to help facilitate their connection to campus and ensure their ultimate graduation from Selective. Specifically, friends and family, academic and social student organizations, and faculty and staff of color were cited as key sources of social, cultural, and academic support. Significantly, in several cases, black students also found support among white faculty.

#### Friends and Family

In interview after interview, participants discussed the importance of friendships to their overall well-being. To be sure, beyond the camaraderie, friendships with other, like-minded

black students served as an outlet for and validation of the frustrations of learning and living on Selective's campus, as exemplified in Kandace's account:

Yeah, we did talk about that [affirmative action], because a lot of my friends went to [predominantly black, urban school district] or like [predominantly black, suburban school district] public schools, so they were in schools with other black people. So I would have an opportunity where I would talk to them about like, talk to them about what happened my senior year, and why it [affirmative action] was important to me (Recorded interview, 3/14/2012)

In a similar vein, Shamar recalled comforting a distraught friend after a racially-charged exchange in a business class:

And what hit home for me was...There was a class, and the discussion was on whether or not as a CEO of a pharmaceutical company we should distribute drugs for free to a country in African that was plagued by some sort of disease. And we were the only company that had a cure to it...So I just remember in the class, people were like, "It's not our problem. We should stay away from it." Or, I remember sometimes they were like calling this group of people like, I don't know if it was 'It' or 'Them,' but however they were saying it, it was like making me real uneasy. I remember one person at least refer to Africa as a country. I remember just being really turned off. And I didn't raise my hand that class period, but I talked to one of my black friends who's in the business school. She's actually from...I don't know what the country is, but she was born in Africa, and she was basically like crying. Like she held it in until she got out, but she couldn't believe what was being said. (Recorded interview, 5/19/2012)

Though not citing a specific example, Jason, too, found his friendship network to be a space wherein he could feel free to be uncensored and enjoy the company of fellow black students:

I think more so than other dorms, there weren't a lot of like black people whatsoever. So whenever we were like doing dinner or lunch or something like that, there would be at least like 5 black people and we'd be really excited. So we would sit there for hours and we would just talk and we would just hang out and what not. And then if somebody would come, and we were like oh, black, yeah, another one. And so we would all sit together and hang out for the most part. We would all hang out and what not, which is just really cool. And I think it kind of bonded us, because we were, you know, we knew that we were the only black people in the dorm, for the most part. We were the only black people in the dorms. (Recorded interview, 3/24/2012)

As Jason described his friendship network, he reaffirmed his earlier point about the tendency of black students on predominantly white campuses to gravitate to those of similar backgrounds and experiences, and with whom they could feel comfortable and speak openly. He stated succinctly:

And I think for a lot of people... It's a lot easier to choose for me to hang out with my black friends than for me to just go out and be uncomfortable. Why would I want to be uncomfortable? (Recorded interview, 3/24/2012)

In some cases, friendships served purposes beyond affording an outlet for the frustrations of learning and living on campus. For Vida, friends were an important part of her growing black awareness, identity and consciousness. Reflecting on her first year, when she primarily associated with the racially diverse group of hall mates, and her desire to engage with black organizations, she stated:

So I took the friends that I had, that I actually made the first week of moving in, was with them all the time... I wasn't comfortable enough with who I was to venture out on my own, by myself, to go to an organization and meet new people. Who was going to tag along with me to a black organization meeting? So slowly but surely, the girl next door—she was black—and we started going to more events together, and we talked about joining a sorority together. We never ended up doing that together, but that was kind of how I found me... I remember going through a phase where I strategically was thinking of organizations to join, just so I could have more black friends... black identity. (Recorded interview, 1/27/2012)

Black students could also be counted on to support and encourage their friends' academic success. For example, Briana, having been expelled and reinstated, regained her academic footing with the help of a friend:

I really thank my friend [name], because she... When I came back, I got to stick with it, and she's like, "Ok, let's study," and I'm like, "I don't feel like it," and she would be like, "No, let's go the library." And I'm like, "Ok." So she really helped keep me on track. She was a big part of me graduating. (Recorded interview, 3/17/2012)

Similarly, Craig, a pre-med student, found black friends to be an important source of support. However, as he explained, black males tended not to discuss their academic difficulties with friends, and thus tended not to reap the academic benefits of friendship:

But with males, they kind of, they're more into themselves, and they don't want to let anybody know that they're struggling, and especially black males. And I think they don't reach out to their mentors, if they even have any, or they don't try to seek out these resources. They feel like I'll get through this myself. At a place like [Selective] there is no way, there is no way for you to succeed and really just be to yourself, unless you're a genius, to me. And I think that's one of the main reasons a lot of black males do not end

up finishing the pre-medical route. And in general, I think that also plays I guess a big role too, because they keep everything to themselves. The women, they talk, not only by talking to their friends, and they say, “You should go to this or you should start doing this,” but men kind of keep to themselves. (Recorded interview, 3/10/2012)

Shamar related the experience of a close friend, corroborating Craig’s observation:

I remember one night we were out. He was pretty drunk, and he just started crying. So me and [friend]...We took him out. We were in some house party...took him out, and we were like, “[friend], What’s wrong?” “I never told anyone this, but like I failed my entire second semester worth of classes.” And so he had to redo them, after we all graduated. And I just remember he was crying, telling us that he couldn’t tell anyone, like he didn’t know who he could go to. (Recorded interview, 5/19/2012)

Significantly, as students shared their stories and experiences with their black friendship network, an interesting pattern began to emerge. Although they might have begun their tenure at Selective with a racially diverse friendship circle, as was the case with Kandace, Shamar, Jason and Eric, or an openness to cultivating friendships across racial lines, as with Vida, Lisa, and Briana, most concluded their tenure in racially-exclusive friendship networks. Shamar’s experience was typical:

There are people that I was friends with people, and that I’m LinkedIn friends with, Facebook friends with, that I consider definitely more acquaintances. But I don’t have, I didn’t develop one meaningful, strong friendship with any white person in the business school. And I think most of that was because of how turned off I was by those experiences that I had. (Recorded interview, 5/19/2012)

Family, both on campus and off, also emerged as an important resource for black students in this study. For instance, when his frustration with racism came to a head, Shamar turned to his father. He recounted the exchange as follows:

...And I think mostly they were referencing Black people in poverty... They were lazy and they...It’s not our fault that they’re poor and all this other stuff. And they never really...The comments I at least remember, because they probably affected me a little bit more... So I just remember like getting really, really, mad about that and calling my dad one day and just telling him that like that I shouldn’t have chosen Selective. I was just like dad, like certain people here are like...It’s amazing like how I haven’t gotten into with someone like physically in class or whatever. I don’t know. There were some other experiences that led me, like a couple of months down the line, to call my dad. I was just saying like...I remember telling him I hated white people, and he was ... I think he joked

around and asked me if I had become a black militant. And I was like, “Yeah, yeah, I have.” And I was just like... I was just really mad. (Recorded interview, 5/19/2012)

Similarly, Sheila often sought her family’s counsel. When asked about the nature of the advice sought, she replied:

Mostly with my mom. She was kind of used to this, you know. She’s in a corporate environment, and she was kind of used to that and so was just kind of like, “Oh my goodness”... It was very different, very strange. And I was probably very candid with her about feeling like my confidence was getting kind of shaken. My aunt as well. She heard about it. I don’t really recall talking to my friends as much about it, but they were all sort of motivational, sort of just like, “That’s how it is”, and, you know, “You’ll kind of find your place;” that that’s sort of the make up of higher education and just the world at large or America at large, that, you know, if you’re moving higher, higher and higher in whatever field, it’s going to become more white, and that, you know, I think from my mom’s experiences and my aunt’s experiences, they had experienced that on their jobs and had been in that type of environment, and so I got that that’s something that you have to get comfortable with; you have to learn how to interact, because [hometown] is a very unique situation in terms of being one big city, you know, predominantly black and very little racial diversity. (Recorded interview, 3/3/2012)

Noted here is Sheila’s preference to discuss her experiences with culture shock and racism with her family network, whom she felt would better understand her plight, given their experiences in corporate America.

Interestingly, parental advice was also sought for matters concerning academic challenges. When Briana began struggling, she consulted her mother, who, during a visit to campus, offered the following advice:

But my mother...Throughout that whole class my mother would come up there. I remember one specific time she came up there. I was like I’m losing my mind. “I really don’t know what I’m doing. I keep failing.” She’s like...So she came up there, she prayed with me, and then she left. I said, “So, you’re just leaving me?” She was like, “Yeah, I have to go to work tomorrow.” “Like, what are you going to do to help me?” And so she asked if there was somebody in there getting an ‘A’, and I said yes. And she said ask him what he’s doing to get an ‘A’, ask him if you can study with him. And I said, “No.” I was scared. I was really scared, because I did not know what I was doing. (Recorded interview, 3/17/2012)

In a few cases, family support was available on campus. In addition to friends and his dad, Shamar enjoyed the ear of his twin brother, also a Selective student. For Jason, knowing that his sister and some cousins were within ready reach was invaluable. He noted:

Well, I think one of the really good things and one of the things that ended up helping me out a lot is the fact that my sister did go to Selective. And so I kind of knew that I could share her friends, and kind of like, I wouldn't go and get lost because my big sister was there. And I have cousins there, even though like I didn't talk to them on a regular basis. But I have a sister that goes to the school, so I mean that was kind of comforting. (Recorded interview, 3/24/2012)

### Social Student Organizations

For several students in this study, membership involvement in a student organization proved to be a saving grace. Whether academic, social or both, students regarded student organizations as safe and supporting spaces, wherein they could with build their confidence, find their voice, and express themselves freely and candidly. Jason and others found their niche in the gospel choir, a mostly African American, Christian-oriented student organization:

I know for me it was like the [African American, Christian-orientated student organization]. Just having a group that you feel comfortable in, and you have people who you know will go to bat for you and have your back, and who also are having similar experiences...To have those sort of connections and be able to interact with people is important. It's a huge campus, but having those sort of groups, that kind of like cut it down to maybe a 100, or maybe 50 people. (Recorded interview, 3/24/2012)

Speculating on how life at Selective would have been had he not affiliated with the gospel choir, he stated:

It would have been short-lived, because you can't succeed without it. It would be very, very, very difficult to succeed when you don't have people pushing you and backing you up. So I think it's absolutely imperative that you have some sort of affiliation with a group of students—a group not just like friends, a group that has like a foundations and has like guidelines and rules, because like that structure does help. It's very difficult to be able to guide yourself through school by yourself. (Recorded interview, 3/24/2012)

Kandace echoed a similar sentiment:

I stayed in [gospel choir student organization] for 4 years. It was a good experience. I got a lot of leadership experience. I learned how to work with different people. I got to plan a



tour 3 years in a row. So it definitely prepared me for what I had to do in the future, because I had to learn how to work with different personalities. And it was hard but it was good. And I got to create while I was in [gospel choir], which was fun. We created a sign language interpretation group. So that was another one of my passions. I love sign language, so we were able to do that...A lot of my friends came out of [gospel choir]. A lot of my closest friends came out of that organization. (Recorded interview, 3/14/2012)

Like the gospel choir and other social/civic organizations, fraternities were viewed as key sources of support for black students in this study. For Eric, the fraternity was a space wherein he could explore his identity as a black male. When asked about his decision to join a black versus a white fraternity, he replied:

I think it was, kind of gave you some identity, kind of getting in with the black males or an organization that was predominantly black males. I didn't need it, because I already had friends. I look back on it now, my life would've been different... But it definitely, I guess it let me express myself, through that organization. (Recorded interview, 4/21/2012)

#### Academic and Civic Student Organizations

Some students found their niche in pre-professional and more academic and career-oriented student organizations. Keith, for instance, joined a pre-professional organization for aspiring engineers. He recounted that:

Yeah, like when I was in engineering I was in the [pre-professional organization for black engineering students]. So like that was pretty cool... That's not how I got my internship. It's like too bad I'm not into engineering, but it was like a really good program, because they kind of like, they knew like a lot of you guys don't know how to act in an interview—this is how you dress for an interview; this is how you approach a recruiter; this is how you do this; this is how you do that. It's like a student organization, so it's sort of like the juniors and seniors teach the sophomores and freshman like how to act, like how to study. They give you their old books. It's kind of like, it's kind of like I was thinking about mechanical engineering so I had all the older mechanical engineers come and talk to us. So it's like a really good program. Then like when I switched to pre-med and science. I joined the [pre-professional organization for black pre-medical students]. (Recorded interview, 3/23/2012)

In our interview, Craig discussed his membership in a black pre-medical student association, which he joined at the suggestion of a mentor, a Selective administrator. When asked if he had

considered joining his organization's counterpart, the predominantly white pre-medical student association, he had this to say:

Craig: ...Because I feel like at a certain time there definitely was a need to have those black organizations, because the other organizations like the pre-medical association, they didn't really have much for us, I guess. I didn't feel as included in those other organizations, just like in general organizations.

Roz: Have you ever attended one to feel that way?

Craig: I'm trying to think of a ... Some of the organizations like I tried...I think I tried to do America Reads, and I don't know, maybe it could've been me, or maybe it could've been them, but I didn't feel as welcomed when I would interact with the some of the white people. But then again, there were some white people who I did get along with. But I guess it just wasn't the same...And to be honest, I don't think I would get as much from the some of these organizations. For instance, the pre-medical association, because they don't necessarily understand, I guess, what we were going through on a daily basis in terms of going to class, being the only black in the class. And then some of these issues wouldn't even be touched upon. For instance, we would have within the black pre-medical association, we'd have like certain community services geared towards the minority community, or geared towards more underrepresented minorities going into medical school, by recruiting black pre-medical students, and I don't, I can't really, because I wasn't in the organization...I don't think that they had those initiatives. (Recorded interview, 3/10/2012)

Noted in Craig's comparison is another likely reason why mostly black, pre-professional student organizations are preferred to their white counterparts. Beyond the solace, support, and camaraderie, these organizations are distinguished by their commitment to the broader African American community, as well as such social issues as the underrepresentation of black students in higher education. Reaffirming the importance of such support to his overall well-being and success at Selective, Craig related a view held by most students in this study:

In terms of the support system, that was my support system and, of course, my roommates. One of them I knew in high school, and then another one through the summer bridge program. My sophomore year, we all lived together. So they would always be like my support system when a science class wasn't going as well, when I was feeling down. But it was interesting; it was almost like different stages in the day. So like the entire day I would be in the classroom with nothing but predominantly white students, and it really wasn't anybody I could really connect with during the day. But as soon as maybe 5:00 or 6:00 hit, I would go to these organizations that were predominantly black.

Or I would go to my room and then I could interact with my roommates. It was like different stages of the day. (Recorded interview, 3/10/2012)

Particularly insightful is his observation that, during the day, when in class among his white peers, he felt disconnection from Selective; however, in the evening, when fraternizing with his black pre-med student organization, he felt a greater sense of connection to campus life. Keith, also a member of the black pre-medical organization, shared a similar view. However, in his case, black students are better served by affiliating with both black and white student organizations. He explained:

Keith: Like the black pre-med it would be more geared towards black people. The white pre-med like, you know, they would just be like, they would have different things, like it would be better to have two good things than just one. I feel like so many of the black students, they only joined the black organizations. It's like they were missing out. Even though it wasn't better, they were missing out on that because they didn't join the general groups... So like I would say join like a pre-professional group... Like if you want to be a lawyer, join the black pre-lawyers and join the white pre-lawyers.

Roz: I'm curious. Why would you advise both?

Keith: I think, you know, like I said, you feel isolated a lot. A lot of times we isolate ourselves. Like that white pre-lawyer group might have an experience that you wouldn't get at the, you know. Yeah, I was in the... I can't even remember the name of it. I went to the pre-med group too and they were pretty welcoming. Like if the topic of the meeting was interesting or if I thought I was going to gain a lot from it, I would go.

Roz: In your experience, what could the white organization give you that the black couldn't?

Keith: Like this guy, this epidemiologist came to speak to the white group, and like the talk he gave was like really interesting. I'm saying like if I isolated myself and only went to the black pre-med, I would have missed out on that. Not so much like the white people are better at organizing or whatever, but they just might be able to give me something different, you know. I'm just saying like don't limit your resources. (Recorded interview, 3/23/2012)

In some cases, student organizations were engaged as a means to effect social change. Sheila, who realized that leaving campus as often as possible was not the most productive way to cope with her feelings of alienation, found an outlet for both her frustration and commitment to

social justice in the residence hall's multicultural council, which led to her involvement in other organizations and programs, such as becoming a residence hall peer advisor for minority students. She stated:

I guess it was a little frustrating the way that I felt in the res hall, and the fact that I felt like I wanted to leave every weekend or whenever I could. And I felt like, you know, this is a multicultural council, so they are going to kind of get it; they are going to know what I'm dealing with, and so this would be a place for scholars, like I can, you know, kind of be myself and help other students be themselves through this organization. And, again, I had a friend who was going to be in it with me, and so I just felt like it would be, it would provide what I was getting by leaving every weekend. And I didn't want that to be my college experience. I didn't want to go through college leaving every time I could. I wanted to have that enjoyable college experience and stuff, so this was my chance to try to get active and get involved and actually become a part of the campus, sort of transform that into an opportunity to talk about that situation more, so I got involved with a lot of stuff that gave me an opportunity to deal with the way I felt on that campus, and the way I felt in the classroom. And so, social justice, social-justice type stuff became my thing. I got involved with the [multicultural council] in the res hall, and that led to me being a [resident advisor], and that led to me being a [minority resident advisor], and those circles of people kind of made me feel like this smaller group of people on this campus. Though we are the minority, we are fighting for something, working towards something that's sort of bigger than us. (Recorded interview, 3/3/2012)

Although involvement in student organizations was widely regarded as a positive, participants cautioned against over-involvement. Eric, a member of a prominent black fraternity warned:

And I think about that sometimes...Fraternities, if you don't handle them in a correct way, could be a distraction to your academic life... And that goes with any organizations, I'd say. (Recorded interview, 4/21/2012)

### Black Student Organization

An interesting and significant finding concerned participants' perceptions of a prominent black student organization, henceforth referred to as the Black Student Organization (pseudonym) or BSO, the de facto organization for all black students. For me, the BSO played a central role in my becoming more socially and culturally conscious. It was also a welcomed complement to my membership in a prominent anti-racist and multiracial organization, whose mission and focus was not confined to the black community. Despite a few concerns, namely the

rigid black nationalism and male-dominated leadership structure, I nevertheless regarded the BSO as an important component of my college experience, and where the unique needs of black students could be met.

Given the centrality of BSO to my experience at Selective, and in light of the anti-affirmative action fervor to which this study's students were subjected, I wondered if the BSO would be as relevant now as it was then, when we contended with the more blatantly racist fliers. However, to my surprise, the BSO was not the home for students in this study that it had been for me and many of my peers. Instead, as in Kandace's case, the BSO, was perceived as too intense and militant:

I went to a couple of [BSO] meetings, but I thought they were too, um, what's the word... too like, "Yeah!" [loud, visceral grunt] I couldn't deal with it at that time. The meetings were like really intense, I'll say that. They were just really intense, and I just...I couldn't get with it, I couldn't identify with it. And so, I don't remember exactly what they were talking about, but I remember there was so much like fervor, like they were like so adamant, like, "Black people!" [loud, visceral grunt], and I was like, ok, I can't do this. (Recorded interview, 3/14/2012)

Keith, during the individual and group interview, echoed a similar impression. For him, the mission and tactics employed by the BSO were passé and no longer relevant to today's black students. He commented in turn:

To me, it just seemed like you would be doing more for our race or for black people in general if you went and became a doctor and went and got 3 or 4 young black people and helped them become a doctor, you know, instead of protest or whatever on campus. At the end of the day, you're not going to make that much of a difference. I don't know... I don't want to...It just kind of seemed like they would complain and whine but they wouldn't really do anything. (Recorded interview, 3/23/2012)

In the group interview, he explained:

Like I worked with them, as far as [event to welcome black students] I'm like the president of my fraternity. It's like they ran it... Like overall, I felt like they were kind of complaining. It's like a lot of things you can't change; you got to just suck it up and deal with it. While you're sitting here and complaining about it, you could be doing something productive, you could be like tutoring some high school kids, and making their transition to college easier. So it's like, I don't know. It's like the black militant, like looking for

things to be offended by sometimes. Like I can't remember what it was, but I went to one meeting, and they were also upset about something, and I'm like that's not really racist. Like I don't know... I'm just saying, to me, it seemed like there's a lot more productive things they could be doing, instead of getting Al Sharpton... They did fund a lot of events; I'll give them that. As far as that, they're good. (Recorded group interview, Keith, 6/23/2012)

Similarly, Briana had this to say:

I tried to join freshman year, and I left. I just found other things to do with my life. And then either junior or senior year, I went back, because I was asked to come back, to check it out, whatever. I came back; I went two weeks. I'm like, "What is your point?" Like seriously, you're sitting here, you're complaining about "Oh, this is racist." But it's like, ok you're talking about it, but what are you going to do about it? And there are other organizations that are talking about it, but they're also doing something about it, whether they're tutoring or on campus... And it just got to the point where I thought, "There are a lot of people there—that's a good thing." But you're just sitting there and talking about it. What are you going to do about it? (Recorded group interview, 3/17/2012)

Lisa took exception to what she felt was the BSO's misguided advice to black students, advice that would have her act less like herself:

Like, yeah there are groups... How do you say it? There are groups specifically for black students that help you feel welcome or whatever. But at the end of the day, I feel like they teach you to not be yourself, that while you're at [Selective], you're out... It's one of those things... You are out here with these white people, you need to be a certain way. And it's like, no you don't. You can be yourself. You just don't be that way, meaning don't be what's on tv, if that makes sense... It was mainly... I would say, I went to a [BSO] meeting and they would discuss like issues on campus and all this other stuff... And it's like everything they brought... It was just like these people are racist toward you, so you have to be a certain way. You have to sit in front of the class, you have to be attentive, or they're going to think this way about you. (Recorded interview, 1/28/2012)

For Sheila, the issue was what she perceived as BSO's hypocrisy with respect to gender. She explained:

One thing that became an issue and a growing issue for me in terms of the black community on campus was... I felt like there was this really kind of like unified, we're all together in the struggle-type of thing going on in the day time, but at night time, at parties and things like that, it was just very different. I felt like a lot of the guys were very, very disrespectful. The gender dynamic became a lot more apparent during those times. I mean by my sophomore year, I had stopped. I went to parties my freshman year; I stopped going my sophomore year up until I graduated, But I still knew what went on. I still had friends who went to parties. I heard conversations. I heard the way, you know, guys made comments about different women and things, and it was... So I knew that that

dynamic still existed, and I think that was the thing that I paid most attention to. (Recorded interview, 3/3/2012)

During the group interview, she reaffirmed her position:

I tried BSU. I kind of fled to it for like 2 weeks, and it just... I didn't really feel connected to anybody there. It was weird, because I'm like...I felt comfortable... I'm like, yes, a room full of black people; this is cool. But that's where the comfort sort of ended. It was just very like...But I will say, I'll give credit. It provided that sort of initial relief. Like cool like I could talk about how frustrating this experience is for me, and like everybody just said, there comes a point when it's like, ok, and now what? And there wasn't that component to it. And then also I had whole other issue with some of the things... I had issue with some very militant like, pro-blackness of it coming out of some people who, how to put this, could also do and say some very sexist things...I've had several experiences where I felt like we're all supposed to be brothers and sisters and we're pouring out liquid and all this stuff and learning all these African rituals and stuff, and we're supposed to be united. But I see you on campus, and you're very disrespectful to your sisters and saying very disrespectful things to who in this meeting are your sisters, but in the [popular campus space] are other names. But that, to me...I couldn't really get with that, so I kind of parted ways. (Recorded group interview, Sheila, 6/23/2012)

The foregoing criticisms notwithstanding, black students in this study nevertheless felt a greater affinity to predominantly black student groups. Eric, as a case in point, stated:

I hung out with predominantly black people, because that's what I related to, because we had similarities and stuff. Not saying that I can't go outside the box, but like on a daily basis... (Recorded interview, 4/21/2012)

Echoing this view, Lisa commented:

I'll put it this way: Whenever I join a group, I always try to find somebody's who black. I always try to do that. And I'm not sure why, but I just do. I don't want to be the only one. (Recorded interview, 1/28/2012)

#### Faculty and Staff of Color

In addition to their friends, family and mostly black student organizations, black students identified faculty and staff of color as important to their overall experience at Selective. Specifically, faculty and staff of color were perceived as more approachable than their white counterparts, and much more likely to take an interest in and extend support to black students. Students also noted that faculty of color demonstrated a greater commitment to issues of

particular concern to the African American community, and to raising the social, cultural and political consciousness of black students. Briana, a pre-med turned African American Studies major, spoke of the personalized support she received from one professor:

Briana: ... Like the [African American Studies course]...I had another [African American Studies] class the end of my first year, and that was Blacks and Asians in [hometown city], and we had an Asian professor, and he was a really, really nice. Even though I didn't start the class out so well... But I ended it very well...And so, he was very helpful.

Roz: In what way?

Briana: Because [he said] you need to do this, you need to do these things if you want to be successful in this class. And just, you know, his telling me, "Because you're not doing well right now, you need to do this x, y, and z in order to pass this class" and stuff like that. (Recorded interview, 3/17/2012)

For Briana, this form and level of support could not be found in other classes, with white faculty.

She added:

Yeah, they were more friendly, they were nicer. I would go into office hours... the director of the [African American Studies] dept, I had him for my [African American Studies] class, and so he was, he was very helpful, and like the editing of my paper and things like that, what I should do, etc. And I felt like I wasn't getting that in the other classes. Yes, I would definitely go see them during office hours. But—I don't want to say this—I felt like because there are very few African Americans up there, and they know, they just wanted to see...I felt like they were going above and beyond to make sure that we succeeded, not giving us any answers or anything but just really helping us. (Recorded interview, 3/17/2012)

In a similar vein, Jason had this to say of his experience with African American graduate student lecturers. He commented:

Like my [graduate student lecturers]...And when I had black [graduate student lecturers], probably more than half of the black GSIs I've had, like I'm friends with on Facebook Like I actually made like real connections, had real discussions with my black [graduate student lecturers] But I feel like a lot of the black [graduate student lecturers] kind of reached out more. Like you're black, I see that you have potential. They kind of made a point to make me more than just a number, I guess. (Recorded interview, 3/24/2012)

For Jason, a psychology major, faculty of color were also instrumental in his decision to minor in Native American Studies:



So I ended up being a Native American studies minor...So one of the...Actually the two main teachers over that program... I was learning the language, learning Ojibwe. And so I ended up becoming really, really tight with two of the people that kind of ran the, oversaw the program. I saw them like last week. It's still something that I keep up with. (Recorded interview, 3/24/2012)

Vida, likewise, was inspired to major in African American Studies because of experiences with faculty of color, whom she credited with helping to raise her awareness of social and racial issues. She explained:

I had a chip on my shoulder. And I think that the more I learned, the more [African American Studies] courses I took, the more I saw this, these 2 different worlds... So learning more about, you know, black unity through my [African American Studies] courses and through... And learning more about women— and not just black women, but women of color or women period, but more so women of color from [African American Studies female professor] I started to feel like, yes, I am advocate. I am an advocate for black women. I am an advocate for women of color. I am an advocate for black people. And I'm also an advocate for homosexuals, especially homosexuals in the black community. (Recorded interview, 1/27/2012)

Sheila, a pre-med turned social work major, had a similar take on one of her African American Studies professors, noting the issues she would raise and the ways she would attempt to make class relevant:

Actually, the environmental course that I was talking about earlier—that was a [African American Studies] and environmental course. I actually took two that were both [African American Studies] and environmental. Both of them were taught by the same professor. She was an African American woman, and she was... I would say I saw a difference in terms of the type of material she was willing to, the way that she would facilitate discussions, and the types of material she would include in her class brought into question a lot of [things missing in other classes]. I think a lot of times things would be left out regarding reasons for issues or ways of people of color or communities of color or impoverished people deal with things. It would be sort of glazed over as though it's just this problem, and not really looking at the things that are going into it. And in those [African American Studies] courses, it was examining that, but also examining the root causes to the issues that we're seeing in these particular communities that we're reading about. (Recorded interview, 3/3/2012)

Like Sheila, Eric, a sociology major, observed the distinct, more relevant way faculty of color approached various social and racial issues. He noted:

I really liked a particular professor [Latino professor]. I think I had maybe 3 classes with him. He had one class on sex and gender. He had one, also, on, I want to say, African Americans. I can't remember exactly. He broke down a lot of theories and then applied them to contemporary concepts. That was the main basis of all of his classes. I don't know if it was [African American Studies] or not. It might have been. (Recorded interview, 4/21/2012)

Significantly, for various reasons, not all black students enjoyed access to faculty of color. For instance, Keith, a pre-engineering turned psychology major, recalled four years without ever having had a black faculty member. During the group interview, he stated:

I never had a black teacher. No, I never had one. I didn't take any [African American Studies] classes, though. (Recorded group interview, Keith, 3/23/2012)

Lisa, similarly, recounted having limited or no experiences with black faculty. Ironically, given her experiences with racism, she confessed to not seeing the point of courses which might have brought her into greater contact with black faculty. She explained:

I feel like all the racial conversations and stuff happened in classes I was not taking at that time, like [African American Studies] classes, the African American classes, which apparently everybody thought all black people took, meaning like at the [BSO] meetings- "We all know you guys are taking [African American Studies] classes. Let's go out and reconnect." I never took a [African American Studies] class, ever. I don't see the point. I don't want to hear, oh, "Black people were slaves, so now they're not. Then there was segregation and so pretty much we've been pushed down and we need to overcome." It's always we have to overcome. It's like, "Chill. You don't always have to overcome. How about you just be ok, go on and be ok. I feel like if black people make it to the point where they're ok with themselves, everybody else does not matter." (Recorded interview, 1/28/2012)

Here, Lisa betrayed her preconceived notions about African American Studies courses, namely their perceived fixation with slavery, segregation, and overcoming oppression. Unlike Vida, Jason, Sheila and others in this study, who reported being empowered and inspired by their experience in African American Studies, Lisa's view suggested that such courses have outlived their usefulness.

Like faculty, staff of color were also perceived as helpful and important to the success of black students on Selective's campus. Craig credited one such staff member, an administrator in the multicultural office, with his decision to become a mentor, and thus reciprocate the support he had been given:

Definitely, Dr. [mentor], who was a part of the [multicultural office], which was the multicultural office, she helped me out. Before I graduated, and I was like a mentor. So I had a mentor and wanted to give back. So I became a mentor my junior year, my senior year...And so I was assigned like 6 or 7 students, freshmen and sophomore students, who I would mentor. (Recorded interview, 3/10/2012)

Jason also affirmed the support he received from a popular Selective academic support program targeting students of color. He noted:

There was the [academic program targeting students of color] office. There were a lot of staff that I went in there and hung out with. Everybody knows [academic program targeting students of color] you're black, so you know what [academic program targeting students of color] is. You know a lot of people took [summer bridge program] classes... And so the majority of the people took classes. And so they took [academic program targeting students of color] because they were in [summer bridge program] or what not, so they still had that affiliation. And so I kind of just from being around the black people... I actually had a friend who worked there, and I think that's how I kind of started going in there. I was a hanger-outer. (Recorded interview, 3/24/2012)

Revealingly, in Briana's experience, not all staff of color could be counted on for support. She explained:

What helped me out a lot were the advisors in the [academic program targeting students of color]...So I remember having one particular advisor, and he's telling me...We had a discussion about me wanting to be a doctor and so...I forget what we were saying. I just remember him saying, "Oh, that's unrealistic." And so then I didn't like him for that... And I wish I knew the conversation, because I really, you know, I just remember he said that whatever I was saying was unrealistic. That's not something nice to say or tell to a student. And then that's when I changed my advisor on my own. Like they give you an advisor, but my friend, she was in the [academic program targeting students of color] as well, and so she had an advisor by the name of [advisor], and so he became my advisor, you know, because I said I'm not going to him because he can't tell me what I want to do is unrealistic, because I don't like... This was like 2004. (Recorded interview, 3/17/2012)

## White Faculty

Given my reading of the literature, wherein black students at predominantly white universities reported mostly negative experiences with white faculty, and the problematic experiences with white students reported in this study, I expected participants' perceptions of white faculty to be consistent with these findings. Surprisingly, with few notable exceptions, however, black students in this study reported mostly positive interactions and experiences with white faculty. Specifically, white faculty were perceived as less racially insensitive and offensive than their student counterparts, as Kandace noted:

No, I didn't get that sense from faculty. I never felt like my professors felt that way. But I did feel like some students, peers did feel that way. I didn't get that perception [from white faculty]. It may have been there, and maybe I didn't notice it. (Recorded interview, 3/14/2012)

Similarly, Jason, when asked if had encountered any negativity from white faculty, had this to say:

Not really...Not that I...because I just forget people that don't matter...Not really. I don't think I got a lot of negativity from faculty (Recorded interview, 3/24/2012)

In addition, as with faculty of color, white faculty were noted for their moral and material support of black students, as well as their commitment to social justice. Vida recalled the encouragement and positive energy she received from two white female professors, one of whom provided a letter of reference. She noted:

There were two professors that I really connected with my first year that were not black. One, [faculty's name], she was one of my writing professors, and she gave me so much praise and so much confidence, that I was...without even knowing that she was doing that. She gave me so much praise on my work and, you know, and she was just... and she gave me what I needed... I was feeding off of her, off the energy that she had. I had come to her my first year, my first semester, and we tried to keep it personal. I think she actually wrote me a reference for law school or for a job. And there was another professor, one that I really connected with. We did, I think, it was almost like a directed study type thing. Other than that, the rest that I connected with were [African American Studies] professors, because I felt that they were preparing us a home that I lived in on

that campus. I felt like they were, you know, the head of the table, and all of the black kids, you know...(Recorded interview, 3/3/2012)

Here, Vida makes an important distinction between white faculty and black faculty. Whereas black faculty “were preparing us a home that I lived in on that campus,” white faculty support existed, but seemed viewed as limited to academics.

In some cases, the encouragement and support of white faculty either inspired a rethinking of an academic major, or, in Jason’s case, a reaffirmation of his interest in “social-workee” type activities. He stated:

Oh, there was somebody else who I became really, really, close with. Once I took the class with a PhD student. I kind of just developed a passion for social work and “social-workee” things...Basically the class would volunteer in [predominantly black city] and surrounding areas. Through class, I ended up getting really close with her, or getting cool with her rather at that point. And then next semester, I ended up like being a teacher’s assistant... I ended up working with her like 3 years on different things and what not. And I would end up like being a teaching assistant like for 3 different classes for her. So she was kind of like my mentor. She was really, really cool, and we were pretty tight and what not, and we did a lot of “social-workee” work together. That was really cool. (Recorded interview, 3/24/2012)

Sheila related a similar experience, and spoke of the bond she shared with a clinical psychology professor, whose class reinforced her desire to pursue a career in social work. She noted:

And so, I took a clinical psychology course and I took another course that was a psychology course, and it was a community service learning course, and the faculty member was in the school of social work, as well as...She was in the psychology department as well. She was over it, and I got really, really close to her, and I just fell in love with the work that we were doing. We were learning through doing community service. And I was just like, “Wow, it’s amazing that this is a class.” And we were writing about our experiences, and really talking about how not to go into these communities with these prejudices, or looking at these communities like, “I’m here to now save you, or I’m here to now clean you up and dust you off.” (Recorded interview, 3/3/2012)

For Keith, white faculty were central to his decision to change his major from pre-engineering to psychology/pre-med. During our interview, Keith related the inspiration derived from his connection with a white female psychology professor:

I ended up majoring in psych because I liked that class so much. And like the professor, her name was professor [name]. Like I would go to her office hours, and she'd kind of talked me into...not talk me into, but I guess inspired me to change my major to psych...I mean there were a couple of different reasons [why I changed]. Like I really didn't like engineering, and kind of was ...It was boring [laughter], like I did a couple, I had a couple of internships, and like I just really couldn't see myself doing that for like the rest of my life...Yeah, I switched [majors] after my sophomore year. Well, it [psychology] was just like...Like the material... Like I really liked learning why do we think the certain way we do, or how do we learn or things like that. Like when we got to that section of the class, I'd go to her office hours and she'd talk to me, and used to say like, you know. She knew I was engineering, and I told her like kind of my dilemma: my uncle who told me "Either you could major in business or engineering, and if you don't you're not going to have a job" She was kind of telling me, you know, "Money isn't everything; you got to find something like your passionate about", and it kind of... started me along the lines. I wished I had switched earlier, but, you know, it kind of planted the seed in my head, I guess...She just said, "You seem really interested. Are you thinking about majoring in psych?" And I said, "No, I'm an engineer." That's where the conversation started...She ended up finding me like a research assistantship—not in her lab, but like in a different lab. Like once I switched over to psych, I emailed and told her about it. She found me like a research assistant like position. (Recorded interview, 3/23/2012)

For Sheila, the encouragement and support received by her [course aimed at un-teaching racism] professor served to dispel her belief that "all white people were ignorant." Having had several negative experiences with white students, Sheila expected much of the same from white faculty, as she explained:

There were a couple that I ended up getting close to, like the teacher who taught [course aimed at un-teaching racism]. I stayed connected to her pretty much throughout college. She was the first person, the first white person that I interacted with who was as aware, and that really... I was completely amazed at how aware she was, and I think that's probably why, you know, I felt so comfortable forming a relationship with her...For me, that was my first experience interacting with like a white person, more so white teacher, that was really involved in social justice issues. But that to me was a real eye-opener, and it really kind of gave me a different perspective. I think that also kind of brought me back to the university too. From freshman year, I didn't like the environment. There are some professors who are going to help support you, and that's kind of cool, and they're not all black. Some of them are white, and that's extra cool. I think overall, though, I felt sort of just kind of faceless. It's a big university. That's probably one of the biggest critiques of a big university. I think it's to be expected to some degree, but I think it's harder when you're dealing with the social-cultural stuff too. (Recorded interview, 3/3/2012)

Interestingly, not all white faculty were assessed as fair in their support of black students.

Although Craig, an African American of Nigerian heritage, noted the support and encouragement

of a particular white chemistry professor, he wondered whether such support would have been extended had he a surname comparable to his fellow African American classmates:

One of my chemistry teachers freshman year, she really helped me out. I went to her office hours all the time. And I don't know if it was because I was...she recognized my name as being an international student maybe, or whatever the case may be, because she was from Poland, I believe. But she helped me out a lot. And it's so funny. I guess you either loved her or hated her. I know friends who really didn't like her and they were African American males and females. But they had a different experience with her, when they went to talk to her. And I always thought that was really interesting. I don't know why. And one of my friends said that she basically said, "You guys don't know how to work." And it kind of...because I identify with the black culture and the African culture, because of my ethnicity and because I was born here in America. And when I heard that I kind of, you know, I was really taken aback. She used to help me out so much. I wonder if my last name was Craig Williams or if it was Craig Smith, if that would have changed anything, because I really think, maybe because of her experiences, she really felt that a lot of the black students didn't work as hard. It kind of would make sense, because I would wonder like, "Why does she treat me so differently?"—probably because she thought I was an international student; or not even an international student, but I had a different upbringing or what not. But it's interesting. So she knew that I was willing to work because I was from, I was Nigerian, but for the other black students, I don't know. But, you know, that's just speculation; I don't know. But she was a really good...For me, she was a really good mentor. She wrote me a recommendation for med school. (Recorded interview, 3/10/2012)

Significantly, the white faculty identified as supportive and encouraging of black students' aspirations were, without exception, female, an observation I will further explore in chapter five.

Black students' overwhelmingly positive views notwithstanding, not all white faculty were regarded favorably. Lisa, for instance, perceived white faculty as inflexible and unwilling to adapt to the cultural diversity within their classrooms. She observed:

Don't take your culture out of it, you know. And I feel like even going to school, especially [Selective], that's what they would do. Even if you're not black, they would tell you...I would say the students felt, who had names that weren't Americanized, they felt like they had to say an American name, because they felt like the professor would never get it right, so why even bother. But it's like, it's [Selective]. Out of all the schools, it's [Selective]. The professors should know there are different cultures. You need to get to know how to say these names. You need to get to know cultures. And also like the professors weren't like inclusive, I would say. They were just teachers, our professors...When it comes to professors, if they're not teaching about cultures, then culture doesn't matter right then. (Recorded interview, 1/28/2012)

In a similar vein, Keith recounted a professor's racial and class bias in an environmental psychology class. Ironically, a white female classmate was among those taking exception to and "calling out" the bias. Keith described the discussion as follows:

I can think of like one time... It's funny because actually a white girl called a teacher out on it. So like they were talking about... I don't know, she was saying why urban teenage women, like why they have the kids, like why the pregnancy rate is higher in urban communities than in suburban communities. And she was trying to justify it saying like "If a girl isn't thinking about college or isn't thinking about a career, why not have kids." It was like a real controversial psychology class. I don't know who, I don't remember the lady's name but she had written a research paper about it, and it was like we were going over this journal article, and that's what the journal article was saying. So then the professor, she like put up some stats. I don't know where she got these stats, but she's like comparing the east side of [predominantly black city] to [predominantly white suburb] and the pregnancy rates. And then she said, "As you see with the east side of [predominantly black city], the pregnancy rates are much higher than [predominantly white suburb], because [predominantly black city] is predominantly black." And then it's like...Everybody was like, "What?" A couple of black students... I remember this girl I was cool with, we were all like, "What?" Then this white girl raised her hand and was like, "Well the east side of [predominantly black city], the economic status is a lot lower than [predominantly white suburb]. People in [predominantly white suburb] have way more money than people in [predominantly black city]. That probably has more to do with the pregnancy rate than their race. Don't you think that has more to do with it than people's race?" And the teacher's like "Oh, I'm sure that plays a part as well." [laughter] (Recorded interview, 3/23/2012)

#### White Staff

Although participants reported not having limited, if any, interaction with administrators, other white staff figured prominently in their recollections. Specifically, students recalled positive and, in more than a few cases, negative experiences with co-workers, university advisors, and public safety officers. In terms of positive experiences, Lisa reminisced on the support of her work-study co-workers, Selective University staff, whom she credited with helping to change her perspective and thinking about white people and race. She stated:

Like even my [work-study job]. I got that job... Well, I started the beginning of sophomore year. It was work-study, and I stayed there until a semester after I graduated. So stayed there a long time. And they were all white, and they were like supportive—very, very supportive. And so they actually helped me change my mindset. It was just sophomore year. I just felt like everyone is racist. Junior year it changed,



changed back. And I'm trying to figure out what happened, what made me think that. (Recorded interview, 1/28/2012)

Unfortunately, more often than not, encounters with white staff proved to be as demoralizing and off-putting as those with white students. Indeed, staff were perceived as variously out of touch with the unique needs of black students, culturally insensitive, and, in the most egregious case, racist. Keith, currently a med student, recounted a dispiriting experience with a Selective University pre-med advisor, which he described in the following exchange:

Keith: The white staff kind of was like discouraging, like maybe you should give up on medicine and do something else.

Roz: Tell me more about your experience with white staff.

Keith: I don't remember. I think his name was [name]. He's like one of the pre-med advisors. Like I got there— I had like a 3.1 at the time, you know... He tried to say it in a nice way, but he kind of just said like, you know, "With a 3.2 or 3.1 (whatever my gpa was at the time), it's probably not going to happen. Like there are a lot of other health careers that are very fulfilling. You could try to be a physician assistant, maybe a nurse practitioner, you know. There are other fields where you could be almost just like a doctor." But he pretty much said that med school's not going to happen... Yeah, I think his was really more than like you're gpa is too low. Obviously I'm black, cuz we're meeting face-to-face. But it's kind of like he didn't know about any of these programs, any of the post-bac programs. I feel like, you know, if I went to like an HBCU, they would know about the post-bacs and would say, "Ok, like, of course, we would like for your gpa to be a 3.6 and you'd get in outright, but you're African American, you come from a disadvantaged background, so here are some programs for you to apply to, and you can be a doctor one day" Like he had no knowledge of these programs at all and just told me to quit. (Recorded interview, 3/23/2012)

Keith believed that HBCUs were more in tune with and supportive of black students' aspirations, the irony and significance of which will be addressed in chapter five. For Lisa, whose experiences with white co-workers restored her faith in the possibilities of cross-racial friendships, the experience with a University therapist, because he did not seem to want her as a patient, was especially disappointing:

I don't know if it was sophomore year; could have been junior year. My supervisors at [her place of employment], I talked to them a little bit about it because they were wondering like, "Your mood changed. What's going on?" And they referred me to

[university counseling center], which is the...where you get therapy and whatever... I went in, did the little survey, and I had a...He was white. Like he could have been German, but that's white as far as everybody's concerned. So it was a white male, and off the rip I felt like he didn't want to like...He didn't want to be there for me. I felt like he's a therapist... I think he was a MSW candidate, and when I sat down, he was like, "Do you want a woman to be your therapist?" And I was like, "No, I don't want a woman." And we went through it a little bit and then he asked me again, and I'm like, "I want you; you're fine." I never went back to him. I don't know what the issue was, I don't know what was going on, but I never went back to see him. (Recorded interview, 1/28/2012)

In some cases, encounters with Selective staff bordered on racial harassment, leaving students traumatized and wondering what why they were treated like common criminals. Shamar recalled the time he was pursued by campus police, who claimed that he matched the description of a robbery suspect. He described the event as follows:

...I think most of that's just being Black. Like I've definitely been chased by cops here. I've definitely been...That was sophomore year, too. Yeah, I got chased down. I was walking back...Like to make a long story short, I was walking back from a party by myself. I had had some drinks. I was like 2 weeks away from being 21. A cop drives by and starts going really slow, and then like shined his light to me. So then I started slowly walking back behind a house, and once I made it back behind that house, I remember like walking fast to try and get back. At that time I was living in [residence hall]. And he came out of nowhere again and spotted me with his light. That's when I started running through, back through like the business school...I just remember hiding and thinking like my mom's going to kill me. So it's like, "God protect me from her. This might ruin what I'm trying to achieve"... And they caught me, they tackled me to the ground, handcuffed me. Like I remember thinking I had broken my wrist... And they like took me to the cop car, they had me tell them some information. I was like basically asking what I had done. I think I referenced the fact that I was in the b-school. They just told me sit back and be quiet. Another cop car pulled by with 2 white girls in the back. They just shook their heads like this [gesturing] saying no. That car pulled off. The cop took the handcuffs off and said that there was a robbery near the area I was at. I said ok. And he said you fit the description of the suspect. And I said what was the description of the suspect? He said African American, 5'7", and something else. And I was like, "Officer, I'm 6 foot. I have no idea why you guys stopped me." He said, "We're the cops. We're going to let you go." In the future, he said "We're here to help protect." And I said, "I'm sorry, officer, but you guys don't have a good relationship with black people, and that's the reason I took off." (Recorded interview, 5/19/2012)

In Keith's case, racial profiling and harassment were recurrent events, as Eric related:

And I never experienced anything racial...But Keith, for some reason, always gets racially profiled. He gets pulled over for something stupid, for no reason, pulled over by

police officers. Like I know Keith...It had to be racial profiling. I never experienced that before. (Recorded interview, 4/21/2012)

Significantly and surprisingly, racial profiling and harassment was not confined to black males. During our group interview, Sheila stunned all with the revelation of her racially-tinged encounter with public safety. In the following account, she described the incident (one of two on a college campus) occurring on Selective's campus.

I've had two situations occur, which kind of shocked me, because I'm a woman. I was living in [residence hall], and I parked my car. And so what I would sometimes do, I would park it just somewhere temporarily, and I would come out later and try to find a permanent spot for it. And I came out maybe 1:00 or 2:00. I came out to move my car, got in the car, and I drove past this police car. It was late at night, and I was riding around the neighborhood just trying to find a place to park. And after a while I realized the police car was following me. And that's when they pulled on their lights, and I pulled over. And she walked up to me, and she just asked what I was doing. I live right here. I'm trying to find a parking space. I was very, very, upset. I can't really say that it was specifically racial, but that was how I felt. I felt like when I drove past her, seeing a black person driving around the neighborhood looked suspect to her. (Recorded interview, 3/3/2012)

Noted here is Sheila's hesitation to characterize the public safety officer's actions as racial, despite feeling otherwise. Though I reserve this discussion for chapter five, it is worth noting the tendency among black students in this study to extend the benefit of the doubt and attempt to offer a measure of objectivity to situations often viewed as racial.

In spite of being affected by factors that should not have been present on an academic campus, participants adapted to and ultimately persevered at Selective. Black friends and family members emerged as important sources of both moral and, interestingly, academic support. Student also found solace in predominantly black student organizations, be they primarily social, civic, or academic, and a means of effecting social change. Ironically, the Black Student Organization – widely regarded as the de facto organization for all black students – was not among those favored by participants; rather, they found the organization too militant and thought it misguided. As well, Sheila expressed concern with sexist views of some of its members.

In addition, participants in this study persevered with the support of Selective's faculty of color, invariably perceived as more approachable and interested in the lives and well-being of black students. Faculty of color were also noted for introducing relevant material into the curriculum, and teaching in a way that resonated with their students. Importantly, and for different reasons, Lisa and Keith had little and no access to black faculty.

Significantly, white women faculty were also perceived as supportive of black students, and more racially aware and inclusive than white students. Vida, Sheila, Jason, Craig and others recalled specific examples of the ways white women faculty showed their support of black students, such as affirming their writing or other academic work, penning a letter of reference for graduate school, or helping to secure a coveted internship.

Whereas experiences with white women faculty were often positive, experiences with white (non-faculty) staff were often reported as negative. Keith, for example, recalled an incident with a white advisor, who discouraged him from pursuing medical school and suggested a more "realistic" profession, such as nursing. Shamar and, surprisingly, Sheila shared how they were racially profiled and targeted by campus police.

Because the realities of Selective did not live up to its rhetoric of being more progressive, participants discussed the issue of equity and proposed ways to make Selective more equitable for its black students. In addition, students reflected on their lessons learned and offered prospective students advice on how adapt to and succeed on campus.

### REIMAGINING SELECTIVE

In addition to reflecting on their learning and living experiences, students considered Selective in terms of its equity and fairness to all students, strategies the university might undertake to better support African Americans, as well as advice they would render to

prospective black students. Importantly, but not surprisingly, while students touted the relative abundance of resources available to all Selective students, they maintained that racial disparities existed with respect to the access and allocation of these resources. Furthermore, regarding strategies and advice, students emphasized the need for faculty and student mentors, additional courses on racial awareness and diversity and, significantly, for black students to broaden their cultural horizons and extend their reach beyond exclusively black organizations.

#### Fairness at Selective: Separate and Unequal

*“Yes, I definitely lived in a different world than Suzy Q that was not black and going to [Selective]. I definitely had, I would say with confidence, a different experience than Suzy Q had, being black going to [Selective].” (Recorded interview, Vida, 1/27/2012)*

As noted, given the incidence of anti-affirmative action rhetoric, stereotyping, and other racial affronts, black students perceived the campus climate to be not only tense but polarized along racial lines. Significantly, they also reported differences in the treatment and level of material support extended to black students. With particular regard to disparities between black and white student organizations, Kandace observed:

Yeah, I would say that would be a difference. I know for us, like fundraising. Like we would have to go through like different media, but I knew a lot of organizations that had like so much money. And I don't know why or how they got their money, but we had to fundraise a lot to be able to do what we needed to do. But when I think of Selective, especially the black fraternities and sororities... Like when you're on campus, clearly I feel like the white fraternity houses are nicer, they're bigger, they have their letters on them. But when you go to the black fraternity houses, it wasn't the same, no. They would have a little-bitty old house that was kind of like. So, yeah, I wouldn't say that it wasn't the same. (Recorded interview, 3/14/2012)

Similarly, Lisa commented:

But as far as like the overall climate or the overall campus, you can join whatever group you want to, but when you join like sororities or something, there are black sororities, the Divine Nine, you know. But if you rush for the sororities, white sororities, they have bigger houses. The Divine Nine, they don't have that. They may or may not have a house. And with the sororities, they have maids or something like that. And it's just like, “What!” They have bigger houses, they have maids, and they're really like stuck up and it's kind of like...I remember when talking to my supervisor at [campus place of

employment] about how they use money to like get out of things. Like when it comes to alcohol and stuff, the police, oh, we'll just pay them off. With like black Greeks, or even if it weren't black Greeks or a black person, they can't pay it off, unless they have money, and they don't have it. Not every black person going to Selective has money. (Recorded interview, 1/28/2012)

Briana shared a similar observation:

Between the white and black fraternities, yeah. Like if you go to all the fraternity homes, the police are there and, you know, and when you come out the next day you see all these red cups, and then by Monday they're gone. So someone is cleaning them up. I don't know who does it, but those parties don't get shut down. But every time I would go to the (name) house or (name) house, police would like be in the neighborhood, you had to like hush. Sometimes they would shut the parties down. I don't know how the shutting down of the parties came to be, but the police would come there and shut the party down. When we talk, it brings up memories. (Recorded interview, 3/17/2012)

Interestingly, as noted in both cases, Selective police were implicated in promoting inequality between black and white students.

For Shamar, lack of equity between blacks and whites was a function of structure, as he observed:

I think socially, that was probably the area for improvement, because if there's already sort of internal, built-in structure for white individuals, even for a lot of Jewish people that I met here, and they have a very strong network. For Black people, that's not really built in here. I mean that's something you really have to almost go out of your way to develop. And I think it would've been helpful to have, or to be made aware of resources that could help with that aspect. Or even if there were resources that were... Maybe there were resources that were intended to do that, but it wasn't made clear, so that I wouldn't know to join... So like [gospel choir], that was a great social network that like helped me... But had I not... that was kind of like a random thing that happened. I didn't know that that was going to be the case. (Recorded interview, 5/19/2012)

In a similar vein, Craig observed:

So no, it's not fair socially because of groups like that, who have this secret privilege that certain people don't...All I know is...I guess it's a secret society. You have to get, it's called tapped to get in. From what I hear, they have a lot of privileges after you graduate, once you are tapped in to get in. You have major connections, so you probably won't be out of a job. I also know that they're associated with a group, and that's why they changed it from [predominantly white student organization] to [predominantly white student organization] something (Recorded interview, 3/10/2012)

Sheila offered an interesting perspective on the equity question. In her view, simply learning and living in a racially-charged environment is sufficient to detract from the equity between black and white students:

Yeah, that's what I'm debating with right now. I don't think so, that everyone had a fair chance. I think we all had our challenges. I don't want to say that all the black kids were just completely thrown under the bus, but I think there were a lot of social things that indirectly and directly affected me. Just the nature of, just being in an environment where I was the only one in and of itself impacted me, and then hearing other students who at the time... I mean I think back on it now, they were 18, 19, just trying to figure out the world from what they had just come out of as well. So I don't really blame them, per se, but hearing those things, certainly at the time I wanted to. I think waking up every day and going into an environment where I feel like I am an outsider, or like I am somehow either not good enough or seen as not good enough, it impacted me. It shook me in a way that maybe a white male would not have to deal with or wouldn't ever have to think about. For some reason, I just felt like all of the white men were so arrogant. I just felt like all of the white male students, even in my [residential college] courses, I just felt like they were so arrogant, like they just knew it all. And I don't know if that was just me kind of...I don't know, projecting my lack of confidence or what. From my perspective, I felt like I didn't have that ability to feel confident because of the dynamics, because of my environment, and that takes away from the equity, of all students being able to succeed at the same level. (Recorded interview, 3/3/2012)

In addition to social disparities, black students perceived differences in the availability and access to academic resources. Lisa, for instance, observed that while academic scholarships were theoretically available to all students, they were not as easily attainable for black students. She commented:

It's not fair in regards to scholarships, because scholarships, well, Selective scholarships, they want you to have a certain gpa. But it's not fair because you, certain people...I'll put it this way: Black people...It's hard for us to get these scholarships because you may or may not be able to get to that gpa, because of how you are teaching me. Like, the way you are teaching these black children, I'm not going to understand it the way that you want me to. You are going to teach it to how you want to know it, but I'm not getting it. And so if I don't get it, I don't pass the test. If I don't pass the test, I don't pass the class. I'm not going to get those grades. And so if I don't get those grades, I'm not going to get the scholarship. I wouldn't even try to apply for a scholarship at Selective. There's no point, because of the gpa. I'm not going to get to that gpa, so there's no point. (Recorded interview, 1/28/2012)

In Keith's case, academic disparities were evident in the availability of tutoring services:

It was sort of like...Some of the white students, I'd hear they would meet with their tutor an hour by themselves or whatever. They would have this tutor. You felt like their tutors probably were really good at what they were doing. But [academic support program targeting students of color] tutors that you could go to for free, like it was...You had to be in the class to be a tutor. Obviously, if you got a B in the class, and I'm trying to get an A, like you can't do much for me. (Recorded interview, 3/23/2012)

From Craig's perspective, disparities between black and white students were largely a function of an inadequate educational system, and thus structural in nature. He offered the following insight:

I don't know if this has anything to do with Selective, but the preparedness of some of the minority students. Because of the high school educational system, I would also say, no, it's not a fair chance for them to succeed... I guess the state government needs to realize that a lot of minority students are not as prepared as their white students when coming into college. (Recorded interview, 3/10/2012)

Keith echoed this sentiment, noting:

I don't know what the university could do about that, but it's kind of like...If you're coming from a school that's not that competitive, you're put at a big disadvantage. And it's kind of like, over the years, I learned how to study, eventually, but they [white students] come in knowing that. So it's like I'm at such a disadvantage, and so are like a lot of other minorities. (Recorded interview, 3/23/2012)

Importantly, implied here and in Craig's comment is the question of Selective's role in addressing what has been regarded as a largely structural issue.

In this section, participants shared their views on equity at Selective. For Kandace, Lisa, Briana, Craig and others, student organizations were cases in point of the ways in which Selective was unfair to black students. Relative to their white counterparts, black student organizations received less financial and material support and, in the case of black fraternities, were often subjected to harassment by campus police. Sheila offered a different perspective. In her view, equity was undermined when black students learned and lived in an environment where their confidence was shaken and they were made to feel less than. Lisa, Craig and Keith commented on academic disparities. Lisa believed that black student did not have a fair chance at



receiving a Selective scholarship, because they lacked a competitive grade point average. Keith noted differences in the level of tutoring support afforded black students, which paled in comparison to the support available to white students. Lastly, Craig expressed concern that the issue of equity began well before black students set foot on Selective's campus.

In the next section, students propose ways to make Selective a much more equitable place for black students.

#### Towards Greater Equity: Re-Making Selective

*“So, I mean, yeah, I think for the most part they tried to make it equitable, but there’s some things that you can’t really...I mean even a program can’t really address things that you’re seeing on a day-to-day basis. But I think overall, they tried to provide resources for all students to kind of close any gaps... I don’t know back then how effective those things were.” (Recorded interview, Sheila, 3/3/2012)*

Their examples of black and white inequality notwithstanding, participants spoke emphatically of the vast resources and support available to all students, black and white.

Kandace's view was typical and echoed by several students in this study:

Roz: How do you define equity?

Kandace: I think... It means that everybody has access to everything in the same measure. That's what I think when I think about equity.

Roz: Having said that, would you say that everyone, all students, had a fair chance at Selective?

Kandace: Yeah, I would say yes. I feel like whatever I needed, I could get access to. If I needed to figure out what was going on with my financial aid, I knew where to go. It wasn't like an issue like not being able to talk to somebody. One of the things that I value about Selective, as opposed to other institutions, are the resources. And I feel like what I needed I could get taken care of...And so I feel like at Selective, it didn't matter. If I was a girl, if I was black, whatever about me, whatever I needed I could get access to and they would be on it. And I think that has more so to do with the institution than anything else, because Selective has a lot of resources. Selective has a lot of money. (Recorded interview, 3/14/2012)

Still, participants made clear that more needs to be done to achieve equity between white and black students, to ensure that the resources, support and experiences of black students at least approximate those available to white students, as Jason explained:

...Because it's funny, because people... I've had a lot of candid discussions, because I have been around a lot of people, where they would just ask, where they would just ask like why do you guys have like a Black Student Organization versus just having the student union, and things like that. And I think there's a necessity for those things because it is... It's a different culture number 1, and number 2, that's not ours. The student union isn't ours. (Recorded interview, 3/24/2012)

Specifically participants suggested the need for additional academic and social support programs, faculty of color, and courses aimed at sensitizing white students to diversity.

#### *Academic and Social Support Programs*

Regarding academic programs, Craig commented that Selective would do well to increase academic support beyond the summer bridge program:

I really like the [summer bridge program], but the thing about the [summer bridge program], it's only about two months, and then it's like you raise like a pet or something, you throw them into to fend for themselves. It's not a continuous resource for them to fall back on. I know that's supposed to be [academic support program targeting students of color], but I don't know if that's... I think there needs to be more resources thrown at students from year 1 to year 4. (Recorded interview, 3/10/2012)

In Vida's view, any solution aimed at achieving equity on campus must include a component that addresses the self-esteem issues with which black students grapple their first year.

Roz: So, if I hear you correctly, you would definitely start some program that centers on self-esteem? Would you please expand on that?

Vida: It would, and the reason why...It was such a shocker to me, because I thought, because I thought I had self-esteem. I was the confident person. I soon realized I was that confident person when I was around folks that made me comfortable...When I'm around folks that I don't know, that don't look like me, that don't know what I'm capable of doing, that already have, you know, their... that already have their minds made up about me— and not because of who I am as an individual, but because of media says I represent. I represent a group of people. I represent what the media portrays of black people. I represent the loud, outspoken black woman. I represent the black person that, you know, that came to college based off the color of her skin, because I wouldn't have otherwise

been afforded the opportunities of a Selective education based on merit alone...So any effort will to be able to help black students realize you are just as good, if not sometimes better, than your counterpart, and your skin is not a determinative factor of how well you're going to do at this university. You are amazing, and you are supposed to shine. So don't, don't put yourself down, don't hide, don't, you know, kind of sit at the back of the classroom, afraid to speak. You know, we are such a dynamic and confident people. (Recorded interview, 1/27/2012)

Similarly, Briana proposed any activities that would support black students feeling welcomed, given their underrepresentation on campus. She commented:

Black people need something to feel welcomed. We need to put on events and do things that are...where we can interact with each other. It's a very small number, and it's smaller now than it was before [affirmative action ballot initiative] So definitely those events and things that are put on should definitely continue. (Recorded interview, 3/17/2012)

### *Black Faculty*

In addition to expanding academic and social programs, students also proposed increasing the representation and support of black faculty. During our interview, Sheila commented on the relative lack of black faculty, and their underrepresentation in traditional disciplines: Insightfully, she noted:

But I think for me to have seen more black faculty would have motivated me, or it would have just kind of taken the edge off a little bit. And so even including faculty in the program in terms of mentorship. And I don't necessarily know if mentorship is the word I'm looking for. But just having them included in the program, and having them seen, and not just when you go to [Selective campus building] or to the [African American studies department], the [African American studies department] floor or whatever. Because that was a huge...I'm actually kind of just now really thinking about that... It's just that, the teachers that I had...In [hometown city], I saw black, educated people teaching and taking leadership roles, and so it wasn't a question. I didn't have a question about whether I could do it or whether... It was just... This is what you do, you go to school, you get good grades. And so I didn't have that in college, and it was kind of like, you know, maybe I'm not cut out for it, maybe I'm not as intelligent as I thought. If you see those images, if you see those types of role models, it seems a lot easier to not let the outside forces kind of influence or take away from your confidence. (Recorded interview, 3/3/2012)

Craig confirmed this view:

I don't even know, maybe they could make some type of faculty mentorship organization. Actually, that would probably be really great...I just thought about that. But in terms of black faculty... So, for instance, all minority faculty at Selective, they could just have some type of organization where they meet the minority students, maybe even once every two months or so. It could even be in a lecture hall... For a lot of minority students, they don't really have people before them, who may even have a college education. Maybe they have a few in their family. A lot of that stuff is new to them. If I didn't have 3 older brothers, I don't know how I would have fared at Selective...And I really do believe that if they see minority faculty mentors, even if it is every 2 months, even at the beginning of the school. I think that I would have them to say, "Hey, this guy could do it." "I could do it." And just to know like you know they have that resource, just in case they fall or struggle during the school year. (Recorded interview, 3/10/2012)

As I reflect on Craig's comments regarding black faculty, I am reminded of my experience in graduate school, where I was fortunate to come across several graduates of HBCUs. As we regaled each other with tales of our undergraduate years, I was struck by how prominently race figured into mine and how little it figured into theirs. They struck me as supremely confident, and seemed the better for having exposure to black faculty and other professionals, many of whom were at top in their fields. One friend recalled a freshmen year replete with weekly addresses by various high-profile black academicians and entrepreneurs. I remember thinking how empowering an experience that must have been, and wishing that my friends and I had had the same. This, I believe, is what is Craig getting at, what he's proposing. There is something about seeing your own, having them there as a testament to resilience and courage in the face of negativity. (Field note, 3/17/2012)

### *Mentoring*

Students also commented on the role of mentoring in initiating black students to college life and leveling the playing field. To that end, Vida proposed a program whereby Selective would match African American alumni with current students:

I would start a black mentoring program. And there were black mentoring programs there from what I can remember. But I would've started a program for incoming students to immediately be paired with a mentor—and not on Selective's campus. To be paired with a mentor that was a Selective alum and was doing something in the [predominantly black city] area, or the [city in which Selective is located] area, or, you know, preferably a black area to kind of help the student make his transition from high school to college and then into the real world. (Recorded interview, 1/27/2012)

For Kandace, black students would benefit most from a mentoring program in which upper class men and women provided specific strategies for academic and social success. She commented:

So I think you need to be able to see yourself in somebody else at the University. So I think if they could implement something where like when you first come in you're talking to some students. And I don't really remember like them having something set up to where you're talking and interacting with a lot of students to see what they're experiences are, so that you can know like, ok, these are things that I could get involved in; this is what's out there; this is my experience; I'm having this really awesome experience; this is what I do; this is my program; this is what I'm studying. That helps me as a person to be able to know like, ok, this person is doing well here, they're having good grades and things like that. I think that needs to be initiated. Not a peer mentor but like... I don't recall like being in like a presentation or hearing those experiences with students. Like this is what I do, these are my extra-curricular activities; this is how I balance everything...Because when you come to the university, they're selling the university to you as far as like this is what we offer, this is the experience, but not like... When I came to visit campus, it was like, "Ok, this is what we do, this is college. But I didn't get like this is my experience as a student at Selective. (Recorded interview, 3/14/2012)

*Culturally-Inclusive Curriculum and Programming*

Significantly, given the University's diversity course requirement, curriculum figured prominently in students' recommendations for promoting equity. Specifically, participants expressed the need for additional coursework and programming aimed at racial awareness and sensitivity, as Sheila proposed:

I think the curriculum, that they have more than just say one course designated for diversity issues and things of that nature... Well, I think I would definitely include a lot more cultural competency-type stuff in terms of...I believe when I was there it was like maybe 4 credits or something like that, the one class you had to have. But that was it. And I think a lot of times white students who took that class felt really uncomfortable the whole semester, having to talk about it, having to have the finger pointed at them. And then the class is over and it kind of went back to business as usual. And even more so they didn't want to talk about race and stuff any more, because they felt really uncomfortable for those 3 months, whereas we felt uncomfortable all school year long, took this class for 3 months and felt like, finally, we can talk about it, and then it's over with and we go back to feeling uncomfortable for the rest of our college careers. So definitely having more of that kind of conversation put into the curriculum, so that you have to have this in order to graduate or whatever. (Recorded interview, 3/3/2012)

For Sheila, the need for programming is particularly acute in the residence halls, where racial conflict tended toward the extreme. She continued:

And definitely something in the res halls. The res halls are just... I mean I had a pretty good res hall, but some of the places on the [popular area on campus] or [residence hall]

were having hate crimes happen, left and right. I remember in our [title of peer advisor for minority students] meeting, we would come and talk about things we were dealing with. And I felt like almost every [title of peer advisor for minority students] we were talking about something else that happened in [residence hall]. (Recorded interview, 3/3/2012)

Whereas Sheila proposed expanding race-oriented courses and programming, Lisa, noting that some courses only superficially deal with race, recommended tailoring existing offerings such that race, ethnicity and diversity are discussed more meaningfully. She stated:

Before I came to Selective, they say the [Selective Slogan]. They tell us this is how Selective is. We have all of these different cultures coming together. But they never tell you that you have to realize it on your own. Yes, these are all different cultures, but you are not telling us how to get along, how to like talk to each, how to understand one another. Yes, there are certain programs that are there, but you have to get into these programs in order to understand different cultures. You have to take the initiative. If you are used to being a certain way, why would you change. What would make you change, unless someone pushes you to do that, or tells you do it, by making certain classes mandatory... But the funny thing about that is that some of those classes are not the focus, the focus is not where it should be, for lack of a better word. The focus should be on... Yeah, mine was about race and ethnicity, but you could go online and look at certain classes that are under that category and it's like, "What is this really going to teach you about race and ethnicity?" Like some of those classes are race and ethnicity and also like creative expression... And that class could be more so creative expression versus race and ethnicity. (Recorded interview, 1/28/2012)

Importantly, whether lack of equity was perceived as inherent to Selective, a function of white student racism, or structural, black students expressed ambivalence over the University's role in correcting disparities. Keith, for instance, felt that efforts on part of Selective to address equity might result in the University being perceived as unfair to white students. He stated:

So it's just like... I don't know what the university could do about that. Like I don't know what ...The university, they try to do stuff. But if they gave too many resources to help blacks, it'd be like that in and of itself would not be perceived as fair... It's like if the [academic support program targeting students of color] tutors are going to hire people with master's degrees to come in and tutor, and spend a whole bunch of money... And people would be like why are you spending all these resources [academic support program targeting students of color], and we all pay the same tuition. (Recorded interview, 3/23/2012 )

Jason, too, questioned the extent to which Selective could effect change and achieve equity:

I think the university...I think comparatively Selective is top notch for that. Selective definitely makes a concerted effort to like have equality, and I appreciate that. However, there's only so much you can do as administration, so much you can do. Just basically, there's so much you can do in an office. It's really easy to pass legislation for what not, but I think as far as on the ground, you know, and in practice, you know it's still... We're not there yet. We're working on it, and we're ahead of other institutions, but we're not there. (Recorded interview, 3/24/2012)

For Vida, the onus of achieving some semblance of equity invariably fell on black students. She noted:

There was the world of your Selective students, but black folks, we had to fight for everything that on that campus was offered to white students. We tried our damndest to make it available, especially for our black students. We gave our black students a place to call home. We tried to give as much as we could to black students, so that our black students who came to school like me, wanting to see other people who looked like them, hearing that were not any, could be ok. (Recorded interview, 1/27/2012)

Significantly, Vida's comments imply that black students, not the University, would have to serve as the agents of the change they wish to experience at Selective. Jason, by contrast, stated that black students would need to enlist the support of progressive and "privileged white groups" to effect change. When asked if he felt black students had a voice and the power to bring about change on Selective's campus, he responded:

I mean because as a black person, as black people on campus, we're not going to have that much of a voice. I mean we're not going to be the ones that are changing things. I mean we can convince other people to change things. We don't have power. What power do we have? How many black people are there making policy and what not? So what I'm saying is what we can do is recruit people to our cause. But as far as...We're not the policy makers, and so we have to convince the policy-makers, and a lot of times that means convincing the people who look like the policy makers. And so if I can, you know, have a dialogue with somebody who's white, somebody who has white friends and what not, and I can convince them that this isn't a black issue, this is a [Selective] issue, then they can tell their friends, and it'll spread, versus if it's just people feel like it's a black issue, then it's not a [Selective] issue, even though it is. And so I think as like black people, and I guess it's really for not necessarily just black people but women's rights and what not, it's really about recruiting and recruiting people who are in the privileged groups so they can be advocates for you. A lot of times it's just seen as you being black and angry. (Recorded interview, 3/24/2012)

Noted here is Jason's reference to the 'angry' stereotype, the fear of which, he felt, might deter black students from exercising personal agency and working to effect social and cultural change on campus.

In this section, students offered solutions to Selective's equity problem. For Craig, Selective would do well to expand academic support opportunities for black students, noting that the summer bridge program and other support services are too limited in scope. Vida suggested that social support must be designed to deal with the inevitable challenges to black students' self-esteem. Sheila found the relative lack of black faculty to be particularly concerning. Thus, she proposed that Selective increase the number of black faculty and not confine them to departments such as African American Studies. Students also recommended that Selective design mentoring programs that are more relevant and better aligned to the actual needs of black students. Vida suggested a program whereby black alumni are matched with current students. Kandace proposed matching high-achieving black students with current students. Sheila and Lisa, highlighted the need for additional course work and programming aimed at raising racial awareness and sensitivity. Lastly, Jason, Keith, and Vida shared their thoughts about Selective's role in effecting change and promoting equity. Jason was of the opinion that equity might be achieved if black students can enlist the support of progressive white students. Keith felt that any effort on Selective's part to make life more equitable for black students would invite charges of "reverse racism." Vida, for her part, believed that the collective agency of black students is what is needed to fashion a more equitable Selective University.

In the section that follows, participants reflect on their experiences at Selective and offer their insights to prospective black students.



### Orienting Black Students: Participants Offer Advice

*“I think the goals for a black student coming in versus the goals of a white student, like on average, are different. For black students, it’s graduating; for white students, it’s “I want to be in student government, I want to do certain things.” And we’re just trying to just graduate, just survive, you know, get done.” (Recorded interview, Jason, 3/24/2012)*

In addition to proposing strategies that Selective might undertake to promote equity between black and white students, participants also considered strategies that prospective black students might adopt to ensure a more productive and pleasant college experience. Strategies addressed the importance of study habits, developing support systems and expanding friendship networks beyond exclusively black groups.

Not surprisingly, given academic challenges, participants’ advice emphasized the importance of studying and compensating for the perceived inadequacies in their college preparation. In that regard, Briana offered the following:

Definitely know that you are going to work harder than you ever had to work. It’s a lot of work, and know that you may not be prepared. It’s going to be like a gap, because high school did not prepare... I wouldn’t say every high school because there are some kids that come from areas that are not urban areas, whose high school had prepared them. But if you’re coming from...Realistically, if you’re coming from an urban area, specifically [hometown, predominantly black city] and you go to those schools— the [urban magnet school], the [urban magnet school], the [urban magnet school], a lot of these high schools are not preparing you for college. I feel like I was more prepared for college than someone who went to [urban public school], [urban public school]or [urban public school], but definitely I was not prepared on the same level as someone who went to like a [suburban, predominantly white public school] or [suburban, predominantly white public school]. (Recorded interview, 3/17/2012)

Not being as prepared for Selective as graduates of more advantaged educational programs became apparent to Briana only after she arrived, and this required more studying on her part to succeed.

Students also commented on the need for prospective students to develop a functional support system, wherein they might find and build a sense of community. Sheila emphasized the importance of establishing a support system early in one’s academic career. She noted:

Just a piece of advice: establish very early a support system, and to either seek one out, or it would be for the university or whatever to put in place a support system for students of color, or black students. (Recorded interview, 3/3/2012)

Likewise, Briana proposed attending the black counterpart to the University's welcome week events:

Start by going to welcome week, because they had black welcome week, and so start by going to different events to see what you like, and see what you enjoy, and see what organizations you want to join. But definitely join something, because you want to be linked to some type of organization, for a sense of community. (Recorded interview, 3/17/2012)

Also, notable among strategies for prospective students was the suggestion to develop more racially inclusive friendship circles. Shamar, who confessed regret at allowing fear to deter him from expanding his friendship network, recommended the following:

But it would be good to branch out as well. That's the first thing I would say. And don't allow yourself to be, to withdraw based on negative experiences with other people. Because it's easy to use it as an excuse, like I did. You know, try to find people that you can talk to, that can sort of help you work through that. I'd say try to join as many organizations that are outside of your comfort zone as possible too...So don't allow a negative experience with a white person to basically stop you from having, from initiating a conversation with another one...Yeah, I think probably the biggest thing is not to just have...and to develop a support system, group of friends you can...not to just develop and have that group be homogeneous, but really try to get as much insight from other individuals as well. For me, I mean, dealing with the things I was dealing with, it was great to have my black friends that were in the business school with me or what not to go back and talk to. But I think for me it would have been good to have friends that I was closer with that were white or any other race that I could talk to, to get their insights and perspectives, and try to make my insights more informed. (Recorded interview, 5/19/2012)

Eric would offer similar advice:

I'd say don't be afraid to step outside your comfort zone. Often how you're raised or what atmosphere or culture you come from keeps you at a narrow scope, but when you get to the university, there are a lot of more options and stuff out of there from what your initial community was. Make sure it's something you're not avoiding, because of how you were brought up. (Recorded interview, 4/21/2012)

Surprisingly and importantly, given the number of racial incidences reported by participants, Keith was the only participant to explicitly comment on the perils of racism. He noted:

I'd tell them like you are going to encounter some racism, you are going to encounter strange looks every now and then, but depending on your field...Like if Selective is going to give you a huge advantage, don't let it stop you. Just stop focusing on it, you know, just kind of accept that it's going to happen and don't spend too much of your time getting upset or mad about it. Like if someone blatantly disrespects you, yeah, address them, but don't let it get to you. If someone thinks you're stupid, work harder and set the curve for that class. Like, you know, you're not here to educate white people about blacks; you're here to get a degree and get your future going. (Recorded interview, 3/23/2012)

Keith's advice called for future students to respond to blatant disrespect, but to work hard and stay focused on their own goals, and not be deterred by the actions of others.

Overall, when asked to comment on ways to re-imagine Selective to improve their own and other black students' experiences, participants offered their advice to prospective students. Perhaps owing to the academic challenges experienced early in her tenure at Selective, Briana directed her advice to graduates of predominantly black urban high schools, which she felt produced students who were, relative to their white counterparts, less prepared for academic success. Thus, Briana emphasized the need for black students to mentally prepare themselves for the realities of academic life on campus, and to study accordingly. For Sheila and Briana, the support system affords students a feeling of belonging, which they suggest is key to persevering on Selective's campus. In Sheila's view, the earlier one can establish a viable support system, the better. Shamar and Eric advise the prospective black student step outside of their proverbial "comfort zone" and seek to build friendships across racial lines. In Shamar's case, it was important that experiences with racism not deter black students from reaching out and forging connections with white students. For Keith, the message was this: while racism may be encountered, black students must remain focused on their purpose and not allow perceptions of

their abilities to set them off course. As such this advice suggests the opportunity costs that attended matriculating at Selective, areas where students needed to take responsibility for their academic needs when structures at Selective proved inadequate.

### SUMMARY

Six major findings emerged from this study of ten African American graduates of Selective University. First, they vividly described their college-going deliberations. Selective was the top choice for students and their parents, given its reputation as a premier public university. In addition, Selective could offer what HBCUs presumably could not: a “real world” experience; that is, an opportunity to learn and live within a racially and culturally diverse community. Unfortunately, graduates of predominantly white high schools began their tenure at Selective predisposed to the anti-affirmative action rhetoric of the time, having had negative encounters with their white classmates and friends.

Second, participants’ first impressions of Selective represented the beginning of a culture shock that these participants had not expected. Participants from predominantly black urban and suburban high schools experienced varying degrees of culture shock. Men participants emphasized their stark underrepresentation in the classroom. Significantly, academic shock, or the experience of perceiving a disconnect between high school preparation for college and the realities of learning on campus, proved a common lament among graduates of predominantly black urban and suburban high schools, prompting students to question the quality of education available at these schools.

Third, participants spoke at length about problematic experiences with white students. Students of both predominantly black and predominantly white high schools reported negative experiences with white students. On-campus affirmative action rhetoric was the most commonly

cited concern. White students were also found to engage in racial stereotyping, especially of black men, to demonstrate other offensive activities, and in other ways to display insensitivity toward black students.

Fourth, participants reported a wide range of challenges to learning and living amid the anti-affirmative-action atmosphere and racial stereotyping and insensitivity. These effects influenced participants' academic and non-academic lives. Unfortunately, it was not uncommon for students to experience self-doubt and thus refrain from speaking up in class, fearing that doing so would potentially invite the critical gaze of their white classmates, or confirm stereotypical views held about Blacks. Participants thus felt compelled to censor themselves, and even other black students, when in the company of white students.

Fifth, in spite of these hurdles, the participants found ways to persevere at Selective. Students engaged the support of friends, family, and predominantly black student organizations to facilitate their adjustment to campus life. Interestingly, the Black Student Organization (BSO), the de facto organization for black students, was not regarded as a viable source of support among these participants. Students also commented on the inspiration and support they received from faculty of color, who were often credited with helping to raise the racial and social consciousness of their students. Significantly, white women faculty also supported black students, serving as their academic advocates and mentors. Experiences with white (non-faculty) staff proved to be less positive or rewarding, however.

Finally, participants provided a vision for reimagining Selective as a more inclusive institution of higher education. Here, participants identified disparities in the material support extended to black, vis-a-vis white, students, and proposed strategies to help make Selective a more equitable and fair institution, such as increasing the numbers of faculty of color and courses

aimed at sensitizing white students to diversity. Participants also extended advice to prospective black students, highlighting the need to invest in their studies, identify support systems, and, significantly, develop more racially-diverse friendship networks.

In the chapter that follows, I discuss these findings in terms of their relevance to the research questions, existing literature, and the conceptual frameworks guiding this study.

**CHAPTER 5:****DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS—THE PERSISTENT SIGNIFICANCE OF RACE****INTRODUCTION**

I began this inquiry into the learning and living experiences of black graduates of a predominantly white, Midwestern university with the following question in mind: How are today's black students faring in light of putatively shifting perspectives on race and sustained challenges to affirmative action in higher education admissions? Given my own experiences before and during my time at Selective in the mid-1980s, I was curious to learn what had changed, what had stayed the same, and what, if any, new knowledge would be generated as a result of this research. I wondered, for example, to what extent findings might be consistent with the existing literature, specifically Feagin, Vera, and Imani's (1996) landmark study, and whether data would affirm the relevance of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Equality of Educational Opportunity as conceptual frames for studies investigating the experiences of black students at predominantly white universities. More specifically, I wondered:

- What figured into Black students' decision to choose to attend a predominantly White university?
- How do Black students describe their own experiences learning and living in a predominantly White university?
- To what extent might such experiences impact Black students' sense of well-being and academic achievement?
- In what ways might Black students cope and deal with learning and living at a predominantly White university?
- To what extent might race be implicated in the experiences of Black students at PWIs, and how do students conceptualize, describe, and make sense of race/racism?
- What is the range of educational opportunities afforded Black students, and to what extent might these opportunities be perceived as being on par with those afforded White students?

- To what extent might the learning and living experiences of Black students exemplify different forms of oppression?

And, in what follows, I organize the discussion of findings along those lines to clarify the contributions of the findings to the scholarship framing the study. As I highlighted in chapter 4 and discuss below, though much has changed with respect to the nature of the challenges black students face on the predominantly white campus (namely, a pervasive anti-affirmative action rhetoric), a great deal has remained the same. Significantly, too, findings reveal new areas ripe for examination, such as the disparate ways black women and men experienced learning and living on campus.

In the sections that follow, I discuss these findings in terms of their relevance to the research questions, the existing literature, and the conceptual frameworks guiding this study. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of future research possibilities, study limitations, and some final thoughts.

#### BLACK STUDENTS' DECISION TO ATTEND A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE UNIVERSITY

According to the existing literature, particularly Feagin et al. (1996), the process of choosing a predominantly white university over a predominantly black, is often a challenging one for African American students and their parents. Indeed, Feagin et al. found that, unlike their white peers, black college-bound students are often conflicted over their decision-making, because they must consider the opportunity costs (Howe, 1997) and implications associated with attending a predominantly white university—one with a great many resources but reputed as racist and unwelcoming to black students. The question with which they grappled was a variation of the following: Do I attend a university known for being racist and hostile to blacks, and risk



being demoralized? Or, should I consider a less reputable, albeit more affirming predominantly black university?

Significantly, findings in this study challenge this proposition. Indeed, far from being conflicted, respondents and their parents were ecstatic at the prospect of attending Selective, which they held in high regard. Much like their parents, participants felt that a Selective education and degree would be their “ticket out of the hood,” and confer advantages that a less selective university could not.

Whereas Selective was lauded as the best possible option for black students, participants were less charitable in their view of HBCUs. For respondents, HBCUs were perceived as less accessible, given their locations in the southern region of the country, and thus as a less cost-effective proposition. Respondents also believed that HBCUs would not afford the “real world” experience of a predominantly white university. From their perspective, the “real world” is not all black, and success in the global economy dictates that students be schooled in a racially-diverse (read: predominantly white) setting. Thus, HBCUs would put them at a decided disadvantage after graduation.

Although participants were in accord in their view of Selective relative to HBCUs, important differences were noted. For instance, graduates of predominantly black high schools registered the most concern with HBCUs. For them, HBCUs would provide more of the same, meaning more of what they had already experienced, as products of mostly black high schools. They spoke of a desire for something different, and to forge friendships across racial lines. Conversely, graduates of predominantly white schools assessed HBCUs more favorably. These respondents used experiences in predominantly white settings, especially during their high

school years, to anticipate that Selective might be an extension of the anti-affirmative action rhetoric experienced at the hands of white high school classmates.

Thus, relative to their counterparts in Feagin et al.'s (1996) study, respondents here were presented with a more unfavorable and complicated context of choice (Howe, 1997). Absent a counter-narrative (collective memory, in Feagin et al., 1996), one providing a glimpse into the academic and social realities of learning and living on a traditionally white campus (e.g. Students might have to contend with anti-affirmative action rhetoric and/or racial stereotyping), and absent HBCUs as a viable option, participants deliberated over and ultimately decided upon Selective less clear of the implications and opportunity costs associated with attending a predominantly white university.

#### BLACK STUDENTS LEARNING AND LIVING IN A WHITE UNIVERSITY

Several studies, most notably Feagin et al. (1996), have documented the challenges black students encounter on a predominantly white campus. Upon matriculating to the predominantly white university, black students experienced adjustment issues, for example. Indeed, participants here spoke of the discomfort associated with being the only black in the class, with feeling as though all eyes were on them and that their every word was being scrutinized. For black men in study, who were more under-represented than black women, this "culture shock" experience proved especially intense.

Although experiences with culture shock have been well documented in the literature, the phenomenon of academic shock has garnered less attention. Indeed, findings in this study document academic shock as a reality for black students, particularly among those graduates of black high schools. While graduates of predominantly white high schools indicated less difficulty adjusting to academic life, graduates of black high schools found their adjustment to

academic life on campus to be especially daunting. For example, study participants expressed astonishment when their placement exams indicated that they needed to enroll in a preparatory course, one beneath that suggested by their high school GPA, leading them to question the quality of education afforded at their respective high schools. While they appreciated the family-like atmosphere and the support of teachers and counselors, they felt less prepared than their counterparts from predominantly white high schools. Participants also wondered how their white peers partied heavily yet still managed to do well.

As noted in chapter two, black students at predominantly white universities often contend with the racial microaggressions of their white peers. However, whereas the literature cites racial stereotyping and profiling as the most common microaggressions, findings here reveal anti-affirmative action speech to be most prevalent. Indeed, respondents discussed the frequency with which white peers would engage in anti-affirmative speech, which permeated every social space of significance, and took exception to the charge that black students were being admitted because they were black, not because they were smart. Racial stereotyping was also common, and black students felt that they were perceived as less academically capable and, in the particular case of black men, loud and “ghetto” and more athlete and entertainer than student. For graduates of black high schools, racial microaggressions opened their eyes to the kind of racism they believed had long since passed.

Not all microaggressions were deemed equal, however. To be sure, while microaggressions in general were viewed as offensive, African American students indicated a particular aversion to anti-affirmative action rhetoric. Respondents believed that such rhetoric questioned their right to be on campus, and thus signaled that they were not Selective material and worthy to be on campus.

Furthermore, data reveal differences in the way black women and men experience and interpret microaggressions. For instance, black women were subject to various invasive questions concerning their grooming regimen (i.e. how and why they style their hair the way they do). While such questions were found to be insensitive, especially if the inquiring white student had not taken the time to establish rapport, they had not called into question black women's status as a student. Black men, on the other hand, were often stereotyped as athletes and entertainers, which, when combined with anti-affirmative action rhetoric, conveyed the message that they were not student material, and ill-suited for academic life.

Consistent with Feagin et al. (1996), findings here show that black students were challenged in their effort to develop and sustain cross-racial friendships, given the frequency with which white peers engaged in racial microaggressions. Indeed, participants spoke of their resistance to forging friendships with white students, whom they felt harbored negative views about Blacks. They also noted that when friendships were developed, they were more often superficial and short-lived. Significantly, although respondents began selective open to crossing the racial barrier, they graduated without a single white friend.

Data here also support previous research linking the prevalence of racial microaggressions to negative appraisals of campus climate (Hurtado, 1992; Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso, 2000). Study participants described their campus as tense and polarized, with Blacks congregating with Blacks and Whites congregating with Whites. They asserted that microaggressions, particularly anti-affirmative action speech, further exacerbated the tension and racial division evident on campus.

Lastly, research has not only implicated white students in creating a hostile and adverse racial climate for black students, but white faculty as well (Feagin et al., 1996; Love, 1993;

Fleming, 1984). As noted in chapter two, black students perceived white faculty as unapproachable, emotionally, socially, and academically unavailable, and culturally-insensitive. However, data here challenge these findings. Whereas respondents perceived white peers to be racially offensive and insensitive, they were less critical in their assessment of white faculty. In fact, black students in this study were able to establish rapport with white faculty, and often consulted them on academic matters, such as whether to change a major. Respondents also pointed out instances where white faculty affirmed their work and academic aspirations. Faculty—especially women— were often perceived as being concerned about social issues impacting black students and their community, thus challenging black students' perception that all white people were racists.

These positive experiences notwithstanding, not all white faculty were held in equal regard. White men faculty, for instance, were viewed as less helpful and supportive than white women faculty, and black students often commented on their inability to connect with them. Furthermore, respondents reported more frequent and positive experiences with graduate teaching assistants than with their professors.

Although white faculty, overall, were viewed in a favorable light, white staff were decidedly not. Study participants felt that university advisors, for example, were less supportive of and attuned to the academic needs of black students. Respondents also implicated campus police, who were found to routinely engage in racial profiling and harassment of black students. Ironically, such harassment was irrespective of gender, with black women and men both subject to negative encounters with campus police.

IMPACT ON BLACK STUDENTS' SENSE OF WELL-BEING AND ACADEMIC  
ACHIEVEMENT

Consistent with Feagin et al. (1996) and others, this study found that racial microaggressions exacted a significant psychological toll. However, whereas the literature documents general stress among black students, findings here specify the ways in which this stress is manifested. For instance, participants felt frustrated at having to constantly defend themselves to their white peers, who, again, believed that they were at Selective because they were black, not smart. Respondents also tired of having to educate white students about black people and culture, and commented on the unfairness of what was perceived as a double-standard: When white students seem “ignorant” of black culture, they are not perceived as culturally-deficient, as is the case when black students appear “ignorant” of white culture.

While the “Acting White” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986) hypothesis was not borne out, suggesting that black students do not view higher educational attainment as tantamount to “acting white,” findings here do support studies positing a link between negative racial stereotypes and academic performance (Steele 1997). Steele (1997) has suggested that “society stereotypes about groups can influence the intellectual functioning and identity development of individual group members” (p. 613). Indeed, although confident in expressing themselves in mostly black contexts, respondents experienced self-doubt, and thus were less inclined to engage in the predominantly white classroom. Participants were especially concerned that their comments would be negatively perceived, and might suggest to white peers that they are less capable and thus not Selective material.

Findings also confirm research suggesting that black students feel pressured to assimilate and conform to white, middle-class standards of dress and speech when in predominantly white

settings. Indeed, given the prevalence of racial microaggressions, specifically racial stereotyping, students in this study indicated a tendency to self-censor and adopt speech and dress deemed more “acceptable.” In this respect, findings here are also consistent with Fordham’s (1996), who posited that black students in predominantly white settings tend to adopt a “raceless persona.” Participants felt that when they were among their black peers, they could be relaxed and free to express and be who they are. However, when the setting was mostly white, respondents experienced more tension, and thus felt less free to be themselves. They also felt compelled to censor black friends who might invite the kind of negative attention they hoped such conformity would deflect.

#### COPING WITH LEARNING AND LIVING AT A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE UNIVERSITY

As previously noted, Aguirre and Turner (2004) discuss four ways that students of color cope and adapt in racially-charged, predominantly white settings. “They will accept their conditions passively; they will assimilate if they are able; they may participate in marginal ways; or they may choose to withdraw or self-segregate or participate in organized protest, rebellion or even revolt” (p. 16). This study found (as did Tatum, 1997) that black students tended to self-segregate, preferring the company of their black peers to those of whites, with whom they were not friendly or open to forging cross-racial friendships. For students here, exclusively black peer networks, be they friends or student organizations, were important social outlets where frustrations could be validated, where black students could gain leadership experience (unlike in mostly white student organizations), and where they could serve the black community, and where they might be able to effect social change. Peer networks were also important to identity, and black students often affiliated with student organizations that shared similar values, such as

the Christian gospel choir. Indeed, for students in this study, black peer networks proved essential to their survival as black students on a predominantly white campus.

According to Patton (2006), black students on predominantly white campuses tend to gravitate to their de facto black student organization. However, findings here reveal substantive concerns with the Black Student Organization (BSO). Specifically, participants felt that the BSO was too militant and out of touch with today's black students, and that it should direct its energy to civic-minded goals, such as helping tutor black school children. Black women also perceived the BSO as having sexist tendencies. They felt that, during the day, black students were all sisters and brothers; but at night, at a party, black men miscast black women as the targets of sexual conquests, no longer identifying them as their "sisters."

#### RACE AND RACISM IN THE EXPERIENCES OF BLACK STUDENTS AT PWIS

Consistent with Critical Race Theory (CRT), Feagin et al. (1996) and others, findings in this study reveal that race and racism figure prominently in the lives of black students at PWIs. As noted, students in this study were frequently subjected to racial microaggressions, which seemed to permeate every social space of significance: the classroom, the residence hall, the public arena. Consequently, respondents often cast the campus climate in racial terms, describing it as variously tense, heated and balkanized, with black students congregating with other black students, and white students congregating with other Whites. Respondents also felt that while white students have the luxury of not thinking about their race, black students are not so fortunate. Indeed, they often described thinking about race in terms of a nine-to-five job: In the day, when they are going about the business of college (that is, in classes), race is foremost on their mind. However, in the evening, when they are "kicking it" with their black friends in the



residence hall or meeting with fellow members of a black student organization, they can relax and think less of race.

Significantly, data here show that black men and women perceive the salience of race differently. For black women, race (and racism) figured much more prominently than gender (sexism), and thus was considered to be more salient. From their perspective, white students see and think race before they see and think gender, particularly in the context of affirmative action. Thus, race for them will always be the variable by which they are judged. Black men, however, perceived their race and gender to be equally important. Whereas black women referred to themselves as simply “black,” black men often conflated their race and gender, identifying themselves as “black males” or “black men. Black men also felt that they are especially susceptible to racial stereotyping, because they are seen as black men or black males, and not simply black.

#### EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES AFFORDED BLACK STUDENTS COMPARED TO WHITES

Consistent with Feagin et al. (1996), data here show that the educational opportunities afforded black students are perceived as more limited and of lesser quality than those afforded Whites. For example, respondents lamented the fact that while academic scholarships were theoretically available to all students, Black students rarely attain the grade point average needed to compete. Consequently, academic scholarships were perceived as essentially the province of white students, and thus not available to Blacks.

In a similar vein, participants questioned the quality of tutoring and other academic support programs. For them, the tutoring afforded black students paled in comparison to that afforded Whites, with tutors for black students perceived as lacking the appropriate credentials.

Respondents also critiqued the quality of the summer bridge program. Although it served as a kind of buffer against culture and academic shock, respondents felt that the courses were not sufficiently rigorous, thus not comparable to the “traditional” courses offered fall semester.

According to Feagin et al. (1996), “the relative shortage of black faculty comes as a blow to many students” (p. 106). Findings here clearly substantiate this view. Although white faculty, specifically white women faculty, provided academic support, black students more readily identified with faculty of color, who provided both academic and social support, by helping to cultivate a sense of family and community on campus—“a home away from home.” For students here, the presence of black faculty on campus was empowering. They reasoned that if black faculty could negotiate and ultimately thrive in a predominantly white world, then so could the black student. Thus, the relative lack of black faculty, especially in departments such as engineering, emerged as a concern for participants. Fewer black faculty meant fewer potential mentors and sources of academic and social support.

Black students felt equally short-changed by the limited availability of social outlets. Study participants had fewer social options, and often those available were perceived as inferior. For example, whereas white students had fraternity and sorority homes to call their own, black students had no such spaces, and thus were beholden to the university for social events, such as fraternity and sorority get-togethers. Indeed, a recurring lament of students in this study was the overrepresentation and encroachment of “white” space (here, fraternity and sorority houses), and the virtual absence of “black” space. Furthermore, respondents felt that mostly white student organizations, such as the Pre-medical Society (pseudonym), were better financed than those available to black students. Often times, black students had to conduct fundraisers to support

their initiatives, whereas these activities were perceived as unnecessary for white student organizations.

For black students, learning and living on campus, where they were routinely subjected to the anti-affirmative action rhetoric and racial stereotyping of their white peers, reinforced the view that while white and black live separate lives, these separate lives are far from way equal. From their perspective, Selective's "playing field" was uneven, in part because they, unlike their white peers, contended with racism (i.e. racial microaggressions), which undermined their ability to be confident, and thus perform at a comparable level.

Findings in this study also show that black students perceive the lack of equity at the pre-college level to be a grave problem. As noted, academic shock was a common lament of graduates of black high schools, who described their adjustment to academic life as difficult at best. Students felt underprepared for Selective, and frequently commented on the disconnect they perceived between their high schools and the realities of learning on Selective's campus. In their opinion, white students began Selective better equipped for academic success, and thus at a decided advantage. Black students, on the other hand, had to work twice as hard to match the performance of their white counterparts, further reinforcing their view that separate is unequal.

Ultimately, the limited educational opportunities afforded black students, vis-à-vis white students, signaled that they were not accorded the full recognition (Howe, 1997) of their disparate educational histories, of their psychological burdens resulting from a contentious campus climate, or of their need for people whose lived experiences aligned with their own, something seemingly taken for granted and accorded to their white peers.

## EXPERIENCES OF BLACK STUDENTS EXEMPLIFYING FORMS OF OPPRESSION

As noted in Chapter 2, Young (1990) posited five faces or types of oppression encountered by oppressed groups: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence. I will discuss each in turn, noting its relevance to the present study.

### Exploitation

Consistent with Feagin et al. (1996), findings from this study show that black students are often tracked (Oakes, 2005) and discouraged from pursuing majors affording greater prestige and earning potential (Feagin et al., 1996). Because black students had paid the same tuition as whites—and thus deserved the same opportunities, black graduates felt exploited by the university and blunted from their academic dreams. For example, respondents felt that advisors were less supportive and more discouraging when their academic goals included majors deemed difficult, such as pre-med, and often redirected them to those perceived as easier and less rigorous, such as nursing. Findings also revealed that these same advisors were less versed and knowledgeable about “minority” and alternative-admission, pre-med programs. Indeed, while several study participants began Selective with pre-med as their major, only two were able to successfully complete the curriculum, setting in motion a vicious cycle of exploitation: Fewer black students in the pre-med pipeline meant fewer Black medical doctors, and thus fewer Blacks represented in the professional class.

### Marginalization.

Findings in this study overwhelmingly support previous research indicating that black students felt marginalized on predominantly white campuses (Feagin, et al., 1996). To begin with, because white student organizations were perceived as unwelcoming and less interested in pursuing issues important to black students, study participants felt compelled to restrict their

membership to predominantly black student organizations, thus reinforcing their perception and sense that they were not part of a broader campus community. Respondents also felt alienated by anti-affirmative-action speech, which signaled that they were not like the average Selective student (read: white), whose admission did not require affirmative action, and thus black students fell outside of the mainstream campus community. Significantly, for black men participants, the prevalence of racial stereotypes, most of which marked them as athletes and entertainers, served to compound their sense of marginalization.

#### Powerlessness.

Although research in this area is scant, evidence in this study clearly validates Young's (1990) notion of powerlessness. Significantly, respondents felt at times powerful and powerless, depending on the social justice issue at hand. For instance, when it came to creating a community (e.g. black student organization) wherein black students felt supported and nurtured, participants perceived that to be within their collective capacity. Indeed, they felt that it was their duty to reciprocate the support they received from black upperclassmen and women. However, when the issue was perceived as structural (e.g. addressing K-12 disparities, campus racism), participants questioned the extent to which they could effect change. In their view, structural change (e.g. affirmative action) required either state intervention, in the case of K-12 educational opportunities, or enlisting the support of progressive, like-minded Whites, in the case of campus racism.

#### Violence.

According to hooks (1995), violence against black people is promoted, encouraged and condoned in white supremacist contexts. Racial profiling by campus police notwithstanding, findings in this study (as in Feagin, et al.,1996; Solorzano & Villalpando, 1998) suggest that the

violence inflicted on black students is often psychological in nature. For example, when white peers defaced Obama posters and left McCain's undisturbed, study participants perceived these acts as aggressive, and as directed at people like them. In a similar vein, respondents commented on the often hostile and anti-black nature of anti-affirmative action speech. Lastly, violence was in evidence in the pressure they felt to self-censor, assimilate, and thus hide their true character, histories and cultural markers of affiliation (e.g. "black" talk). Such acts, and the inevitable stresses and pressures they engendered, signaled to respondents that they were less than, and not worthy of the dignity and respect accorded to their white peers. In their view, psychological violence betrays the entire notion that some are in fact deemed equal.

#### Cultural Imperialism.

Taken together, these oppressions spanning exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, and violence accrue in an instance of cultural imperialism. As previously noted (see chapter 2), "to experience cultural imperialism means to experience how the dominant meanings of a society render the particular perspective of one's own group invisible at the same time as they stereotype one's group and mark it as the Other" (Young, 1990, p. 59). For participants in this study, cultural imperialism (here, the notion that the campus is white, and that "white" is "right") was clearly in evidence. And here again, respondents implicated anti-affirmative action speech, which conveyed the message that while white students deserved to be at Selective (read: white is right), black students did not, as well as the expectation that black students align their behaviors with those deemed appropriate in the white space of campus and divorce themselves from the complex black-white social history in our country (here, marking the campus as white, because it could collectively ignore black history). Taken together, the Selective campus culture systematically elevated some (white-identified behaviors and perspectives) and rendered others'

invisible (those of blacks). Through these processes that played out in social interactions on campus, white became marked as mainstream, and black marked as “other.”

### LIMITATIONS

Although every effort was made to ensure trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), two limitations to transferability need to be acknowledged. First, the participant sample may not be representative of Selective graduates as a whole. Unlike Feagin et al. (1996), whose thirty-six participants were randomly selected, this study employed a snowball sampling method (see chapter 3), whereby participants assist the researcher in recruiting other participants. Moreover, respondents in this study were admitted to Selective within a specific context of time, before and amid state-wide challenges to affirmative action in higher education. Thus, given that respondents were acquaintances or friends, and attended Selective at a time of intense anti-affirmative action activity, caution is advised when applying findings to other black, Selective students, particularly those whose admission coincided with study participants’, or to current or future Selective students, who are and will be years removed from anti-affirmative action rhetoric.

Second, data were collected from a large, highly selective public university in the Midwest. As such, transferability across institutional settings may be limited to those with similar characteristics, such as admissions standards, institutional size, public vs. private, geographic region, and the proximity to a large, predominantly black urban community.

### POSSIBILITIES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Although this dissertation has significantly deepened my understanding of the learning and living experiences of black students at a PWI in the Midwest, it has left me with additional questions. Based on my research findings, five areas are particularly fertile for future

investigation. The first, and perhaps most obvious, area concerns the learning and living experiences of black students at a post-affirmative action, predominantly white university. We know from this study that black students at PWIs fare poorly when learning and living amid state-wide challenges to affirmative action. For example, we know that anti-affirmative action rhetoric is pervasive, and that black students feel compelled to defend their right to be on the white campus. What we have yet to understand are the experiences of black students admitted to selective, predominantly white universities after affirmative action (i.e. race-based admissions) has been eliminated. There, do black students contend with racial microaggressions, such as those questioning their right to be on campus? Or, are black students seen as “equals,” and spared the indignities of racism and anti-affirmative action rhetoric? Certainly, given past and current efforts to abolish affirmative action (The U.S. Supreme Court will be taking up this issue as of this writing), the experiences of black students at post-affirmative action white campuses merit scholarly attention.

A second possibility concerns the experiences of graduates of predominantly black high schools relative to those of predominantly white high schools. As data here show, meaningful differences exist in the way that graduates of black high schools experience the predominantly white university. For example, compared to their counterparts from predominantly white high schools, graduates of black high schools experience significant difficulties adjusting to the social and academic realities of the PWI (i.e. culture and academic shock, respectively). Indeed, findings reveal a disconnect between the black urban and suburban high school and the selective, white university, with graduates of predominantly black high schools feeling less academically and socially prepared than their counterparts from white high schools. In order to effectively address this disconnect and the disparities between the two groups, we need to expand our



understanding of the perceptions, expectations and preparation of held by graduates of black high schools.

In addition, findings here reveal significant differences in the way black men and women experience PWIs, as well as the way they perceive race and gender. For example, whereas black women perceived their race to be more salient than their gender, black men found both to be equally salient. Furthermore, while both groups were subject to racial profiling and stereotyping, stereotypes directed to black men (e.g. athlete, entertainer) conveyed the message that they were not “real” students. Yet, “although many researchers have studied black students on white campuses, few have independently examined trends, outcomes, and the experiences of black male and female collegians. That is, black students have long been treated as a monolithic group and data are not disaggregated by gender in most published research” (Harper, 2006, p.1). Thus, the literature would be well served by studies that expand our understanding of the different ways black men and women perceive and experience the predominantly white university.

Findings also suggest the need to explore black students and resilience. Although black students encounter and are affected by racial microaggressions, and engage predominantly black student organizations as a means of negotiating the racially-charged white campus, more research is needed to understand their ability to persist and ultimately graduate. This is especially the case for students of predominantly black high schools, who face the additional burden of culture and academic shock. Certainly, we could infer that black student organizations, and the friendships born of such affiliations, play a role. However, might other factors, such as one’s personal resolve, also be at play? Additional research would advance our knowledge of those factors supporting black student progression.

Lastly, data suggest ambivalence with respect to the way black students conceptualize and make sense of race and racism. Several examples support this view: participants' perception that HBCUs are not as "real world" as their predominantly white counterparts; that the Black Student Organization's tactics as too militant and outmoded; the observation that while black students need to be versed on white culture, white students need not be versed on black culture; the reality that while black students begin their tenure open to cross-racial friendships, they conclude it without one white friend; and, finally, the advice that prospective Blacks develop more racially-inclusive friendship networks, despite negative experiences with white students. The apparent paradoxes in these findings beg two questions worth investigating if we are to further expand our understanding of black students attending white universities: What is race to the black student at the predominantly white university?, and How do black students reconcile their experiences with racial microaggressions with their desire to connect to campus and befriend white students?

## CONCLUSION

The invitation came in an email. In November of 2010, two months before conducting my first interview for this study, the Black Student Organization held its annual alumni event. Curious to learn what had become of the BSO (I was well over two decades removed), I accepted the invite and headed to my old stomping grounds.

At first glance, everything seemed to be in order, just as it was when I was a member. Captive black audience? Check. Pouring of libations in honor of the ancestors? Check. But the four white students sitting in the audience? This was different, and certainly not the case when I was a student. Times had clearly changed.

Yet, I wondered, had they? Unfortunately, as findings here clearly show, the “change” that I witnessed that evening was more illusion (of racial harmony and togetherness) than reality, more symbol than substance, more cosmetic than substantive or meaningful. In other words, American society remains disappointingly far from realizing the post-racial ideal, one devoid of racism and inequality of educational opportunity.

Interestingly, while we are far from a post-racial America, we are, decidedly (and literally) post-affirmative action, in that society is diverging from a conceptualization of equality of educational opportunity that incorporates Howe’s (1997) notions of recognition and nonoppression (see chapter 2). As the findings here reveal, educational, social, economic and political equality continue to elude black students. Furthermore, Blacks are often not afforded the recognition or “power” to effect structural change and thus reduce inequality, begging a final, thought-provoking question: Ultimately, what would be the point of re-imagining Selective University (see chapter 4)— or any predominantly white university, for that matter— if the limited educational opportunities available to black students, vis-à-vis Whites, render them unable to gain admission or, once on campus, to thrive academically and socially?

## APPENDIX A


## INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL FORM



IRB Administration Office  
87 East Canfield, Second Floor  
Detroit, Michigan 48201  
Phone: (313) 577-1628  
FAX: (313) 993-7122  
<http://irb.wayne.edu>

## NOTICE OF EXPEDITED APPROVAL

To: Rosalind Reeves  
College of Education

From: Dr. Scott Mills   
Chairperson, Behavioral Institutional Review Board (B3)

Date: January 04, 2012

RE: IRB #: 117911B3E  
Protocol Title: Learning and Living While Black: Black Students and the Post-Affirmative, Post-Racial White University  
Funding Source:  
Protocol #: 1111010388  
Expiration Date: January 03, 2013

The above referenced protocol and items listed below (if applicable) were **APPROVED** following *Expedited Review* Category ( #7 ) by the Chairperson/Chairperson for the Wayne State University Institutional Review Board (B3) for the period of 01/04/2012 through 01/03/2013. This approval does not replace any departmental or other approvals that may be required.

- Revised Protocol Summary Form (received in the IRB Office 12/09/2011)
- Protocol (received in the IRB Office 11/17/2011)
- Behavioral Research Informed Consent (dated 03/03/2012)
- Participant Contact Form
- Data collection tools: Group Interview Questions and Semi-Structured Interview Questions

- Federal regulations require that all research be reviewed at least annually. You may receive a "Continuation Renewal Reminder" approximately two months prior to the expiration date; however, it is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to obtain review and continued approval before the expiration date. Data collected during a period of lapsed approval is unapproved research and can never be reported or published as research data.
- All changes or amendments to the above-referenced protocol require review and approval by the IRB **BEFORE** implementation.
- Adverse Reactions/Unexpected Events (AR/UE) must be submitted on the appropriate form within the timeframe specified in the IRB Administration Office Policy (<http://www.irb.wayne.edu/policies/human-research.php>).

## NOTE:

1. Upon notification of an impending regulatory site visit, notification, and/or external audit the IRB Administration Office must be contacted immediately.
2. Forms should be downloaded from the IRB website at each use.

\*Based on the Expedited Review List, revised November 1998

**APPENDIX B****BEHAVIORAL RESEARCH INFORMED CONSENT**

Title of Study: LEARNING AND LIVING WHILE BLACK: BLACK STUDENTS, WHITE UNIVERSITIES AND THE AGE OF POST-AFFIRMATIVE ACTION AND POST-RACIALISM

Principal Investigator (PI): Rosalind Reaves

**Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to gain insight into the learning and living experiences of Black students at predominantly White universities. As an African American and recent graduate of a predominantly White university, your insights and perspectives will be invaluable.

**Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.**

**Study Procedures**

If you agree to take part in this research study, you will be asked to comment on your experiences at Selective University (a pseudonym) in a one-on-one, semi-structured interview, and again as part of a focus group of 8-12 participants, for a total of two study visits. (The focus group will convene eight to ten weeks following individual interviews). The interviews will take about 60 and 120 minutes, respectively, and the individual interviews will be held at a time and in a place that is most convenient for you.

1. As part of the individual interview, you will be asked to respond to 20 and 25 questions regarding your experiences at Selective University (pseudonym). The purpose of the group interview is to gather each of the 10 participants and confirm experiences and perceptions from each of the 10 individual interviews.
2. The individual and focus group interviews will take about 60 and 120 minutes, respectively. For the purpose of ensuring accuracy, the interviews will be recorded on audio and/or video tape and transcribed. You may decline to be recorded (in either or both cases), and you may request to have the recorder turned off at any time during the interviews. After the audio and video tapes are transcribed, within a year's time, all names will be removed from the data and the tapes will be destroyed.
3. Interview questions will ask you to consider your decision to attend a predominantly White university, your experience while there, any impact your experiences may have had on your personal and/or academic well-being, and how you may have coped and adapted to campus life. With your permission, and for the purpose of ensuring accuracy, the interviews will be recorded on audio tape and transcribed. You may decline to be recorded (in either or both cases), and you may request to have the recorder turned off

at any time during the interviews. After the audio tapes are transcribed, within a year's time, all names will be removed from the data and the tapes will be destroyed.

4. Pseudonyms will be utilized throughout, and any information that can possibly identify you will be omitted to maintain your anonymity.

### **Benefits**

As a participant in this research study, there may be no direct benefit for you; however, information from this study may benefit other people now or in the future.

### **Risks**

There are no known risks at this time to participation in this study.

### **Study Costs**

- Participation in this study will be of no cost to you.

### **Compensation**

You will not be paid for taking part in this study.

### **Confidentiality**

All information collected about you during the course of this study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. You will be identified in the research records by a code name or number. Information that identifies you personally will not be released without your written permission. However, the study sponsor, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Wayne State University, or federal agencies with appropriate regulatory oversight [e.g., Food and Drug Administration (FDA), Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP), Office of Civil Rights (OCR), etc.] may review your records.

When the results of this research are published or discussed in conferences, no information will be included that would reveal your identity.

If photographs, videos, or audiotape recordings of you will be used for research or educational purposes, your identity will be protected or disguised. Audio tapes will be destroyed immediately upon following transcription.

## **Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal**

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You have the right to choose not to take part in this study. If you decide to take part in the study you can later change your mind and withdraw from the study. You are free to only answer questions that you want to answer. You are free to withdraw from participation in this study at any time. Your decisions will not change any present or future relationship with Wayne State University or its affiliates, or other services you are entitled to receive.

The PI may stop your participation in this study without your consent. The PI will make the decision and let you know if it is not possible for you to continue. The decision that is made is to protect your health and safety, or because you did not follow the instructions to take part in the study

## **Questions**

If you have any questions about this study now or in the future, you may contact Rosalind Reaves or one of her research team members at the following phone number xxx-xxx-xxxx. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, the Chair of the Institutional Review Board can be contacted at (313) 577-1628. If you are unable to contact the research staff, or if you want to talk to someone other than the research staff, you may also call (313) 577-1628 to ask questions or voice concerns or complaints.

## **Consent to Participate in a Research Study**

To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. If you choose to take part in this study you may withdraw at any time. You are not giving up any of your legal rights by signing this form. Your signature below indicates that you have read, or had read to you, this entire consent form, including the risks and benefits, and have had all of your questions answered. You will be given a copy of this consent form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed name of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Time

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of person obtaining consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed name of person obtaining consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Time

**APPENDIX C****SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL****Introduction:**

*Thank you for agreeing to participate. As you know, this is a study about the learning and living experiences of Black college students. Today, I hope to converse with you about your experiences at Selective University. I am most interested in your reasons for choosing Selective, your perceptions and experiences while there, how these experiences may have impacted you personally and academically, and any adaptive or coping strategies adopted to facilitate your adjustment or connection to the campus. Your experiences are important to me, so please treat this as a conversation, with no right or wrong answers.*

*Before we begin, I'd like to reiterate a couple of key points from the signed consent form.*

1. Interview will take about 1 or 1.5 hours to complete.
2. You can share what you wish to share. If you would rather not respond to a particular question, that is fine. You can simply indicate so.
3. You are free to choose not to participate in all or any part of this study. At any time, you can excuse yourself without any consequences.
4. To ensure that I have as accurate a record of our discussion as possible, I am asking your permission to audio -record the interview. Is that ok? If you would like to go off the record during the interview, you may request to have the recorder turned off. This recording will be deleted within a year's time or as soon as I have a reliable transcription, and I'll destroy your contact information after conducting the group interview.
5. You should know that I will do everything in my power to keep your responses confidential by never linking anything that might identify you with any part of my data set. In fact, in the findings, I will insert pseudonyms to obscure information that might be used to guess who said what.

**Opening discussion:**

*Again, my main goal in this research is to understand things from your vantage point. Of course, I was a student here and of course I had plenty of experiences, both good and bad. However,*



*your experiences, perspectives, beliefs, and stories are what this research is about. Do you have any questions?*

Interview questions are posed and followed by prompts as needed.

### *Context of Choice*

1. First, tell me about going to high school.
  - a. High school attended
  - b. Grew up where?
  - c. When did they realize they wanted to go to college?
2. Let's talk about your decision to attend Selective University? Thinking back, tell me about your decision to go to Selective.
  - a. People involved in conversation/decision?
  - b. All the things taken into account in making this decision?
  - c. Are there are things you took into account?
    - a. Tell me how (a "thing" identified by the participant) played a role?
3. What were your perceptions of Selective University prior to attending?
4. What were all of the fears you had about attending Selective University?
  - a. Were there other concerns?
  - b. Did you have any other reservations about attending Selective U?
  - c. Which of these concerns seemed the strongest? Why were they stronger?
5. Ditto with parents.

### *Campus Experiences/Perceptions*

6. Tell me what it was like for you to go to Selective University at first. (What were your first experiences and impressions of Selective University?)
  - a. Could you give an example to illustrate what you mean when you say (whatever is said)?
  - b. You mentioned an example (within or outside the classroom)... How common were those kinds of experiences?
  - c. Tell me what it is was like (within or outside the classroom, whichever wasn't mentioned)
  - d. Were there other kinds of situations? Tell me about those.
  - e. How common were these kinds of situations?
7. Tell me about or describe interactions with other students on campus?
  - a. What are all the kinds of interactions you might have with other students?
    - i. Prompt for within and outside the classroom experiences.
  - b. How would you describe your friends?
  - c. What were all the things you did outside the classroom with those considered friends?
  - d. What about those who were not considered in your friendship group. What did you do outside the classroom with those not considered friends?

8. Tell me about your interactions with faculty, staff and administrators?
  - a. Where did these interactions happen?
  - b. What happened in these interactions?

*Impact/Effect*

9. Earlier you mentioned that (experience/incident given) and that this was a challenge to your attending (or changed your perception or opinion of) Selective University. Were there other challenges?
  - a. Were there other challenges?
  - b. What were all of the challenges you faced?
  - c. Which of these would you consider the most challenging (or serious)?
  - d. What makes (this or) these more challenging?

*Coping/Adjustment*

10. When you think about the challenges that you faced at Selective University, what are all of the things you did to cope with or adjust to these challenges?
11. Were there more?
12. How did (example given) help you cope with or adjust to life at Selective?
13. Were there specific campus groups?
14. How did (it/they) help you cope with or adjust to life at Selective?
15. Were there particular campus services or support services that you used to cope with life at Selective? (Prompt for how these may have helped participant to cope/adjust)
  - a. Tutoring
  - b. Advising
  - c. Counseling
  - d. Library Services
16. Thinking back, I wonder if you could speculate on how life might have different had you not engaged in those activities.
17. Suppose you could change the kinds of services available to students at Selective. What do you think Selective University could have done to make your experience or adjust to campus life better?

*Race/Racism/Gender*

18. When you think back to your time on campus, how would you describe the campus **racial** climate?
  - a. Could you provide an example to illustrate what you mean when you say (quote the participant)
  - a. How common were events/experiences like this?
  - b. Where (or where else) did these events occur?
  - c. What sort of message did such events send to you about your place on campus?
  - d. If you could have change the situation at Selective, what would you suggest should have changed?

19. Thinking back to your time on campus, how would you describe the campus **gender** climate?
  - a. Ditto for gender.
20. Now, thinking about life at Selective today, what advice would you give to Black students considering Selective University?
  - a. How would you suggest they prepare for life there?
  - b. What are your recommendations for future students about ways to cope with the realities as you saw and/or experienced them on campus?

*Equity/Equality of Educational Opportunity/Oppression*

21. Now I'd like to shift gears a little and ask you to consider the climate at Selective University relative to its fairness to all students or its equity. So when you think about fairness or about equity, what does that mean to you?
  - a. When you think back to your undergraduate career at Selective, how would you describe your sense that everyone had a faire chance there?
  - b. Could you give an example to illustrate what you mean when you say (quote participant)?
  - c. Overall, how fair would you say Selective was to you?
  - d. If you could change Selective to make it more fair or more equitable, what are all of the things that you think needs to be done to make it more or more equitable?
  - e. Now, to be more specific, do you think there were racial inequities at Selective University?
    - i. Examples?
  - f. Do you think there were gender inequities at Selective?
    - i. Examples?
22. To what extent could African American students (women African American students, where applicable) contribute to changing Selective to make it more equitable?
  - a. What opportunities existed for African American and other students of color to contribute to University life, in ways that may have influenced or impacted policies and/or practices?
    - a. Within the classroom?
    - b. Outside the classroom?
23. Finally, is there anything else that would help me to understand what it was like for you to be a student at Selective University?

Closing: Thank you very much the keen insights you've shared with me today. I appreciate your time, candor and wisdom. Before we close, you may recall that I am interested in meeting again with a small group of participants to have a conversation that helps me confirm my findings. Would you kindly complete this contact information sheet, which I will destroy as soon as the group interview is completed? Many thanks again.

**APPENDIX D**

**PARTICIPANT CONTACT FORM**

1. First, Last Name \_\_\_\_\_

2. Pseudonym/code \_\_\_\_\_

3. Address \_\_\_\_\_

4. Phone (H) \_\_\_\_\_

(W) \_\_\_\_\_

(C) \_\_\_\_\_

5. Email

Address(es): \_\_\_\_\_

6. Best days and times to schedule group interviews November 2011-April 2012. Please circle all that apply.

(M T W Th F Sa)

(M T W Th F Sa)

(M T W Th F Sa)

Mornings (9:00-12:00)

Afternoons (12:00-5:00)

Evenings (5:00-8:00)

**APPENDIX E****GROUP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL****Introduction:**

*Thank you for agreeing to participate. Today, I hope to continue our conversation about your experiences at Selective University, as shared during the individual interviews, and confirm and possibly expand on my findings. As with the individual interview, please treat this as a conversation, with no right or wrong answers.*

*Before we begin, I'd like to reiterate a couple of key points from the signed consent form.*

1. This group interview will take between 2 and 2.5 hours to complete.
2. You can share what you wish to share. If you would rather not respond to a particular question, that is fine. You can simply indicate so.
3. You are free to choose not to participate in all or any part of this study. At any time, you can excuse yourself without any consequences.
4. To ensure that I have as accurate a record of our discussion as possible, I am asking your permission to audio -record the interview. Is that ok? If you would like to go off the record during the interview, you may request to have the recorder turned off. This recording will be deleted within a year's time or as soon as I have a reliable transcription, and I'll destroy your contact information after conducting this group interview.
5. You should know that I will do everything in my power to keep your responses confidential by never linking anything that might identify you with any part of my data set. In fact, in the findings, I will insert pseudonyms to obscure information that might be used to guess who said what.

**Opening discussion:**

*Again, my main goal in this research is to understand things from your vantage point. As with the individual interview, this is about each of your experiences, perspectives, beliefs, and stories. Do you have any questions?*

Interview questions are posed and followed by prompts as needed.

*Context of Choice*

1. As part of the individual interview, we discussed several topics, including your decision to attend Selective University? Please tell me about your decision to go to Selective.
  - a. People involved in conversation/decision?
  - b. All the things taken into account in making this decision?
  - c. Are there are things you took into account?
  - d. Tell me how (a “thing” identified by the participant) played a role?
2. What were your perceptions of Selective University prior to attending?
3. What were all of the fears you had about attending Selective University?
  - a. Were there other concerns?
  - b. Did you have any other reservations about attending Selective U?
  - c. Which of these concerns seemed the strongest? Why were they stronger?
4. What were all of the fears your parents had about attending Selective University?

*Campus Experiences/Perceptions*

5. Tell me what it was like for you to go to Selective University at first. (What were your first experiences and impressions of Selective University?)
  - a. Could you give an example to illustrate what you mean when you say (whatever is said)?
  - b. You mentioned an example (within or outside the classroom)... How common were those kinds of experiences?
  - c. Tell me what it is was like (within or outside the classroom, whichever wasn't mentioned)
  - d. Were there other kinds of situations? Tell me about those.
  - e. How common were these kinds of situations?
6. Tell me about or describe interactions with other students on campus?
  - a. What are all the kinds of interactions you might have with other students?
    - i. Prompt for within and outside the classroom experiences.
  - b. How would you describe your friends?
  - c. What were all the things you did outside the classroom with those considered friends?
  - d. What about those who were not considered in your friendship group. What did you do outside the classroom with those not considered friends?
7. Tell me about your interactions with faculty, staff and administrators?
  - a. Where did these interactions happen?
  - b. What happened in these interactions?
8. Ditto with staff
9. Ditto with administrators

*Impact/Effect*

10. Some of you mentioned that (experience/incident given) and that this was a challenge to your attending (or changed your perception or opinion of) Selective University. Were there other challenges?
  - a. Were there other challenges?
  - b. What were all of the challenges you faced?
  - c. Which of these would you consider the most challenging (or serious)?
  - d. What makes (this or) these more challenging?

*Coping/Adjustment*

11. When you think about the challenges that you faced at Selective University, what are all of the things you did to cope with or adjust to these challenges?
12. Were there more?
13. How did (example given) help you cope with or adjust to life at Selective?
14. Were there specific campus groups?
15. How did (it/they) help you cope with or adjust to life at Selective?
16. Were there particular campus services or support services that you used to cope with life at Selective? (Prompt for how these may have helped participant to cope/adjust)
  - a. Tutoring
  - b. Advising
  - c. Counseling
  - d. Library Services
17. Thinking back, I wonder if you could speculate on how life might have different had you not engaged in those activities.
18. Suppose you could change the kinds of services available to students at Selective. What do you think Selective University could have done to make your experience or adjust to campus life better?

*Race/Racism/Gender*

19. When you think back to your time on campus, how would you describe the campus **racial** climate?
  - a. Could you provide an example to illustrate what you mean when you say (quote the participant)
  - b. How common were events/experiences like this?
  - c. Where (or where else) did these events occur?
  - d. What sort of message did such events send to you about your place on campus?
  - e. If you could have change the situation at Selective, what would you suggest should have changed?
20. Thinking back to your time on campus, how would you describe the campus gender climate?

21. Now, thinking about life at Selective today, what advice would you give to black students considering Selective University?
- How would you suggest they prepare for life there?
  - What are your recommendations for future students about ways to cope with the realities as you saw and/or experienced them on campus?

*Equity/Equality of Educational Opportunity/Oppression*

22. Now I'd like to shift gears a little and ask you to consider the climate at Selective University relative to its fairness to all students or its equity. So when you think about fairness or about equity, what does that mean to you?
- When you think back to your undergraduate career at Selective, how would you describe your sense that everyone had a fair chance there?
  - Could you give an example to illustrate what you mean when you say (quote participant)?
  - Overall, how fair would you say Selective was to you?
  - If you could change Selective to make it more fair or more equitable, what are all of the things that you think need to be done to make it more or more equitable?
  - Now, to be more specific, do you think there were racial inequities at Selective University?
    - Examples?
  - Do you think there were gender inequities at Selective?
    - Examples?
23. To what extent could African American students (women African American students, where applicable) contribute to changing Selective to make it more equitable?
24. What opportunities existed for African American and other students of color to contribute to University life, in ways that may have influenced or impacted policies and/or practices?
25. Within the classroom?
26. Outside the classroom?
27. Finally, is there anything else that would help me to understand what it was like for you to be a student at Selective University?

Closing: Many thanks for your time today. This has been a most informative conversation, and I appreciate your candor and willingness to share. While this concludes your commitment to the study, you should feel free to contact me. I would welcome any additional questions, comments or ideas you'd like to share.



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<sup>1</sup> These resources have not been listed to secure the identity of Selective University: Selective University Student Newspaper, Selective Alumni Magazine, Selective African American Fact Book, and Selective University's Black Student Organization.

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**ABSTRACT****LEARNING AND LIVING WHILE BLACK: BLACK STUDENTS, WHITE UNIVERSITIES, AND THE AGE OF POST-AFFIRMATIVE ACTION AND POST-RACIALISM**

by

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With Critical Race Theory (CRT) and social justice serving as complementary conceptual frames, this ethnographic study investigates the learning and living experiences of ten African American students of a predominantly White university in the Midwest. Although several studies have investigated black students' experiences at PWIs, most notably Agony of Education (1996), much of this research was conducted pre-2000, prior to two notable and significant social developments: the systematic dismantling of post-secondary affirmative action policies, and the increasingly popular, but highly contentious, ideology of post-racialism. Thus, the purpose of this study was to understand how black students are faring present-day, in the wake of efforts to dismantle affirmative action in higher education and to characterize the United States as post-racial, as having moved beyond considerations of race.

The following questions guided this study and served to deepen understanding of the learning and living experiences of African American students: What figured into black students' decision to choose to attend a predominantly White university? How do black students describe their own experiences learning and living in a predominantly white university? To what extent

might such experiences impact black students' sense of well-being and academic achievement? In what ways might black students cope and deal with learning and living at a predominantly White university? To what extent might race be implicated in the experiences of black students at PWIs, and how do students conceptualize, describe, and make sense of race/racism? What is the range of educational opportunities afforded black students, and to what extent might these opportunities be perceived as being on par with those afforded white students? To what extent might the learning and living experiences of black students exemplify different forms of oppression?

Overall, findings indicate that race remains a salient factor for black students at a predominantly white university, thus debunking the notion of post-racialism. Black students also perceive disparities in the educational opportunities afforded them and their white counterparts. Lastly, exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence (i.e. five faces of oppression, Young, 1990) were found to be in evidence.



## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

I feel incredibly fortunate to have had many pivotal experiences in my life—experiences that collectively have shaped my thinking about race and social justice, and that certainly have served as the inspiration for this dissertation. The first such experience occurred after second grade, when I transferred to a predominantly white, Catholic elementary school. There, I was forced to think about race and grapple with what it means to be black in a white “world.” Though I would not realize this until much later, my experiences in elementary school were deeply and profoundly life-changing.

My undergraduate years at a large, predominantly white public university in the Midwest, were equally formative. Given my previous experiences in elementary and high school, I was eager to affiliate with organizations that supported and affirmed me as an African American. As a member of the Black Student Organization, I learned to appreciate the struggles that helped pave the way for me and other black students at the University. The Coalition Against Racism a multi-racial, social justice-oriented organization taught me about the structural character of racism, systems of oppression, and the notion of personal agency, to name the most resonant.

Lastly, as a graduate student in New York, I was able to fulfill one of my life-long dreams: to visit and volunteer in Africa. For the first time since second grade, I felt less self-conscious and preoccupied with my race. Indeed, Africa is where I deepened my understanding of race—the effects of Westernization and centuries of imperialism and oppression were clearly in evidence—and what it means to be both African and American.

In many ways, this dissertation represents an extension, if not culmination, of my life’s work, one dedicated to raising social and political consciousness and challenging the status quo. If this study fulfills at least one of these goals, my work will not have been in vain.