

AFRICAN AMERICAN EDUCATORS' PERSPECTIVES ON
CONTRIBUTIONS, CHALLENGES, AND
MARGINALIZATION WITHIN
AMERICA'S PUBLIC
SCHOOL SYSTEM

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CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my sons, Nicholas and Christopher Cormier who supported and encouraged me to complete this project. Their tremendous love for me is a wonderful blessing in my life.

This work is also dedicated to my “sisters” Alison and Katherine who were my biggest cheerleaders throughout this two year educational journey.

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ABSTRACT

The teaching force in the United States is out of balance. As our country has grown more diverse, teaching staffs have grown less diverse. The population of African Americans has increased at approximately twice the growth rate of European Americans; however, less than two percent of America's teachers are African American. This study investigated the experiences of African American educators in the public school system. The study identified rewards, challenges, and reasons for the lack of African American presence in the school system. Five African American educators were selected to participate. Three of the participants were classroom teachers, and two participants were administrators. Four participants were female, and one participant was male. Nine interview questions were developed relevant to the topic of this study. Oral interviews were conducted to ascertain responses to interview questions. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed. The results of the study indicated that African American teachers go above and beyond the call of duty to meet the educational and social needs of African American students. This extra layer of support is vital in helping African American students make educational gains in an effort to close the achievement gap. Also, results indicated that proactive measures should be taken to insure the presence of more African American teachers in classrooms throughout the United States of America.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to identify the contributions of African American educators to the public school system, the challenges they experience, and reasons for their ethnicity's current lack of representation in America's public school teaching force.

The educational road has been long and hard for African Americans in the United States of America. The institution of slavery prohibited African Americans from being educated as a means to maintaining white superiority. The post-Civil War/Reconstruction Era brought about positive changes with an emergence of black schools. These schools were led by a determined group of black educators who were committed to providing a comprehensive and quality education for their students in spite of tremendous opposition from the establishment and less than adequate resources and services. These schools, although lacking in resources, were rich with idealism and commitment from their teaching staff (Wright, 1996).

In the 1930s, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) sought to rectify the obvious lack of resources for black schools by challenging the premise of the "Separate but Equal" United States Supreme Court decision that justified systems of segregation on the condition that the quality of each group's materials, services, and quality of facilities were to remain equal (Roche,

1951). However, public school systems ignored the decision and major disparities in education continued.

The NAACP persevered in its fight against “Separate but Equal” as they brought these educational inequalities to the forefront of the justice system citing that southern states spent less than half of the educational allotment for white students on education for black students. Additionally, they sought to rectify salary differentials, inferior facilities, and the limited schooling opportunities for African American students. This campaign for equality resulted in the Brown decision, which provided for school desegregation when the Supreme Court found that the law establishing separate public schools for black and white children was unconstitutional (Linder, 2000). African American educators were steadfast in their perseverance, determination, and support to opening educational doors. Their commitment to provide black students in particular, and all students in general with a well-rounded academic foundation was always at the forefront of their mission (Wright, 1996).

Today, black educators are continuing to strive for quality educational programs and resources for their students; but, there still is a significant number of race related gaps that continue to have negative consequences for the public school system. One of these gaps involves teacher diversity with over 40% of the public school population comprised of “students of color”, while “teachers of color” comprise less than 17% of the workforce in education (Boser, 2011).

Statement of the Problem

The teaching force in the United States is out of balance and is not reflective of America. As our nation has grown more diverse, the teaching force has grown less diverse with a shortage of African American teachers, especially African American men (Johnson, 2013). African American educators are disproportionately represented in the public school system, which leaves African American students without positive role models within their own ethnicity from whom to learn and emulate. In addition to this deficit, other students receive a distorted image of a diverse society by the lack of African American representation in the teaching force.

Research Questions

1. What are the personal rewards experienced by African American educators and the contributions that they make to the United States' public school system?
2. What are the professional challenges experienced by African American educators in the public school system?
3. What factors contribute to the lack of African American educators in the public school system?

Significance of the Study

This study may shed light on issues of imbalance between the high number of African American students and the low number of African American educators. This study hopes to provide useful information for educators and policy makers to develop

programs and reform measures aimed at increasing teacher diversity in the public school system.

Limitations of the Study

The following limitations were considered in the analyses of the responses given in this study:

1. The truthfulness of the participants. The author considered the possibility that the teachers interviewed may intentionally exaggerate or understate their instructional practices.
2. The candor of the participants. As an educator in the same school district as some of the participants, this researcher recognized the possibility that the educators interviewed may not feel entirely comfortable fully answering each question.

Definition of Terms

African American. An American of African and especially black African ancestry.

Separate but Equal. Pertaining to an educational policy by which African American students may be segregated from white students if granted the same opportunities and quality of services and facilities as white students.

Public Schools. Elementary or secondary schools in the United States that are supported by public funds and provide a free education for all children.

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). A civil rights organization in the United States. Its mission is to ensure the political, educational, social, and economic equality of rights for all persons and to eliminate racial discrimination.

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). A national assessment of what American students know and can do in core subjects.

Title I . Provides for financial assistance to local educational agencies and schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low income families to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards.

Summary

Chapter I presented an introduction to this study, which will examine the professional experiences and contributions of African American educators and identify reasons for the current lack of representation in America's public school teaching force. Also, research questions were established, the significance presented, and definitions of terms relevant to this study were provided. Chapter II will present a review of relevant literature pertinent to the topic of this study.

CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to identify the contributions of African American educators to the public school system, the challenges they experience, and reasons for their ethnicity's current lack of representation in America's public school teaching force. This review of literature will present historical, legal, and educational perspectives relevant to the topic of study.

Historical Perspectives

“In the field of public education, the doctrine of separate but equal has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal. (Segregation) generates a feeling of inferiority (among students) as to their status within a community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone.”

Chief Justice Warren, 1954

“How much satisfaction can I get from a court order for somebody to associate with me who does not wish me to be near them?”

Zora Hurston, 1955

Supreme Court Justice Warren's decision on the doctrine of “Separate but Equal” as well as Zora Hurston's thoughts on the issue embody two sentiments that reflected the African American plight in education during the 1960s. The desegregation of schools was a giant step of progress towards educational equality for African Americans in the United States. However, was this enough? Could a court order truly bring about equality in education? (Trueman, 2000).

The decision to desegregate schools was only the beginning of a decade of educational opposition for African Americans. In a massive campaign of resistance, southern states refused to abide by the decision and found ways to circumvent the order. Tactics such as permitting local school officials the option of transferring students to maintain segregation, the withdrawal of state funds, and school closures were all used to stop the desegregation process.

The NAACP forged countless legal battles to force these uncooperative school district officials to comply with the law. Federal intervention became necessary in many cases such as Little Rock, Arkansas (History Learning Site Education and Civil Rights, 2004).

The Little Rock Nine was a group of African American students enrolled in Little Rock's Central High School in 1957. Although the school board had plans of integrating gradually, the NAACP chose to have these model students with excellent academic and attendance records begin classes at Central High School in the fall of 1957, not long after the Supreme Court decision. The Little Rock Crisis ensued when Governor Orval Faubus attempted to prevent black students from attending the all-white high school in 1955 through use of the Arkansas National Guard. The governor was forced to remove the guard, but a general combative tone was set as angry mobs taunted these "integration pioneers" as they sought to attend classes. President Eisenhower was forced to send federal troops to Little Rock to uphold the decision and permit the nine students to attend their classes (Galiano, 2013).

Little Rock was not an isolated event. Southern states continued to resist throughout the 1960s particularly in the realm of higher education. In the fall of 1962, the University of Mississippi (Ole Miss) attempted to stop James Meredith's enrollment in the university. Governor Ross Barnett was found guilty of contempt and fined \$5,000 per day until he allowed Meredith to enroll. Riots between citizens and students ensued and two people were killed before Meredith finally began attending classes in October of 1962 (Elliot, 2012).

Southern states continued to resist throughout the 1960s until federal district courts threatened to remove their state financial aid. Most remaining districts reluctantly agreed to desegregate or face financial sanctions (Johnston, 2011).

Legal Perspectives

In the 1970s, most schools had accepted desegregation as a matter of law. However, integration had not been accomplished. School boards did little to eliminate racial separation in public schools. Dual schooling for black and white students continued to exist. In 1971, the United States Supreme Court issued another landmark ruling related to equality in education in their ruling in the Swann decision. This case was brought to the forefront of the justice system by Darius Swann and nine African American families who wanted their children to attend an all-white school. *Swann v Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* (1971) was a case that promoted busing of students to promote racial balance and integration in public schools. The court held that busing was an appropriate remedy even when there was a geographic

proximity to the school, similar to the situation of Mr. Swann and his son who lived near the all-white school as cited in Montgomery, 1971.

The onset of forced busing brought violence and bitterness to campuses throughout the United States. From 1970-1971, there were eight bomb explosions and six deaths related to busing. In North Carolina, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Alabama, racial violence that included bomb threats, fires, suspensions, and arrests were at an all-time high. In spite of the violent circumstances, busing continued and eventually progress was made in integrating public schools. The percentage of black students attending white schools increased from 18.4% to 38.1%, while the number of black schools dropped from 68 to 18 (Minchin & Salmond, 2011).

African Americans perceived integration as the only viable means of gaining a better life and future for their children. The NAACP expressed these sentiments to President Richard Nixon stating that “Education is that step ladder out of poverty and anarchism into the mainstream of American democracy. The problem we face is centered on education. Separated education is wrong legally and morally” (as cited in Minchin & Salmond, 2011, p. 83).

The proponents of busing and racial desegregation maintained that there would be positive outcomes for African American students resulting in improved achievement, aspirations, self-esteem, racial attitudes, as well as educational and cultural opportunities that segregated schools could not offer (Minchin & Salmond, 2011). Opponents of busing argued that racial desegregation was not integration and the hostile conditions created by busing could limit the benefits for both races and

that more effort to foster positive interracial interactions was necessary in order to achieve success and positive effects of desegregation (Pettigrew, 1971). The struggles incurred by African Americans in their plight for educational opportunities began to show signs of progress throughout the 1970s and 1980s with an increase in overall academic achievement in elementary school, improvement in African American high school graduation rates, and a significant increase in the number of African Americans seeking a college education.

Educational Perspectives

In the 1970s and 1980s, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reported a reduction in the achievement gap between white students and their African American counterparts in reading and mathematics scores. For some students, the gap was cut in half. In 1971, a 39 point gap existed in reading scores between white and African American 13 year old students. By 1988, this gap was reduced to an 18 point difference. Grissmer (1994) conducted a study to identify and examine reasons for the gap. Grissmer and his colleagues measured the impact of the following factors: parent education level, family income, whether the mother was working, the mother's age at the birth of the child, the number of siblings, whether the mother was single or married, and whether the parent(s) were white, African American, or Hispanic. The study's major conclusion was that the circumstances of minority families relative to white families contributed greatly to the achievement gap reduction.

At the high school level, school integration showed positive benefits as well with increases in performance for 13 and 17 year old African American students on reading tests conducted by the NAEP (The Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, 2013). Evidence showed that the reduction in the achievement gap between African American and white students was more prevalent at schools that had integrated sooner. Crain and Mahaard (1978) found that schools that had embraced desegregation earlier resulted in greater educational gains for African American students. A larger study conducted by the United States Department of Education (1995) showed major academic gains for minority children in the south during the 1970s.

Colleges and universities also experienced an increase in attendance by African American students during the 1970s and 1980s. Prior to 1965, most American colleges and universities were attended primarily by white males. Additionally, college was not a necessity for most workers to earn a decent living. However, labor trends shifted dramatically as the demand for skilled labor increased and the salary differentials grew larger (Autor, 2011).

By the end of the 1960s and throughout the 1970s, the Civil Rights movement increased social awareness, and significant changes in federal policy regarding higher education brought about an increase in college enrollment in institutions of higher learning (Smith, 1994). The passage of the Higher Education Act of 1965 extended federal financial aid to the general population as well as provided more financial resources to support colleges and universities. Additionally, this funding created

scholarships and gave low interest loans to students. The Teacher Corps was also a result of the Higher Education Act of 1965. The Teaching Corps was designed to improve teaching in elementary and secondary settings by having colleges and universities with teacher training programs work in partnership with local school districts to carry out the desired goals of schools. These schools were usually in predominantly low income areas. The interns were active in developing strong community relations in the school neighborhoods while also continuing to pursue their college careers. The Teacher Corps was replaced by block grants under the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act of 1981 (Eckert, 2011).

In the 1970s, reports indicated that 45% of African American high school seniors were entering college, nearly double the previous count (Fontaine, 2010). Historically black colleges and universities were pivotal in providing higher education to African Americans (Drewry, 2001). These colleges, which received federal funding as long as they were accredited, also saw an increase in attendance during the 1970s. Although predominantly African American, these universities may have non-African American majorities in accordance with the guidelines of the civil rights laws (Fontaine, 2010).

The educational gains of the 1970s and 1980s stagnated and declined during the next two decades. The achievement gap between African American and white students increased slightly and showed no marked gains. The average African American student at the age of 17 was 4 years behind their white counterparts. African American students in twelfth grade scored lower than white eighth grade

students in reading, mathematics, U.S. history, and geography (Therstrom & Thernstrom, 2003).

Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) results for African American students from 1996 through 2008 showed that African Americans were underrepresented in the upper tiers of the achievement distribution with less than one-third of African American students in the basic proficient group in mathematics, science, and history, and barely half were basic proficient in reading. In stark contrast, two-thirds of white students were achieving basic proficient in all of the aforementioned areas except U.S. history (Harris, 2010).

The role of African American educators in closing the achievement gap is vital. For years, African American teachers have played a pivotal role in the lives of African American students by identifying with their circumstances and serving as positive role models. The progress of desegregation came at a price to educators with thousands of African American teachers losing their jobs over the next 20 years due to school closures and integration measures. In the years following the Brown decision, more than 36,000 African American teachers and administrators in 17 southern and border states were relieved of their teaching duties. *“It took a chunk out of the black middle class,”* stated Linda Tillman of Wayne State (as cited by Toppo, 2004). Those who supported desegregation saw the negative impact on African American educators and were worried that students were not being served well in their new integrated schools (Toppo, 2004).

From 1975 to 1985, the number of African Americans majoring in education dropped by 66% (Hudson, 2000). In 2000, 84% of teachers were white, while only 61% of students were white. African American students comprised 17% of the public school population, but fewer than 8% of the teachers were African American. Additionally, 38% of public schools did not have a single African American teacher at their sites. African American students were likely to spend their entire K-12 educational career in public schools without having an African American teacher or attend an African American led school (Hawkins, 2013).

The presence of positive role models is beneficial for students. The presence of African American educators must be increased to provide students with role models to inspire them to achieve. Social factors are also greatly enhanced by African American presence in the classroom (Dee, 2011).

A study was conducted in Georgia public schools between 2002 and 2006 to analyze data related to teen pregnancy rates by county. The pregnancy rate of 15 to 19 year old girls was 343 births per 1,000 students. Fewer than one third of these students completed high school and less than 2% graduated from college. Teen mothers face educational challenges as they attempt to attend classes and raise children (Hamilton, 2012). The results indicated that an increase in African American teachers resulted in a decrease in teen pregnancies among African American students confirming the idea that the presence of role models of the same race can lead to positive benefits for the people who can readily identify with them (Beck, 2013).

There are no easy solutions to the achievement gap and the lack of African American teachers in today's public schools. U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan appealed to U.S. college students in 2010 to invest their lives in teaching, specifically addressing African American teachers. The TEACH campaign was designed to raise awareness of the teaching profession and encourage more minorities and males to pursue careers in education. In 2010, 35% of public school students were African American, but less than 9% of the teachers were African American or Hispanic. Ninety percent of teachers in urban neighborhoods were white and less than 2% of these teachers were African American males (Certain, 2010).

Along with creating more diversity in teaching, Duncan hopes to support teachers in rebuilding their profession and to elevate the level of respect for this profession. The five billion dollar proposal would attempt to improve the teaching profession for entry level teachers by reforming teacher preparation programs and reforming compensation for teachers by aligning salaries with performance, paying teachers more for working in difficult environments, and making teacher salaries more competitive to be more closely aligned with other professions (McCracken, 2010). Duncan's proposal represented a step in the right direction for closing the achievement gap by having highly trained professionals of all ethnicities represented in the classroom (Paulson, 2012).

There are many educational issues that continue in 2013. Closing the achievement gap and hiring well trained African American teachers is vital.

Additionally, adequate and equitable resources must be provided for all students. Far too often inner city schools with large numbers of African American students lack the resources necessary to provide for these students and they lose interest in school and eventually drop out. Educators and policy makers must look at this crisis in education and seek viable solutions in order to save the educational lives of African American students (Crosley, 2013).

Summary

Chapter II presented a review of the literature pertinent to this topic of study.

Chapter III will present and discuss the sample, methodology, and data analyses used.

CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to identify the contributions of African American educators to the public school system, the challenges they experience, and reasons for their ethnicity's current lack of representation in America's public school teaching force. For this study, the following topics will be reviewed to provide the methodology: (1) sample population, (2) data collection process, and (3) data analyses.

Sample Population

The African American educators in this study were elementary teachers employed by local public school districts in Stanislaus County. Each participant was identified by a fictitious name to protect his/her identity. Selection included participants who were male and female, worked at Title I schools, and had a minimum of five years teaching experience in a public school setting. Title I schools have a high percentage of children from low income families and receive federal financial assistance.

Table 1 Participant Descriptors

Teacher	Years in Education	Male or Female
Errold	18	Male
Shelly	25	Female
Pete	32	Male
Ginny	19	Female
Cammy	19	Female

Data Collection Process

For this study, all data and information were collected in January 2014. The data collection consisted of individual one-on-one interviews with five African American educators in Stanislaus County.

Upon receiving approval from California State University, Stanislaus Institutional Review Board to conduct field research, the potential participants were contacted by telephone. They were informed of the nature and purpose of this study. The phone calls were followed up with a letter describing the study, an Informed Consent form (see appendix A), and a matrix of questions (see appendix B) to be answered during the interviews.

Prior to interviewing the participants, the interview questions were field tested with two teachers who were not included in this study. The field test assisted in determining which questions provided the specific type of data that this researcher was seeking in this study. The field test also assisted in the determination of the approximate amount of time that would be required for each interview.

All interviews were recorded with permission of all parties. Notes were also taken at the time of the initial interview and reviewed upon completion.

Data Analysis

Each recorded interview was transcribed upon completion. This researcher determined the accuracy of each interviewee's responses by: (1) asking the interviewees to carefully review the transcripts noting accuracy and intent of

statements, (2) e-mailing copies of transcripts, and (3) requesting that the transcripts be approved and returned to this researcher within 48 hours. A second interview was scheduled, if the researcher determined that additional clarification of their responses was necessary.

In order to organize the data, the transcripts were color-coded based on the categories defined in the research questions: R1= identification of contributions to the public school system, R2 = identification of challenges they experience, and R3 = reasons for their ethnicity's lack of representation in America's public school teaching force. Each category was disaggregated into sub-categories using a response matrix in order to identify, compare, and contrast the common themes. The questions from each sub-category are listed below:

R1 = Identification of contributions to the public school system

1. Describe how you have reached out to African American students in need of a role model.
2. Describe an experience where you have been a positive role model in the life of a non-African American student, and how their opinion of African Americans may have been altered because of their interaction with you.
3. Please cite one professional experience where your ethnicity played a positive role in the life of a student.

R2 = Identification of challenges they experience

1. Describe a teaching experience when your ethnicity was perceived in a negative manner by a student, parent, or staff member.

2. Are there other African American teachers at your site, and if so, how many? How does being the minority “minority” on a teaching staff make you feel?
3. Do you believe that your teaching assignment at a Title I school is related to your ethnicity?

R3 = Reasons for their ethnicity’s lack of representation in America’s public school teaching force

1. Why do you think there are so few African Americans educators in the public school system?
2. What are ways to increase their presence in the public school system?
3. If you were a principal, how important would hiring African American teachers be to you? Elaborate.

Summary

Chapter III presented and discussed the sample, methodology, and data analyses used. Chapter IV will report the results of the analyses.

CHAPTER IV
RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to identify the contributions of African American educators to the public school system, the challenges they experience, and reasons for their ethnicity's current lack of representation in America's public school teaching force. As a result, this researcher interviewed five African American educators to provide feedback on these topics in relation to their educational careers. This chapter provides a summary of the interviews as they relate to the research questions.

Interview 1

What are the personal rewards experienced by African American educators and the contributions that they make to the United States public school system? (R1)

Errold is an African American sixth grade teacher. He sees his role in education as a high calling. He promotes excellence in all of his students, especially African American students by maintaining high expectations and empowering his students with the tools to excel in science and math. Errold offers personal advice to African American students by telling them that their career options are much broader than the media portrays, and that there are many other career opportunities beyond sports and entertainment. Errold readily mentors and advises his students to see beyond the present to reach their fullest potential.

What are the professional challenges experienced by African American educators in the public school system? (R2)

Throughout Errold's teaching years, he has endured racial challenges including being called a "nigger" by parents and students. On one occasion, a professed skinhead in his class verbally attacked him. Throughout these assaults, Errold has maintained his composure and continued to teach all students with excellence and commitment. Currently, Errold is the only African American teacher at his site, which is a Title I school. He feels that having one African American teacher on staff is much better than having no one at all. He does not feel that his placement at this site was the result of his ethnicity.

What factors contribute to the lack of African American educators in the public school system? (R3)

Errold believes that the 21st century's "visual generation" is one of the key factors hindering more African Americans from entering the teaching force. He feels that the prevalence of African American entertainers and sports figures in the media and the rarity of giving news coverage to teachers has made this profession less appealing to young adults. This lack of positive exposure to opportunities in education has caused young people to not consider this field as an option. He feels that this could be corrected by having more teachers and parents discuss educational career options with their children when they are young and assist them in pursuing

these options. Errold feels that the teaching population should be representative of the community that it serves.

Interview 2

What are the personal rewards experienced by African American educators and the contributions that they make to the United States public school system? (R1)

Ginny is an African American principal at an elementary school. In her role as principal, Ginny views herself as a positive role model for all students. However, she feels an extra responsibility to nurture and encourage African American students to do their personal best. She feels that having the same ethnicity adds another “layer” to her relationship with the students as she strives to have them flourish educationally and socially. Positive “high 5s” and pats on the back are regularly given to all students in general, and African American students in particular, to show them her support. During challenging discipline encounters with African American students, Ginny reprovokes the action and attempts to convey the importance of African American students representing their culture by demonstrating good behavior and educational excellence. Ginny stated that she often speaks to these students as she would her own son or daughter.

Ginny often goes the extra mile for students beyond her normal workday. She has attended family gatherings, funerals, and cultural events where she has been the only African American present. Her actions convey a deep and sincere concern for

her students and their families while also attempting to bridge the “cultural divide” that often exists between races. Ginny has assisted families financially with travel expenses so that they could attend funeral services for a loved one.

Ginny recalled an incident where her ethnicity gave her a deeper understanding and ability to solve a problem at her site. During a verbal reprimand of his class, a substitute teacher told the class that they were being “ghetto” in regards to their poor classroom behavior. At this low income school, the students received a different message and were highly offended. Along with their parents, they brought their concerns to Ginny. She spoke to the teacher about his choice of words and explained that they struck a deeper chord with many of the African American students who were living in poverty. Her role as an African American administrator served her well in thoroughly understanding the dynamics of this situation from the students’ perspective.

What are the professional challenges experienced by African American educators in the public school system? (R2)

For Ginny, challenges due to racism have been few and far between in her educational career. She could only recall one incident when a disgruntled parent resorted to a racist verbal attack because he/she did not agree with her administrative decision. She promptly ended the meeting.

Ginny feels that her ethnicity has not been a barrier in her educational career. Although she is the only African American principal in her school district, this has in

no way impeded her from executing her job duties with dignity and excellence. At her school site, there are several African American staff members including teachers, instructional coaches, office personnel, and yard supervisors. Her school boasts of having the highest number of African American employees of any site in the district. She feels that their presence is comforting, reassuring, and creates a camaraderie. Although many other relationships are present, there is a certain “kinship” with co-workers who share her ethnicity. She feels that her placement at this school is definitely because of her ethnicity and she said that she was proud to serve as the administrator.

What factors contribute to the lack of African American educators in the public school system? (R3)

Ginny stated that the lack of African Americans in the public school system was a geographic issue and proportionate to the population in a certain area. In Virginia, where Ginny began her career, there were many African American educators. However, in the Central Valley, the educators are less prevalent because the African American population is much smaller than Virginia.

Ginny feels that mentoring would be one way to encourage more African Americans to pursue careers in education. She would like to see current educators and retired educators seek viable candidates and expose them to the field of education. She also feels that teacher education programs and school districts need to

increase their support and training of new teachers for them to enter the profession and remain.

As an administrator, hiring qualified, caring, compassionate, and eager teachers would be a first priority, not ethnicity. However, Ginny stated that she believes a school should have the staff be representative of the population it serves whenever it is possible.

Interview 3

What are the personal rewards experienced by African American educators and the contributions that they make to the United States public school system? (R1)

Cammy is an African American principal at an elementary school. She proudly stated that “she does what’s right for all kids.” As a principal and role model for African American children, Cammy seeks to challenge them by sharing positive experiences about successful African Americans, which hopefully will encourage them to reach their fullest potential. Cammy readily identifies African American students who lack role models and struggle with identity issues and seeks to be an active, positive role model for them. She recalled an encounter with an African American primary student who told her “I never knew they had African American principals!” Whenever Cammy visited this student’s class, she said that the student beamed with pride and sat up tall to show her principal that she was doing her best.

Cammy recalled another encounter with a non-African American student who had been home schooled and abused for many years. Attending Cammy's school was the student's first public school experience. Cammy and her staff went beyond the call of duty to create a safe, favorable learning environment for this child to thrive and overcome some of the damages that years of abuse had caused. She wanted the child to know that people can be positive, friendly and helpful. Cammy hoped that this would prompt the child to "pay it forward" and help someone else.

What are the professional challenges experienced by African American educators in the public school system? (R2)

Cammy has encountered professional challenges because of her ethnicity. Cammy feels as if she had to prove herself in many situations and is not given the benefit of knowing her craft. She recalled an event where she worked at a school site as an administrator and a co-worker asked if she was hired as a result of affirmative action. Additionally, Cammy dealt with a family that accused her of predetermined favor. The parents stated, "I know that you're all going to stick together" before she had the opportunity to review the details of the incident in question. Although daunting at times, Cammy puts such attitudes aside and seeks to accomplish the important work that needs to be done as a site administrator.

What factors contribute to the lack of African American educators in the public school system? (R3)

Cammy feels that the current system of higher education is a non-friendly system that does not reach out to African American students. This results in lower numbers of African Americans in school, and far less entering the field of education. She would like to see schools actively recruiting African Americans in education programs such as “Teach for America”. Cammy believes that the faces of a teaching staff should match the demographics of a school.

Interview 4

What are the personal rewards experienced by African American educators and the contributions that they make to the United States’ public school system? (R1)

Pete is an African American sixth grade teacher. He feels that his role as a male teacher, as well as being African American, is quite unique at the elementary level. He equates himself as a father figure for the students at his school site. Pete has impacted numerous students in positive ways. His role as an African American male teacher made his classroom the “desirable” placement for many young African American boys who may have needed the presence of a male role model in their lives. Pete sought to correct some of the “*dullness and self-hatred*” that he saw in those challenging students. African American students and students of all ethnicities still return to his class or Facebook him to stay in touch.

What are the professional challenges experienced by African American educators in the public school system? (R2)

In terms of professional challenges, Pete recalled a unique incident when he was a victim of a racist slur, which was delivered by an African American couple who disagreed with a professional decision that Pete had made regarding their child. He was called the “N” word by the mother at which time he promptly ended the meeting and left the room.

Pete feels that his teaching assignment at a Title 1 school may have been a result of his ethnicity, but stated that he went where there was a job opening. Looking back, Pete is happy with his assignment because the cultural characteristics of this school are a good fit for him.

In terms of having African American colleagues at his school site, Pete is very pleased. There are at least four other teachers, a retired vice principal, and many yard supervisors on campus. According to Pete, this has been true for the twenty plus years that he has been on the teaching staff.

What factors contribute to the lack of African American educators in the public school system? (R3)

Pete traces the lack of African American educators back to the desegregation of schools and the onset of integration when many African American teachers lost their jobs. Pete stated the 1970s and 1980s also brought about an increase in disparaging remarks made about teaching and education. He feels that many African

Americans bought into the anti-teaching movement and chose not to pursue this profession. Along with the era, the rise of the hip-hop culture and rap music that championed anti-social values began to portray teachers in a negative light.

To increase the African American presence in education, Pete feels that African American teachers must reach out to college students by participating in community and college forums whenever possible to inform African American students about the teaching profession.

Interview 5

What are the personal rewards experienced by African American educators and the contribution that they make to the United States' public school system? (R1)

Shelly is an African American sixth grade teacher who strives to be a positive African American role model for all students. In her interview, she recalled a Hispanic student who she befriended on the playground. The student would always hit Shelly and then run away giggling. After several years, when she became a fifth grader, the student was enrolled in Shelly's class; however, she was removed by her mother for an unknown reason. The following year, Shelly switched grade levels and became a sixth grade teacher and again had the child in her classroom. She remained in Shelly's class this time and had a successful, prosperous school year. Shelly recalled that the student, an English learner, carried around a notebook at all times to write down new English words that she had learned from Shelly and her peers. The

girl's diligence and hard work paid off for her when Shelly awarded her with a prestigious character education honor at the end of the school year.

For the next few years, Shelly stayed in contact with the child, attending her eighth grade graduation and seeing her on occasional visits. However, in ninth grade, Shelly learned of a suicide attempt by this girl. She immediately reconnected with the student and her family to establish a mentoring relationship with her. Shelly became an active part of the girl's life and was able to get her back on track. Through the years, Shelly has continued to be there for this young woman who now refers to Shelly as "mom". The young woman told Shelly once that she was not sure what her life would have been like without Shelly's presence and influence.

Shelly was also a powerful force in the life of a troubled African American boy in her sixth grade class. The student had been shuffled from relative to relative after his mother passed away and his father was sent to prison. The lack of structure in his life along with deep emotional scars caused him to "act out" at school. Shelly sought out a unique mentoring program for African American boys at a local church and connected the troubled student with this group that provided African American males as role models and a host of other resources including a sports program and academic tutoring. The student's behavior improved dramatically after attending this program. At the end of the school year, when flyers were being distributed for summer classes, the student proudly announced to the class, *"I don't need any of those! I already got me a program!"*

What are the professional challenges experienced by African American educators in the public school system? (R2)

In terms of professional challenges and her ethnicity, Shelly said that she does not see race, but sees people instead. She does not feel like her assignment at a Title I school is a result of any racial factor and has not noticed any overt or covert acts of racism toward her as an African American educator.

What factors contribute to the lack of African American educators in the public school system? (R3)

Shelly believes that the lack of presence of African American educators is a geographic issue and is proportionate to the population of a particular region. She stated that in Memphis where she grew up, African American educators were prevalent because of the larger number of African American people in that city, in contrast to the Central Valley that has fewer African Americans residents and fewer African American educators.

When I asked Shelly about ways to increase the African American presence in education, she thought that improving the salary and benefits would definitely help. Although Shelly is supportive of increasing the number of African American educators at schools and supports diversity in teaching staffs, she feels that hiring the candidate best suited for the school as a whole should be the highest priority.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to identify contributions, challenges, and reasons for the lack of representation that African Americans experience in the public school system. This researcher prepared three research questions to guide the collection of data: (1) What are the personal rewards experienced by African American educators and the contributions that they make to the United States public school system? (2) What are the professional challenges experienced by African American educators in the public school system? and (3) What factors contribute to the lack of African Americans in the public school system?

In Chapter IV, this researcher provided a summary of the interviews as they related to each research question. In Chapter V, this researcher will provide conclusions from the analysis of the data collected from the interviews.

CHAPTER V
IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to identify the contributions of African American educators to the public school system, the challenges they experienced, and reasons for their ethnicity's current lack of representation in America's public schools. This researcher used data collected through interviews in order to provide insight into the experiences of African American educators and to seek answers for their lack of presence in the school system. This chapter provides implications of this study as well as recommendations for further study.

Implications

Demographic changes in the United States over the past two decades have made ethnically diverse learners more prevalent than ever. The population of African Americans has increased at approximately twice the growth rate of European Americans (Hodgkinson, 1992). Although increasing in population, African American students are not making educational strides and continue to lag behind their white counterparts, with the average seventeen year old African American student being at least four years behind the average white student. Eighth grade African American students score lower than white eighth grade students in reading, mathematics, U.S. history, and geography on national assessments (Thermstrom & Thermstrom, 2003). Although the achievement gap narrowed from the decade of the

1960s to the 1990s, the rate of closing the gap is so minimal that it would take years to eliminate (Harris, 2010).

This researcher summarized the participants' perceptions gathered during the five interviews. Five African American educators were interviewed for this study. Each participant has served as an educator for approximately twenty years.

Personal Rewards and Contributions

Participants conveyed a profound sense of pride in their role as African American educators and role models for all students. All participants shared stories of the powerful and positive impact that they have had on students. Many of these events went beyond the walls of the classroom in their efforts to empower and encourage their students. Four participants cited examples of reaching out to African American students in particular to offer an extra layer of guidance and support. These four participants felt as if their ethnicity was an integral factor in assisting African American students and understanding problems with ethnic overtones. All participants cited positive interactions with non-African American students and families as well.

Professional Challenges

Four participants shared incidents where their ethnicity was perceived in a negative manner by a student, parent, or staff member. In three of the cases, the "n" word was used in a verbal assault. Participants shared that although shaken, they were resilient and professional in handling the situations.

Lack of African American Educators

Participant responses varied in identifying the factors contributing to the lack of African American educators in public schools. Two participants felt that the lack of African American presence was merely a geographical issue and proportionate to the population in a certain area. Two participants blamed the media for portraying teaching in a negative light and glorifying entertainers and athletes, as opposed to educators. The final participant blamed colleges and universities for not exerting enough effort into recruiting African American candidates for teaching programs.

To increase the African American presence in the school system, participants suggested mentoring programs, more discussions and forums about careers in education, and providing active recruitment of African American candidates. All participants felt that having African American teachers is important and that a school's staff should be representative of the population it serves.

Based on the interviews, this researcher believes that African American teachers have a keen awareness and unique understanding of the needs of African American students and use this knowledge to equip and empower African American students with the skills required for academic success. There is an urgent need for their presence in today's diverse classrooms to actively engage, educate, and save African American students who are falling through the cracks of the U.S. public school system.

Errold stated that he offers personal advice and encouragement to African American students by telling them that their career options are much broader than the

media portrays and that there are many opportunities available to them beyond sports and entertainment. Errol mentors and advises his students to see beyond the present to reach their fullest potential.

Ginny and Cammy offered similar advice. These African American administrators feel an extra responsibility to nurture and encourage African American students to do their personal best and constantly convey the importance of representing their culture well by demonstrating educational excellence and positive social behavior. They seek to challenge African American students by sharing the many accomplishments of African Americans hoping to inspire them to achieve as well. Ginny stated that she often speaks to these students as she would her own son or daughter.

Pete has a unique multi-faceted role as a male African American teacher whose classroom is the “desirable” placement for many young African American boys who need a positive role model in their lives. Pete seeks to correct the “dullness and self-hatred” that he sees in many of these students. Cammy stated that she too identifies African American students who lack role models and struggle with identity issues and seeks to be an active, positive role model for them.

Based on an analysis of the perceptions of the participants, this researcher believes that the level of intervention and concern for African American students demonstrated by African American educators is vital for their success and conveys a genuine commitment and belief in their ability to achieve. This level of dedication

has a profound effect on African American students and will be an essential component in insuring their academic success.

Based on an analysis of the perceptions of the participants, this researcher believes that African American educators have a deeper understanding of the social, emotional, and interpersonal conflicts that African American students undergo. They are uniquely equipped to handle these conflicts because of their shared culture. These conflicts or issues are often factors that impede African American students from learning along with their peers because they feel different or misunderstood by non-African American educators and classmates.

Ginny shared an incident where her ethnicity provided her with the knowledge to understand the feelings of a group of African American students who were highly offended when a white substitute teacher referred to their behavior as “ghetto”. Ginny was able to empathize with the students and their families, as well as convey to the substitute teacher that this term struck a deep chord because many of these students were living in poverty. Racially charged teacher reactions such as this one could have resulted in the students acting out, or “shutting down”. However, the cultural knowledge and expertise of an African American educator was the pivotal factor in bringing an amicable solution to the problem.

Shelly went above and beyond her call of duty in seeking a program to meet the needs of a troubled African American boy in her class. Shelly found a unique mentoring program designed for African American boys at a local church that offered African American male role models along with a host of other resources including a

sports program and academic tutoring. Shelly's concern for this student had a huge impact on his self-esteem and classroom performance. As an African American teacher, Shelly knew proper avenues to pursue in order to connect this student to the appropriate "cultural resources" within the community.

As exemplified by these interviews, the commitment of African American educators to African American students reaches far beyond the educational realm and delves into their personal lives and shared culture as well. African American educators reach out to African American students and make connections with them that may not be established in a classroom with a non-African American teacher. These educators use their ethnicity to relate to African American students on a deeper level. All educators in this study promoted excellence in their students and offered support beyond the classroom. This researcher believes that the commitment of these educators is a vital component to the future success of African American students in the public school system.

The imbalance of the teaching force in the United States is of great concern. African American educators are disproportionately represented in the public school system (Boser, 2011). Errold and Pete cited the negative images of the media "glorifying" sports and entertainment figures, while casting a negative light on teaching and education. Pete stated that the rise of the hip hop culture and antisocial values was a catalyst for the decline in the teaching profession during the 1980s.

Cammy and Ginny shared similar sentiments regarding the teaching imbalance by stating that the current system of higher education is non-friendly and

does not do enough to seek qualified African American candidates for the teaching profession.

All participants felt that the teaching faculty should be representative of the population it serves whenever possible. Participants offered many viable strategies to increase African American presence in the public school system. Ginny believes that current and retired educators should take an active role in recruiting African American candidates and exposing them to the field of education by establishing mentoring programs. Additionally, Pete would employ the use of educational forums at colleges and within the community to inform potential African American candidates of the different facets of education and to inform them about the teaching profession. Cammy suggested the “Teach for America” program as a means to recruit more African American educators.

Based on the reflections of the participants, this researcher strongly recommends reform measures aimed at increasing the African American presence in classrooms throughout the United States. This researcher advocates programs such as The TEACH campaign initiated by the U.S. Department of Education that is designed to raise awareness of the teaching profession and to encourage more minorities, especially males, to pursue careers in education. The TEACH campaign, led by Secretary of Education Arne Duncan (2013), is taking an active role in attempting to correct the imbalance of the teaching force. Duncan stated that *“I’m actually working very hard traveling throughout the country to make sure our teacher workforce reflects the diversity of our students. There’s a growing imbalance in*

terms of what our teachers and principals look like in relation to our students” (as cited by Certain, 2013).

In his travels, Duncan has visited many historically black colleges and universities promoting the TEACH campaign and the recruitment of African Americans and Latinos to enter the teaching profession. Duncan is also asking Congress for one hundred and twenty-three million dollars for a “First in the World” competition offering financial incentives to colleges and universities doing creative work particularly among African Americans, Latinos, first generation college students, and English language learners to increase access and completion of college. Although both proposals have many details to be hammered out with Congress, they propose financial incentives to colleges and universities to “revamp” their teacher preparation programs and would encourage high quality recruitment programs designed to attract more minority students. The TEACH program also seeks to reform compensation for educators by increasing salaries, support, and training for teachers. Based on this researcher’s interviews, the lack of competitive salaries as compared to other professions, as well as teacher education programs that do not adequately train and support new teachers are two main areas viewed as barriers to hiring and retaining African American educators. Thus, effective reform measures could eliminate or at least reduce such barriers and the imbalance in the teaching force.

The employment of more qualified African American teachers, who use their ethnicity to relate to African American students on a deeper level and promote

excellence in their classrooms, would be a giant step in the right direction of assisting African American students in closing the achievement gap.

Recommendations for Further Study

This researcher recommends the following for further research and study:

1. Replicate this study in an urban area with a larger population of African American students and educators.
2. Replicate this study with another ethnic group to see if the same trends exist that are unique to African Americans.
3. Replicate this study with African American educators who have served fewer years in education than the participants in this study to determine if there are any significant shifts in their experiences compared to their senior counterparts.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

African American Educators' Perspectives on Contributions, Challenges, and Marginalization Within America's Public School System

I am asking for your volunteer participation in a study that I am conducting as part of the fulfillment of my Master's degree at California State University, Stanislaus. The purpose of the study is to identify the contributions of African American Educators to the public school system, the challenges they experience, and reasons for their ethnicity's current lack of representation in America's public school teaching force.

As part of the data collection, I will ask you to participate in an interview regarding your experiences as an African American educator. The interview will take about 30 minutes of your time and you may withdraw or refuse to answer a question at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. The interview will be tape recorded and transcribed for analytic purposes. There are no known foreseeable risks to participating in this project.

The information you give will be protected from all inappropriate disclosure under the law. Your name or references that might identify you will not appear in any reports of this research. The information that is gained will be used for educational purposes and professional publications. Only this researcher will have access to the information collected in this project. All data will be maintained for a period of one year after data collection and then destroyed by the researcher.

If you agree to participate, please indicate this decision by signing below. If you have any questions about this research, please feel free to contact me, Gail Frances Cormier, at (209) 380-3382 or my supervising professor Dr. John Borba, at (209) 667-3260. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Compliance Office, CSU Stanislaus at (209) 667-3493.

I have read the information described above and agree to participate in the study.

 Name of participant (Please print)

Date

 Signature of participant

Date

APPENDIX B

QUESTION MATRIX

Research Questions:

- R1: What are the personal reward experienced by African American educators and the contributions that they make to the United States' public school system?
 R2: What are the professional challenges experienced by African American educators in the public school system?
 R3: What factors contribute to the lack of African American educators in the public school system?

Interview Questions	R1	R2	R3
1. Describe how you have reached out to African American students in need of a role model.	✓		
2. Describe an experience where you have been a positive role model in the life of a non-African American student, and how their opinion of African Americans may have been altered because of their interaction with you.	✓		
3. Describe a teaching experience when your ethnicity was perceived in a negative manner by a student, parent, or staff member.		✓	
4. Are there other African American teachers at your site, and if so, how many? How does being the minority "minority" on a teaching staff make you feel?		✓	
5. Do you believe that your teaching assignment at a Title I school is related to your ethnicity?		✓	
6. Why do you think there are so few African American educators in the public school system?			✓
7. What are ways to increase their presence in the public school system?			✓
8. If you were a principal, how important would hiring African American teachers be to you? Elaborate.			✓
9. Please cite one professional experience where your ethnicity played a positive role in the life of a student.	✓		