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## The Wheels on the Bus Go Round and Round: Rethinking the St. Louis Busing Program

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**The Wheels on the Bus Go Round and Round:**

**Rethinking the St. Louis Busing Program**

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## **RETHINKING THE ST. LOUIS BUSING PROGRAM**

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## RETHINKING THE ST. LOUIS BUSING PROGRAM

### Abstract

This autoethnography shares our personal experiences and counter-narratives in the St. Louis busing program. Through our mission we expound on experiences and real-life situations as seen through our lens as a student and a mother in the St. Louis busing program. Critical race theory (CRT) was used as an essential framework allowing us to focus on the following four tenets: counter-stories, permanence of racism, whiteness as property, interest convergence. (Anderson, et al., 2017). Critical race theory (CRT) is the framework in social sciences that examines society and culture as it relates to categorization of race, law and power (Lynn & Dixson, 2013).

The purpose of our study was to take a closer look at the discriminatory practices and unfairness that took place in the St. Louis busing program. Our autoethnography has allowed for authenticity and truth as we tell our personal narratives as to why the St. Louis Busing program wasn't all sunshine and roses.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The way to right the wrongs is to turn on the light of truth upon them

Ida B. Wells, *The Light of Truth*

As we embarked upon this journey we have always been moved by the social ills within society. Our passion has brought us to the frontlines of advocating for social reform. It was our abolitionist spirit and eagerness to dismantle racial inequalities that led us to this doctorate cohort. Our cohort served as a safety net that allowed us to unpack our own encounters surrounding race, gender, and inequalities. Our readings from the cohort allowed us to collaborate and share our lived experiences. The time we spent unpacking race related trauma, we reflected on the events that shaped our educational experiences. Through dialogue we discovered that racism and discrimination played a key factor in shaping our perspectives. The classes in our social justice cohort enhanced and supported us in our understanding of what socially just communities should mirror. Those deep conversations prompted us to become our own educational experiment for the purpose of this autoethnography. We believed that because of lessons learned on this self- exploratory journey we can help other Black children and parents who may have suffered in silence from the impact of the busing program. We also came to the realization that although the busing program had good intentions on righting the wrongs in educational inequity, it ended up having an adverse effect on us. Tango experienced feelings of guilt and

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shame as a parent of children she purposefully placed in the busing program. Ketosha experienced trauma in attempting to survive in busing as a student. The exchanging of personal narratives is how we arrived at the topic of the busing program. Although we participated in the busing program in different capacities, we realized that we shared similar experiences that left us feeling fearful, neglected and unwelcomed.

We used autoethnography as our methodology and a part of Critical Race Theory (CRT) as our theoretical framework. One of the remarkable elements we have discovered through autoethnography is the value and integrity of using our own voices in engaging in several complex class discussions. It is implied, “that autoethnographies tend to communicate personal experiences and dialogues regarding oneself or one’s interaction with others” (Gurvitch et al., 2008 p.240). We also came to the realization that before we could advocate in dismantling systemic oppression, we must rethink and unpack our own trauma surrounding racism. The importance of selecting an autoethnography has allowed us to self-interpret and analyze our encounters in the busing program.

The portion of CRT we chose to use consists of the following four tenets: the permanence of racism, counter-storytelling, interest conversion, and whiteness as property as our theoretical framework (Ladson- Billings, 1998).

The process of self -exploration and interrogation aids individuals in locating themselves within their own history and culture allowing them to broaden their understanding of their own values in relation to others (Chang, 2008). Interestingly, under the umbrella of self -study, or the study of self in

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relation to other, autoethnography suits the ends of such research in the intersection of biography and history where the study of the self has both a relationship with and pertinence to the context and ethos of time (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001). The study did not intend to discount or generalize the narratives of other busing participants. However, the study did seek to recount our own experiences with race related trauma in busing. Autoethnography allows for self-reflection and to find meaning, “in an autoethnography the individual seeks meaning amid the swirl of present events, moves historically into his or her own past to recover and reconstitute origins, and imagines and creates possible directions for his or her own future” (Shubert, 1986, p. 33). Shubert also states:

Based on the sharing of autobiographical accounts with others who strive for similar understanding, the curriculum becomes a reconceiving of one’s own perspective on life. It also becomes a social process whereby individuals come to a greater understanding of themselves, others and the world through mutual reconceptualization (p. 33).

Our objective in using the four tenets of critical race theory was to highlight the impact of how racism in white schools directly affected us.

First, counter-storytelling will allow us to expound on our own narratives as a Black student and Black parent. It is through counter-storytelling that we hope, our audience will challenge their own myths and assumptions (Delgado 1995).

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Second, through our past experiences we will seek to explain the permanence of racism has been normalized in our encounters in the busing program (Delgado & Stefnacic, 2000).

Third, whiteness as property will paint a portrait of our experiences with condescending whites and property rights (Harris, 1993). Whiteness as property can entail rights of disposition, rights of enjoyment, reputation and status property, and the absolute right to exclude (Harris, 1993).

Fourth, we will use interest convergence to convey what we had imagined gaining vs. what whites gained (Bell, 1980).

We created the title *The Wheels on the Bus Go Round and Round: Rethinking the St. Louis Busing Program* to use as a metaphor. It meant that the system that runs the busing program will continue going until counternarratives are told and through the storytelling changes are made. In this dissertation we will briefly expound on the origins of busing, which began with the circulation of legislations in the *Liddell v. Board of Education of City of St Louis*, 679 (1987). The case served as a springboard for transporting black bodies to white schools and school choice programs. Liddell advocated for her son to receive an equitable education sparked a series of legislations and a lawsuit in St. Louis, Missouri *Liddell v. Board of Education of City of St. Louis* (1987). The outcome and push back of Liddell would suggest that prior to Liddell and after *Brown v. Board of Education St. Louis* schools had been racially imbalanced in 1954 (*Liddell v. Board of Education of City of St. Louis* (1987)). This case soon implemented the transfer busing program and drew approximately 13,000 black students from the

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city to the county suburbs (Heaney and Uchitelle, 2004). Later, this legendary case would pave the way for us to be inner city participants in white suburban schools.

In the dissertation we will discuss the aftermath of experiencing the results of the Liddell case. Our intent was not to generalize nor discount the busing program in its entirety. However, it was to illustrate the negative effects it had on us. Our attempts at belonging in the busing program only fostered feelings of isolation, and subjugation as if we were sub-human or bodiless. We wanted to be visible. Our desires to be seen and heard correlates with exactly what from Ralph Ellison discusses in *Invisible Man* (1952):

I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allen Poe: Nor am I one of your Hollywood movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids, and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, simply because people refuse to see me (p. 35).

### **Ketosha Harris**

I was an active participant in the transfer program from 1993- 1996 at Ladue Horton Watkins. One day while visiting my mother's house, I discovered my old yearbooks stashed away in the basement. I wiped off the dust particles and unpeeled the pages. I glanced through four yearbooks from freshman to senior year. I began to think about the factors that made me feel isolated and stick out like a sore thumb. The feelings of isolation were deeply plastered beyond the yearbook. I was staring at my own visual as a young black girl feeling pressured

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to assimilate and adapt in a white school. Later, the pressure to assimilate brought on its own forms of brokenness and trauma. My traumatic experiences and episodes at Ladue were bottled up in attempting to survive. I now insinuate healing with the power of truth. My healing comes from standing in my own truth.

### **Tango Walker**

As a Black mother, I dreamt of an educational space where my children would thrive while being their authentic selves. They would be embraced for their individuality and treated in a fair and equitable manner. What mother doesn't want the best learning environment for their children? I was sold on the dream by other parents that the busing program was the way to go. I was convinced that my children would receive a stellar education. Stellar to me meant that my children would be educated in an environment that would support their social, emotional, mental, and academic development, an environment in which teachers were culturally competent and fully equipped to be present for all students and families. Quickly, I learned otherwise! This autoethnography focuses on disappointments, expectations, pitfalls, and traumas I encountered as a parent in the busing program and how the healing is only a scab because the fight still remains.

### **The Significance of the Study**

The significance of the study is to utilize autoethnography to tell our stories. Stories that are counternarratives to what is typically heard about the busing program. Specifically, stories about the busing program being harmful to a Black mother and a Black student. What you will read is not a generalization for all

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Black students and parents. However, it is our experiences and we invite the reader into our world and be given a bird's eye view of our recollections of the time spent in the busing program. You will see the research shows, that based on our experience, educational programs, such as the busing program are fixated on dispelling inequalities, but oftentimes can have an adverse effect on the same participants it is aimed to assist (Castagno, 2019). Educational programs and practices intent may serve as a nice gesture in closing academic achievement gaps, but oftentimes backfired.

When it comes to educational reform that educators engage in some not-nice practices that challenge systemic inequalities, such practices remain good and are rooted in niceness, many students from nondominant backgrounds are not drawn in by nice social justice lessons, and educators' niceness is leveraged for the benefit of marginalized students (Castagno, 2019 p. 24-25 ).

The research will show how the busing program perpetuated racial trauma on us. Our autoethnography is a counter narrative from mainstream proponents of busing that argue that the transfer program was a way to right the wrongs of educational inequalities (Heaney & Uchitelle, 2004).

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### Key Words and Definitions

- Anti-Blackness is the central concern and proposition within an intellectual project known as Afro-pessimism. Afro-pessimism theorizes that people exist in a structurally antagonistic relationship with humanity. The concept that Blacks are not the other, but is other than human (Dumas, 2016).
- Autoethnography: autobiographies that seek to describe and systemically analyze personal experiences according to engage in cultural analysis and interpretation (Chang, 2008).
- Cognitive Dissonance: This is a term used to describe the discomfort aroused when people have cognitions and behaviors that are inconsistent with, or dissonant from, each other (Festinger, 1957).
- Color of Mind is a term coined by Darby and Rury (2018) on how traditional racist assumptions about race have systematically denied Black students' equal dignity and respect and has created a longstanding racial achievement gap in education.
- Colorblind racism typically refers to an assertion of equal opportunity that minimizes the reality of racism in favor of individual or cultural explanations for inequality (Burke, 2019).

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- Counter-narratives using storytelling to present a counter-story to the narrative told regarding an experience or series of events (Lynn & Dixon, 2013).
- Critical race theory (CRT): examines racial inequities in educational achievement in a more probing manner than multicultural education, critical theory, or achievement gap theorists by centering the discussion of inequality within the context of racism (Sleeter et al., 2003).
- Cultural Assimilation involved learning and adopting the behaviors deemed appropriate by the cultural majority (Kónya, 2002).
- Cultural Competence: Having knowledge, awareness, and understanding of the experiences of marginalized students, acknowledging and positively responding to the cultural differences, using their experiences as resources in the teaching and learning process (Gay, 2002).
- Desegregation -court mandated transfer program where urban students of color attended schools outside of their neighborhood or community to gain educational opportunities and resources unavailable in local districts. (Rothstein, 2014).
- Good Intentions is a critical component of niceness, as long as a person or system is considered nice, well-meaning the actual impact of one's behavior, discourse, or action is often meaningless (Castagno, 2019).
- Implicit Bias: While unconscious, implicit bias refers to the stereotypes and attitudes that occur unconsciously and may or may not reflect our actual beliefs. (Gullo, et al., 2019).

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- Interest Convergence: A Critical race theory tenet coined by Derrick Bell stipulates that Black people achieve civil rights victories only when White and Black interest converge, a what's in it for me. (Bell, 1980).
- Integration was a non-court mandated transfer to suburban districts racial mixing involving people of color and whites in the same institution, activity or role. (Anderson, 2010).
- Institutional Racism: Structural view of racism which encompasses the patterns, procedures, practices, and policies that operate within social institutions to penalize consistently, disadvantage, and exploit individuals who are members of non-White racial/ethnic groups (Better, 2008).
- Microaggressions are unconscious, shocking, and subtle forms of racism (Solórzano, et al. 2002).
- Neutrality is exemplified as even though teachers may make their stances explicit in some ways, they can also struggle to leave behind the idea that educators should be neutral. (Castagno, 2019).
- Racism is an engrained feature of our landscape, it looks ordinary and natural to persons in the culture (Delgado & Stefancic,2000).
- Racial socialization can be described as a cultural practice used in minority families to promote positive youth development in children of color by providing them with strategies to navigate racism (Huguley et al. 2019).
- Suffering is ascribed as social and cultural forces working against a person and how they maintain their dignity through pain. One should not be

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fixated on suffering but understand what happens in suffering (Wilkinson & Kleinman, 2016).

- Social Justice: the idea of fairness/equity/equality at the level of society or state that is rooted in the context of history, cultural, and human social relations. (Bales, 2017).
- Student Transfer Law was a law enacted in 1993 allowing students to move to a new district when their home district loses its accreditation and required the unaccredited district to shoulder the tuition payments for the transferees (Zubrzycki, 2013).
- Whiteness is the shot-gun marriage of two incoherent but well-loved concepts: identity and agency. (Fields, 2001). Whites are permitted to exist outside of racial identity, even though non-whites are constantly assigned racial labels. In other words, to be white enables one to retain a sense of individuality, while barring people of color from exercising that same right. Those who acknowledge their whiteness often do not recognize the ways in which it protects privilege, which is one way in which whiteness becomes problematic. Indeed, even “seemingly ‘benign’ practices of whiteness reinforce white supremacy” (ibid., 215). When the white way is enforced as the only right way, people of color are viewed as divergent, and marginalized as a result. (Lindner, 2018).
- White Supremacy: This term refers to a political, cultural, and economic system premised on the subjugation of people who are not of the White,

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European race and ethnicity. White supremacy establishes, upholds, and normalizes hierarchy based on the premise that the less Black someone is, the closer they are to God (Rankin & Solomon, 2019).

- White privilege is a subconscious prejudice perpetuated by white people's lack of awareness that they held this power. White privilege could be found in day-to-day transactions and in white people's ability to move through the professional and personal worlds with relative ease. (Collins, 2018).
- Whiteness as property initiated that slavery linked the privilege of whites to the subordination of Blacks by legally converting Blacks into property, therefore property functions of whiteness consist of; rights of disposition, rights to use and enjoyment, reputation status property, and the absolute right to exclude (Harris, 1993).
- White spaces are the spaces that whites occupy; everyday performances of white privilege through discourse and other practices (Boyd-Fenger, 2012).

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### CHAPTER TWO

#### Literature Review

##### **Autoethnography**

The contributing attributes of autoethnography is a text that is always written from the retrospective viewpoint of a person interpreting his or her own past; its form and content largely depend upon the author's current preferences and opinions and part of its function is to preserve and remain faithful to the writer's personality. Autoethnography in this research was used to voice and express the impact of our participation in the busing program. It is through the narratives they can connect the researchers' history with their future. The stories and encounters of the past have shaped the perception on the meaning of race, and racial policies. In this self-reflection research, "the heart of learning should be personal experiences because it created trustworthy relationships between knowledge and learning" (Burdell & Swadener, 1999). Utilizing autoethnography allowed us to interrogate our own phenomenon and feelings of being marginalized in the context of education, specifically in predominantly white school districts, and visualize what education would be like if there was imagination to support liberal pursuits (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Our reflections caused us to design questions around what was the impact that the busing program had on us as Black participants, the process in suffering, and how racism perpetuated suffering in the busing program. The research is qualitative because our narratives fostered validity to self- study. Qualitative research is "an inquiry

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process of understanding where the researcher develops a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of the informants and conducts the study in a natural setting” (Creswell, 1998, p. 15).

### **Critical Legal Studies and Critical Race Theory**

Critical race theory was the theoretical framework used for this study. Critical race theory challenges the notion that the individual experiences that Black people have with racism and discrimination cannot represent the collective experiences that Black people have with racism and discrimination (Cook & Dixson, 2013, p. 1253). Formal equal opportunity- rules and laws that insist on treating Blacks and whites alike- can thus remedy only the more extreme and shocking forms of injustice, the ones that do stand out. It can do little about the business-as-usual forms of racism that people of color confront every day and that account for much misery, alienation, and despair (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000).

Oliver Wendell Holmes is credited as being the godfather of critical legal studies (Boyle, 1992). The roots of critical legal studies extend back to the 1920’s and 1930’s in America (Boyle, 1992). The law, in CLS scholarship, is a tool used by the establishment to maintain its power and domination over an unequal status quo (Boyle, 1992). Critical legal studies seek to subvert the philosophical and political authority of what it sees as an unjust system (Boyle, 1992). Critical legal studies began to emerge in the 1970s adhering that laws are used to maintain the status quo of society’s power structures, it is a codified form of society’s biases against marginalized groups (Hunt, 1986). The key goals of critical legal studies embodied the following:

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- Demonstrate the ambiguity of possible preferential outcomes of impartial and rigid legal doctrines (Hunt, 1986).
- Publicize historical, social, economic and psychological results of legal decisions (Hunt, 1986).
- To demystify legal analysis and legal culture in order to impose transparency on legal processes so that they earn the general support of socially responsible citizens (Hunt, 1986).

In this dissertation we employed critical legal studies and critical race theory as an interpretive lens to examine experiences in the desegregation program. Critical law studies predated back to the 1920's and 1930's set precedence for Critical race theory (Hutchinson, 1989). In critical legal studies, law and politics is indistinguishable from one another (Hutchinson, 1989). Critical legal studies view law as an objective, rational, process of precise decision making and politics as a realm of imprecise, often irrational opinions and competing interests (Hutchinson, 1989). In critical legal studies the law has power and structure that grew out of the power relationships of society (Hutchinson, 1989). Therefore, critical legal studies view the law as a collection of beliefs and prejudices that covers the injustices of society with a mask of legitimacy (Hutchinson, 1989) including education. Thus, law is considered an instrument for oppression used by the wealthy and powerful to maintain their place in the hierarchy (Hutchinson, 1989).

Critical race theory stemmed from the 1970's when scholars viewed the civil rights movement of the 1960's gains were being turned back (Unger, 1983).

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In Critical race theory unconventional narratives are categorized as legal storytelling, which includes legal writing, fiction, myth, parable, anecdote, and autobiography (Unger, 1983). For example, Bell (1992), published in a legal journal a science fiction story with implications of race relations in the United States (Unger, 1983). In *Space Traders*, Bell (1992), described that the majority group of whites must always put other groups at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder as a scapegoat for the country's ills. For example, science fiction implies space traders coming down to purchase Black bodies for the exchange of goods. Inferring that Black bodies are commodity and disposable.

The similarities in critical legal studies and critical race theory are that they find fault in liberalism and particular features of liberal jurisprudence that bear on race, affirmative action, neutrality, and color blindness (Bell, 1994). Both theories assert that breakthroughs in racial rights by the Supreme Court serve only to validate an unjust political system by creating an illusion that racial inequalities are ending when they have not (Unger, 1983).

Delgado & Stefnacic (2000) imply that racism is a permanent fixture in society which is Critical race theory's central components in society and its routine often unrecognized behavior: CRT begins with several basic insights. The central tenets of Critical race theory are counter-storytelling, the permanence of racism, whiteness as property, interest convergence, and the critique of liberalism (Anderson et al., 2017).

The tenet of storytelling is not to vent rant or be an exhibitionist regarding one's struggle. Unfortunately, far too many would-be critical race theorists in

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education use the narrative, or counter-story, in just that way (Ladson-Billings, 2013). There is little or no principled argument to be made. The story does not advance larger concerns or help us understand how law or policies is operating (Ladson-Billings, 2013). However, one must understand the power dynamics of who benefits from the struggles or suffering of others (Bell,2003).

According to Bell (2003), the principle of interest convergence has two ghostly parts: First, the interest of Blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when that interest converges with the interest of Whites in policy-making positions. Second, a racial remedy will be abrogated at the point that policymakers fear the remedial policy is threatening the superior societal status of Whites. (p. 92).

Whiteness as property functions as the rights of disposition, rights to use and enjoyment, reputation and status property, and the absolute right to exclude operates within schools (Harris, 1993).

The critique of liberalism portrays dominant legal claims of neutrality, objectivity, color-blindness, and meritocracy as camouflages for self-interest of powerful entities of society (Tate, 1997). The theme of unethical school practices has been used as colonizers in colonizing bodies (Friere, 1968). It criticizes liberals that refer to the voluntary transfer program being inclusive, neutral, objective, color-blind, and meritocracy as camouflaged (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). It also challenges ahistoricism and recognizes experiential knowledge and voices of people of color (Delgado & Stefancic). The theory in this dissertation cross-examines the epistemology boundaries in distinguishing people's opinions

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of the transfer program vs. justified belief (Anderson, et al., 2017). Critical race theory acknowledges that society is not race-neutral but structured in ways that directly and indirectly sustain white supremacy and perpetuate the exclusion of, and disadvantage and exploitation of people of African- descent and their communities (Aylward, 1999). Critical race theorists argue that most of the racism remains hidden beneath a veneer of normality and it is only the more crude and obvious forms of racism that are seen as problematic by most people (Gillborn, 2015).

Critical race theory addresses the legacy of discrimination in our country by suggesting that the backlash on it is historically inclined. The theory recognizes the permanence of racism, but also alludes to doing the groundwork to disrupt and resist it. In this dissertation the acknowledgement, response, and healing process are the beginning of breaking into the wound of America racial segregation. One must abandon their own perceptions and become objective in order to hear and see the rot and germs in being against others. The evidence of CRT is illustrated in the patterns and practices in predominantly white schools. The conceptualism in CRT in anti-Blackness states the following: racism as endemic and normal, not aberrant nor rare, but deeply ingrained legally and culturally. It criticizes liberals that refer to the busing program being inclusive, neutral, objective, color-blind, and meritocracy as camouflaged.

More recently there has been an intensified focus on the widespread disparities in experiences with a renewed call for systemic change (James & Turner, 2017). These conversations include highlighting unequal educational

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outcomes and differential treatment. Black youth often face an unwelcoming and unfriendly school environment because of their race, gender and class, while trying to actively participate in their school community. This is the same for schools in St. Louis, Missouri. Look at any of the institutions of learning and you will see some statement or department that supports equitable education. However, the schools continue to fail Black children (Richardson, 2007).

### **Busing: Trauma to Black Children**

Advocates of the busing program alleged that evidence would emerge that busing improved outcomes for Black students with no harm (Heaney & Uchitelle, 2004). *In the Evidence on Busing Report*, (Armor, 1972), supporters for busing argue that the development of school integration programs throughout the country made it possible for achievement, aspirations, self-esteem, race relations, and opportunities for higher education (Armor, 1972). The report entails five integration programs such as Project METCO in Boston, West Plains New York, Michigan, California, and Project Concern in New Haven, Connecticut (Armor, 1972). These programs' effect on integration and busing were centered around academic achievement, aspirations, self-concept, race relations, and educational opportunities. Nevertheless, the findings and data were contradictory to what such programs intended to do. Good intentions and niceness displayed in education to dispel inequalities have an adverse effect. Diversity in schools has been framed in such a way as to require a stance of inclusion, optimism, and assimilation (Castagno, 2019). Despite their good intentions and the general niceness among educators, most schools in the United States contribute to inequality every day

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(Castagno, 2019). Niceness can become suffocating through whiteness because it is inflexibly hostile for students of color; implicating white students or faculty in racism is considered not nice even when true (Castagno, 2019). Racially hostile sentiments are coddled in the name of free expression, so long as they use a nice tone (Castagno, 2019). Similar, in busing programs, “well intentioned actor who sustain racial inequalities through a lack of awareness and sustain racism without racist” (Bonilla-Silva, 2010). Most interestingly, “racial literacy is a reflection of critical race theory because it emphasizes transformation: actors increased knowledge can shift the relationship between race, racism, and power” (Castagno, 2019, p. 45).) Most interestingly, “racial literacy is a reflection of critical race theory because it emphasizes transformation: actors' increased knowledge can shift the relationship between race, racism, and power” (Castagno, 2019, p. 45). School programs such as busing should foster safe spaces for Black students. However, Black students are often traumatized within the confinements of schools and white spaces. Black children not only witness or experience physical violence, they also encounter constant alienation, discrimination, and microaggressions (Henderson, 2016). In order to reduce race related trauma among Black students in busing, stress reduction practices, youth- adult partnerships, and facilitate truth and reconciliation groups. in white schools need to be adopted. Stress reduction practices in busing can be using meditative practices to improve attention and increase self-regulation among adults and children. Stress reduction practices can assist in reducing racial tensions. Advocacy through youth partnerships improve school engagement and gives

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opportunities to discuss racism and decision making at school (Chavous et al., 2008). Last, truth and reconciliation groups bring stakeholders such as; youth parents, and teachers to the forefront to address racial disparities in schools and develop solutions. (Androff, 2010).

Racism, one of the most baneful and persistent evils, is a major barrier to peace (DeGruy, 2017). Racism functions as a collective white structural domination (Vaught, 2011). CRT reveals the inequities and racial disparities that challenge student achievement and the success of African American students (Anderson et al., 2017). Critical race theory was an offspring of critical legal studies (Boyle, 1992).

### **Racism in Missouri's Education**

Missouri, formerly a slave state, prohibited the education of Black children. Missouri emphasized that no person shall keep or teach reading and writing in school for the instruction of negroes and mulattoes (Weathersby & Davis 2019). On February 18, 1972 Minnie Liddell and several concerned African American parents filed a class action lawsuit against the Board of Education for the City of St. Louis in St. Louis federal district court. The purpose of the lawsuit expressed by Minnie was to obtain a quality education for her children and all other school age children (Minnie Liddell v. Board of Education, 1983). The lawsuit played out in the courts for over a quarter century. The lawsuit did not end until two important Supreme Court decisions in the 1990's laid the foundation for public schools to extricate themselves from continued and potentially unending desegregation efforts. The plaintiffs, represented by private counsel, asked the

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court for injunctive relief, claiming the defendants operated city schools in violation of the Fourteenth Amendment. Specifically, the plaintiffs claimed racial discrimination in the operation of St. Louis Public Schools (*Liddell v. Caldwell*, (1976). In 1971, some parents who attended public school in St. Louis, Missouri received notice due to overcrowding, their children were being assigned to a distant, old, and worn school building. After informal efforts to get the school district to change its decision failed, five parents and their minor children filed this class action complaint. They asked the court to promptly require the defendants to operate the schools using nondiscriminatory allocation of financial and physical resources and without racially identifiable boundaries, building usage, pupil/ staff/ faculty assignments and transportation services. More than 25 years of litigation followed, which included the design approval, and adoption of the nation's first voluntary inter-district students transfer program used to settle a school desegregation case (*Saint Louis Board of Education v. Caldwell*, 1977). *Minnie Liddell v. The Board of Education* (1983) was an offspring of the Fourteenth Amendment and the *Brown* case.

### **Colorblindness & Anti-Blackness in Busing**

Our Constitution is color-blind and neither knows nor tolerates classes among citizens, was a statement made by Justice Harlan (*Auer*, 1973). Justice Harlan continues to say in respect of civil rights, all citizens are equal before the law. (*Auer*, 1973). Harlan's dissent insisted Black Americans are entitled to full fruits of citizenship (*Reed*, 2021). The statement does not then nor now reflect the treatment of Blacks.

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Colorblind racism is fundamentally about denying the reality of ongoing racism, and/or the impact that historical forms of racism still have on the present. It is an ideology, a commonsense way of looking at the world that explains what we see around us. Ongoing advantages for white people and barriers and violence towards people of color (Burke, 2019). Bonilla-Silva (2010) perceived colorblindness as a set of rhetorical strategies which, under the veil of ignorance, communicate racist attitudes. The concept of colorblindness has a particularly salient role in understanding the impacts of the racial-cultural mismatch in education.

Delgado and Stefnacic (2001) define color blindness as the belief that one should treat all persons equally, without regard to race. This increases the effects a racist education system has on Black students (seeing them but dismissing their lived experiences), in turn allowing teachers, counselors, social workers, administrators and school board members the advantages of imagining that they are not a direct cause of anti-Blackness in education when indeed they are. More importantly, the claim by educators of color-blind practices simply embodies further oppression by failing to recognize the impact of race and anti-ness on lived experiences of Black youth.

Anti-Black racism, as the systemic discrimination that embodies resentment towards Black people, is such a part of the lived experience of Black people (Dumas & Ross, 2016), that it has become the central focus of how many Black people make sense of every aspect of their environment. This is common as their social, economic, historical, and cultural dimensions of human life (Dumas

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& Ross, 2016). While not surprising, and perhaps a further indication of the dominant culture, there is little or no theory on anti-Black racism in the education system (Dumas, 2015). However, documented evidence of cultural disregard, verbal assault, micro-aggression, implicit biases and physical attacks on Black youth make it apparent that Black students frequently suffer outcomes that are much less frequently experienced by nonblack students (Dumas, 2015). “The intersection of hegemonic ontologies of Black masculine deviancy and so-called “colorblindness” school discipline policies contribute to the excessive surveillance and disproportionate discipline of Black boys” (Allen, 2017 p. 410). Wells (2014), suggests:

When education policies are color-blind on the surface, they interact with school systems and residential patterns in which race is a central factor in deciding where students go to school, what resources and curricula they have access to, whether they are understood and appreciated by teachers and classmates, and how they are categorized across academic programs. (p. 3).

For example, the Supreme Court decision in *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No.1* asserts that the decision application of a colorblind paradigm does nothing more than provide a protective veneer over white people (Donnor, 2013). While more benign in appearance and subtler in tone when compared to Jim Crow, the high court’s racial coding of integration, a policy intended to foster racial equity, as a barrier to the educational opportunities of white students and their families reinforces the American racial hierarchy

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(Donnor, 2013). Being color-blind isn't nice and is detrimental to Black students, their learning and livelihood. (Anderson, 2021).

Advocates of the busing program allege that evidence would emerge that the busing program improved outcomes for students with no harm to white students (Washington Post, 2019). Richard Kahlenberg, a senior fellow at the Century Foundation, a think tank that supports integration claims that desegregation was highly successful. It provided a way to raise academic achievement for African Americans that was far more successful than anything we've tried (Washington Post, 2019). According to Armor (1972), supporters for busing argue that the development of school integration programs throughout the country has made it possible for achievement, aspirations, self-esteem, race relations, and opportunities for higher education.

### **Deficit Thinking**

“Schools can perpetuate the myth that Black students are bad, and lazy as contributing factors in low academic achievement, it doesn't matter how kind or nice their intentions may be” (Castagno, 2019 p. 62). The deficit thinking model is harmful to Black students because it fails to reveal unacknowledged classism (Gorski, 2005) as well as ableism (Beratan, 2006) and racism (Fergus, 2016). Black students from poverty-stricken communities were considered bad and the students showed a lack of interest (Gorski, 2005) when they failed to overcome and beat the odds. The idea and narrative of overcoming is popular when speaking about Black and poor students of color because they are expected to overcome their poverty and academic issues (Castagno, 2019). The subconscious mindset of

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white teachers appears to minimize Black student's expectation. White teachers possess a self-fulfillment prophecy when it comes to Black children. White teachers' expectations about Blacks entity, eventually resort to Black students acting in ways to confirm those same expectations (Blad, 2017). Consequently, "they are expected to be successful in a school system that is primarily built to serve the needs of students who fit within normal development parameters" (Castagno, 2019, p.62). Racism and ableism can be an intersection of operating in conjunction. It is stated, "social constructions of race and ability and yet recognizes the material and psychological impacts of being labeled as raced or dis/abled, which sets one outside of the western cultural norms" (Annamma, Connor, et al. 2013, p.6). Racism and ableism work hand in hand because they normalize processes that are collusive (Annamma, Connor, et al. 2013). "Racism validates and reinforces ableism, and ableism reinforces racism" (Annamma, Connor, et al. 2013, p.6). The intersectionality of race, class, and ability reproduces social inequality for poor students of color (Castagno, 2013).

Because racism is an ingrained feature of our landscape, it looks ordinary and natural to the persons in the culture. Formal equal opportunity- rules and laws that insist on treating Blacks and whites alike can thus remedy only the more extreme and shocking forms of injustice, the ones that do stand out. It can do little about the business-as-usual forms of racism that people of color confront every day and that account for much misery, alienation, and despair" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000).

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### **Just Black Bodies**

According to Solórzano et al. (2000), students of color in predominantly white settings commonly experience racial discrimination that leads to alienation and emotional exhaustion. Studies have shown that this type of discrimination strongly impacts adolescents' identity development processes and their ability to form a cohesive sense of self, which is a critical task of adolescent development (Elmore, C. & Gaylord-Harden 2012). The environments are not culturally reflective of the children they serve. Many teachers lack the desire to nurture or have patience to embrace Black children. Numerous of studies have documented the prevalence of racial discrimination experiences among Black students in predominantly white school contexts (Holmes et al. 2015), which suggests that racial discrimination in school decreases an individual's sense of belonging and harms their socioemotional well-being. In addition, Gaylord-Harden et al. (2012) indicated that experiencing racial discrimination in educational settings is associated with increased negative perceptions of one's ethnic group, which may adversely affect adolescents' identity development if students of color begin to internalize prejudicial messages received from peers and school personnel. Studies have also shown that negative perceptions of one's racial group can lead to feelings of depression and anxiety as well as decreases in self-esteem and psychological resiliency. A lot of this stems from ideas being handed down from slavery. Laws and curriculums are meant to fail Black students. The extension of racial innocence to educational spaces is resonant with an understanding of Black schooling as situated within what Ross (forthcoming) refers to as the afterlife of

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school segregation, where Black students remain systematically dehumanized and positioned as uneducable. Drawing from Hartman's (2007), concept of the afterlife of slavery entails,

“ if slavery persists as an issue in the political life of Black America, it is not because of an antiquarian obsession with bygone days or the burden of a too long memory, but because Black lives are still imperiled and devalued by a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago. This is the afterlife of slavery -skewed life chances, limited access to healthcare and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment. and its ongoing subjugations” (p. 6)

The afterlife of school segregation signals both the more explicit instances of anti-Black violence in schools such as a white male police officer viciously slamming a Black girl student's head into concrete and dragging her across her South Carolina classroom (Fausset & Southall, 2015), or the alarmingly disproportionate rates of out of school suspensions for Black children in the early learning years (Losen, et al. 2015), and also, the myriad disturbingly mundane ways that Black students suffer in schools, such as the erasures and deficit constructions we are describing here in relation to environmental education.

Suspensions frequently mean students spend less time learning in the classroom, and suspended students are more likely to drop out of school, repeat a grade and become incarcerated, the report noted. However, if Black children are being suspended in the early years, they are not being given the opportunity to be successful. Black children are being removed from class at astronomical rates

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compared to their white peers. Taketa (2018) states while in-school suspensions technically keep students in school and schools can thus keep their attendance figures from dropping, that doesn't always mean students are learning while suspended. Black children are not allowed to grow and develop as typical children. Their acts of misbehavior are treated like crimes even when it is recognized as developmentally appropriate behaviors in white children. Black students are not only being given subpar education; they are also being treated like criminals. School is a place for students to learn and become stronger individuals unless you are Black. Whether it's an unaccredited urban school or a blue-ribbon suburban school, Black students are often still criminalized and overly disciplined.

Efforts to support Black youth in Canadian schools have generated many discussions over the years. More recently there has been an intensified focus on the widespread disparities in experiences with a renewed call for systemic change (James & Turner, 2017). These conversations include highlighting unequal educational outcomes and differential treatment. Scrutiny of policies that have language describing an equitable and culturally relevant environment for Black children are prevalent. However, these schools continue to fail Black children (Debs, 2007). The importance of education is constantly being thrust upon us, yet when we enter said spaces we are met with divisiveness, dismissiveness and unresponsiveness (Debs, 2007).

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### **Parent Involvement-Unwelcoming for Black Parents**

Children benefit from parental involvement in their education. There are years of research identifying that when parents are present in the school buildings, on committees and showing up to events there is more success from children. Even the U.S. government stresses that teachers and school administrators should engage parents and families as educational partners (Cooper, 2009.) Black parents have a well-documented history of involvement in their children's education and engage in a range of parental involvement activities that support the well-being and overall success of their children (Anderson, 1988 as cited by Allen et. al. 2018). However, Black parents are not always welcomed in school spaces (Marchand, et. al., 2019.) "Black parents have sometimes been perceived as uncaring about their children's education, and often racism has precluded their full inclusion and meaningful participation" (Marchand, et.al., 2019, p. 367) The ideas that schools have on what parental involvement looks like is often structured in a way that "creates social justice inequities" (Marchand, et.al. 2019.) School staff often times are not interested in building a partnership with Black parents because "the discourse and scholarship pertaining to the educational involvement of African American parents usually starts with discussions of parental absence rather than presence" (Cooper, 2009, p. 381). "Researchers who have studied school-family relations that involve low-income families, and families of color have found that educators typically do not welcome, expect, or cultivate power sharing practices with students' families" (Cooper, 2009, p. 380.)

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Parental involvement is often needed or allowed during school hours, including PTO meetings. These expectations were formed decades ago (Cooper, 2009.) These norms were originally based on the behavior patterns of middle-class, white mothers in the early-mid twentieth century-many of whom were not employed (Tutwiler, 2005 as cited in Cooper, 2009 p. 381). These traditional norms continue even though many mothers, now, work outside the home.

Black parents have always advocated for their children and been involved in their education. Often advocacy is frowned upon and not looked at as parent involvement. Engaging in protests, participating in school councils and organizing parent spaces to improve educational resources and standards are all forms of parental engagement (Marchand, et.al.2019). These actions are often seen as aggressive, are not valued and instead are mislabeled as angry and agitative (Cooper, 2009.) These negative, deficit views about parents of color may result in discriminatory treatment in the schools, wherein some educators do not expect, welcome or cultivate relationships with Black parents. (Cooper, 2000, p. 380)

Black mothers' involvement in their children's education is not made easy. According to Copper (2003):

Educators' perceptions of African American mothers are too steeped in deficit-based ideologies and stereotypic images that view them as uninvolved, angry or uncaring. Since ideology and beliefs guide action, deficit-based views of African American mothers can result in biased and discriminatory treatment of these mothers and their families in school systems. (p. 379)

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These depictions of African American mothers as being deviant from society's social and moral norms reflect stereotypical ideologies of Black women that are prevalent in the U.S. society-at-large thus they influence many educators' ideologies as well (Hart, 2002).

White mothers have and continue to control many narratives. They dominate the scene and possess more racial and class privilege than most other types of parents in public schools. These mothers constitute the majority of public-school volunteers, and they most often govern the parent teacher groups in schools (De Gaetano, 2007). White parents' ability to show up gives them favor. "The presence and participation of middle-class, white parents yields them greater influence, status, appreciation and value among educators (Abrams & Gibbs, 2002 as cited in Cooper, 2009, p. 381). These benefits are then extended to many non-present, white parents by way of positive association (Cooper, 2009). In other words, parents' whiteness and middle-class socioeconomic status alone can motivate educators to assume they are well-resourced and actively involved in their child's education (Lareau & Horvat, 1999). Cooper (2009) states:

Consequently, African American parents, particularly those with low incomes or working-class status, remain tied to a dichotomy that constructs them as lacking educational presence, values, and care when contrasted with white, middle-class parents who are constructed as being present and helpful. This taken for granted dichotomy perpetuates bias and fuels exclusionary, if not racist, educational practices. (p. 4)

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Being present and volunteering in your child's school is important. It is equally important to be able to navigate spaces and advocate especially when your child is the minority. Making sure your child is seen and accepted for who she is matters. "Promoting a positive racial-gender identity in young African American girls attending a predominantly White school is a challenge faced by African American mothers that requires them to do thoughtful, intense, and emotional racial socialization work" (Bailey-Fakhoury, 2014, p. 62) The work is never done for African American mothers.

Within a school system that privileges white middle-class norms, aesthetics, and parenting styles, the parental involvement practices of Black parents are often pathologized (Allen, et al. 2018).

### **Black Mothers & Radical Socialization**

Black mothers have unique considerations in trying to prepare their children to cope with racial discrimination and racially motivated violence in schools, neighborhoods and community centers (Hughes, et al. 2006 as cited by Leath, et al. 2020). Studies have consistently found that mothers are the primary source of racial socialization messages in Black families (T.L. et al. 2010 as cited by Leath, et al. 2020). Even though these studies exist, there is very little known about how Black mothers contextualize and communicate knowledge on racial discrimination and racialized violence to their daughters (Tribble, et al. 2019).

Racism, and its intersection with class and gender exploitation, is endemic in American society (Bell, 1992). In addition to providing for their children as all parents do, Black parents have the additional burden of raising

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children in a racist society in which they are pathologized and discriminated against (Allen, et. al. 2018). The amount of racial socialization that occurs depends on the social class of the Black mother. (Leath, 2020). Typically, Black mothers who have higher levels of formal education are more likely to be involved in the racial socialization process (Croutter, et al. 2008). Research findings suggested that Black mother's children's experiences with racial discrimination activated racial socialization in mothers who felt a strong sense of control over their life circumstances, which was related to occupation and social status (Leath 2020).

Black mothers have had to learn how to have racial and navigational capital; which is “the ability to maneuver through and manipulate institutions and practices that were designed to exclude Black families” (Yosso, 2006 as cited by Allen, 2018 p.8). Black mothers learn to “look the part” to be able to live in a certain area to place our children in a certain school district is a response to racialized zoning practices. (Allen et al. 2018). Single Black mothers often learn a dual role in an attempt to dispel any myths about how the white world might see her (Allen et al 2018). This racial capital and others like it are the ones Black mothers attempt to pass on to their Black sons, advising them on how to manage the racial microaggressions their sons would encounter, including both overt and covert forms of discrimination that demean and subjugate Black people (Sue, et al. as cited by Allen et al. 2018) inside the school walls.

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### **More Than Surviving**

We often felt as if we were in survival mode during our tenure in the busing program. Our suffering was overlooked. “Most dark suffering goes unnoticed by too many Americans, but America’s educational history is overrun with dark suffering” (Love, 2019, p.27). We were engulfed in an educational system that only had love for internalized white standards. Love (2019), talks about education reform and dares others to join in becoming abolitionist teachers. Love (2019), defines abolitionist teaching:

as practice of working in solidarity with communities of color while drawing on the imagination, creativity, refusal (re)membering, visionary thinking, healing, rebellious spirit, boldness, determination, and subversiveness of abolitionists to eradicate injustice in and outside of schools (p. 3).

Out of all the literature that we have reviewed we found minimal support for our experiences. While there is direct evidence pertaining to the disparities of educating Black students, not much is reflective of the busing program. Therefore, this autoethnography is important.

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### **CHAPTER THREE**

#### **Methodology**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to offer insight into an existing phenomenon through the lens of lived experiences (Ellis & Bochner, 2011). For the purpose of the research an autoethnography was the most effective methodology to expose our experiences within the busing program. Qualitative research allows researchers to “address the meaning of individuals or groups ascribing to a social problem” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 181). In this qualitative data the study explores how the tenets of Critical race theory impacted the researchers. The researchers believe it is imperative that their stories are heard, reflected upon and utilized from self- analysis. As stated earlier in the introduction under the umbrella of self-study, or the study of self in relation to others, autoethnography suits the ends of such research in the intersection of biography and history where the study of the self has both a relationship with and pertinence to the context and ethos of time (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001).

#### **Autoethnography and Qualitative Data**

This autoethnography documents the patterns of behavior, language, and actions of both authors over a prolonged period (Cresswell, 2018). In this study, it discovers the phenomena of racial profiling and racial practices in white spaces and public schools. Most of the data for this research was collected through personal reflections within the transfer program (Chang, 2008). The autoethnography also allowed us to culturally understand ourselves and others (Denzin, 2014). The research is qualitative because it is based upon our interests

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and narratives. We both were the primary instrument in the data collection (Eisner, 1992; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2019; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988). Qualitative research employs a variety of methods which imply a humanistic stance in which phenomena under investigation are examined through the eyes and experiences of individual participants (Creswell, 2009). It is because of this particular approach to inquiry that personal narratives, experiences and opinions are valuable data which provide researchers with tools to find those tentative answers they are looking for (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Autoethnography is a useful qualitative research method used to analyze people's lives, a tool that Ellis and Bochner (2000) define as an autobiographical genre of writing that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural .On this journey Ketosha was able to retrieve yearbooks from 1993-1996, old report cards, and course schedules from the basement. Tango was able to retrieve journals, emails, letters, progress reports and notes from meetings from 1997-2013. We carefully reviewed each document one by one analyzing whether the information was a key component to our autoethnography. We knew we wanted to tell at least two stories that would illuminate our points.

It is through our individual journey that we would like to convey how race and racism worked in education (Dixon, 2004). We would also like to give Black participants and others a better understanding of what can possibly happen in transfer programs (Maso,2001). According to Denzim (2000), writing personal stories makes witnessing possible. Readers become witnesses of key events and can testify on behalf of a problem or phenomena. Storytelling in social justice for

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us gives us an amplified voice for those Black students and parents who are experiencing or have experienced the same types of trauma (Dixson et al., 2017).

### **Ethics in Autoethnography**

Autoethnography is a highly regarded and widely used research methodology and practice where the researchers are deeply immersed in self-experience while observing, writing, journaling and reflecting (Edwards, 2020). During this time of self-analysis, the authors chose how the stories would unfold. This included whether individuals or institutions would be specifically identified. Using names brings about transparency and allows the audience to connect. Ongoing reflection was needed when we considered how including others within an ethic of research practice is provided appropriate attention within autoethnography, to ensure that accountability and care are situated at the centre in responsible research (Edwards, 2020).

### **Critical Race Theory**

As stated before, critical race theory is being used as theoretical framework. Critical race theory according to McGee and Stovall (2015), Long-standing theoretical education frameworks and methodologies have failed to provide space for the role mental health can play in mediating educational consequences. We are building from the works of authors Derrick Bell, Michael Dumas, Ladson Billings, and other CRT researchers. Just like in other CRT research the authors attempt to connect oppressive social systems to the psyche of the oppressed in a way relevant to students. The stories in the research sought to give the audience an in-depth look at our journeys in the busing program. The

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busing program in St. Louis was an extension of a series of policies that allegedly intended to rectify separate but equal laws in education. This work was a counter-narrative from our perspective as both a Black student and Black mother participant. We believed it was essential to unmask stories about the busing program from a diverse perspective. The research was qualitative because it specified and gave a first-hand eye-witness account of the experiences we encountered in the program. As stated before, one of the tenets of CRT we used was racism is normal, not aberrant, in American society. Because racism is an engrained feature of our landscape, it looks ordinary and natural to the persons in the culture. We also found it necessary to use critical race theory because it allowed us to share our own reality and experience of the busing program.

According to Delgado (1995). One thing critical race theory does for scholars is:

“it points out that much of reality is socially constructed, stories provide members of outgroups a vehicle for psychic self-preservation, the exchange of stories from teller to listener can help overcome ethnocentrism and the dysconscious conviction of viewing the world in one way” (p. 111).

One of the greatest components of CRT is that it examines the contemporary through historical context (Anderson; Dixon & Donnor, 2017). In anti-Blackness CRT re-examines the historical events, experiences, policies and legislation that has been the root cause of recurring educational practices in white public spaces. CRT challenges the dominant discourse that has characterized much of the scholarship in CRT (Anderson, Dixon & Donnor, 2017). Critical race theory

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addresses the legacy of discrimination in our country by suggesting that the backlash on is historically inclined (Anderson, Dixson & Donnor, 2017). It criticizes liberals that refer to the busing program being inclusive, neutral, objective, color-blind, and meritocracy as camouflaged. Since the dissertation is an autoethnography the design inquiry is coming from our perspectives. This autoethnography documents the patterns of behavior, language, and actions of the school system we encountered over a prolonged time. (Cresswell,2018). In this study, it discovered the phenomena of racial profiling and racial practices in white spaces and public schools. Most of the data for this research was collected through our past experiences and journal writings. It uses qualitative research in explaining the effect of segregation, the influence of white supremacy, the historical impact of trauma on us and the relation between anti-ness and education. We were the primary instruments in the data collection (Eisner, 1992, Fraenkel & Wallen, 2019; Lincoln & Guba).

Critical race theory addresses the legacy of discrimination in our country by suggesting that the backlash on Blacks is historically inclined. The theory recognized the permanence of racism, but also alludes to doing the groundwork to disrupt and resist it. In this dissertation the acknowledgement, response, and healing process are the beginning of breaking into the wound of America racial segregation. One must abandon their own perceptions and become objective in order to hear and see the rot and germs in anti-Blackness. The evidence of CRT was illustrated in the patterns and practices in predominantly white schools. It also criticizes liberals that refer to the voluntary transfer program being inclusive,

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neutral, objective, color-blind, and meritocracy as camouflaged. CRT also challenges ahistoricism and recognizes experiential knowledge and voices of people of color (Donnor, 2013). Because the dissertation was an autoethnography the design inquiry was coming from us as the researcher and our perspectives.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

The delimitations of the research enabled us to conduct a self-study and explore the experiences that connect the past with the present. One of the main delimitations of personal narratives is that they give us access into learners' private worlds and provide rich data (Pavlenko, 2002, 2007). Since we were the instruments of study there was an ease to access. It is this advantage that entails a disadvantage as well because the limitation on the self by others may not be considered valid, "if culture circulates through all of us, how can autoethnography be free of connection to a world beyond the self" (Bochner & Ellis, 1996, p. 24). Our desire for selecting autoethnography as a research method was because we wanted to foster a glimpse of our encounters with racism and racial policies in education. We wanted to contribute to the lives of others by hoping they would empathize and reflect on the narratives presented. We wanted other practitioners, students, parents and those that make decisions about education to digest our work and understand that this counter narrative shows how unhealthy and divisive the busing program can be. The stories should enable the reader to enter the subjective world of the teller to see the world from his or her point of view, even if the world does not match reality (Plummer, 2001). We were allowed to take ownership in reflecting and telling our own narratives. Autoethnography is

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viewed as an emancipatory discourse since those being emancipated are representing themselves instead of being colonized by others and subjected to their agendas or relegated to the role of second-class citizens (Richards, 2008). The limitation of this qualitative research is that the autoethnography is restricted and is not a generalization of every Black participant experience in busing. The experiences and events are only restricted to the researchers of the study. We understand that some limitations may be that the feelings evoked in readers may be unpleasant since connections readers make to narratives cannot be predicted (Bochner & Ellis, 1996).

The critique on autoethnography is that the method was restricted to our voices. The most recurrent criticism of autoethnography is its strong emphasis on self, which is at the core of the resistance to accepting autoethnography as a valuable research method (Atkinson & Silverman, 1997). This has led to the criticism that the main goal of autoethnography has been more therapeutic than analytical (Atkinson & Silverman, 1997).

Since we were the primary instruments of study our next chapters will include captivating stories from both Ketosha, the Black student and Tango, the Black parent. Former participants in the busing program.

**RETHINKING THE ST. LOUIS BUSING PROGRAM****CHAPTER 4****NARRATIVES****Ketosha Harris***Black Inferiority and the Third Grade Blues*

I am the product of two first generation college students. My father and mother grew up in Old North St. Louis. My father was born in Macon, MS and moved to Saint Louis around ten yrs. old. He grew up in the late sixties and was an active band member at Vashon High School. He later earned a scholarship to attend Gannon University, a predominantly white private college in Erie, Pennsylvania. He was the first in his family to graduate and attend college. My mother was a native of St. Louis and a first-generation college student as well. She graduated from Beaumont high school in the late seventies and later matriculated to graduate with a Master's degree in education. My parents were also biproducts of the present culture and world they lived in. Later, they would impose the same culture of race representation upon me. The world my parents grew up in challenged them in every way to escape the evils of poverty, violence, and racial exploitation. I can recall the stories my grandmother told me about scrubbing toilets in white people's homes to send my father money in school. My mother recounted the times she went to school wearing her brother's pants, too little shoes, and could not concentrate because of hunger pains. My parents used education as a passport out of the ghetto and slums of St. Louis. They imposed the same culture of competition and drive within me. I adopted the ideology that I had to prove myself to be the best because I was carrying the yoke and burden of representing all Blacks. My parents inferred that it was

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important for me to represent my race in excellence. The idea of representing excellence left little to no room for mistakes. Carrying the weight of representing my race was extremely exhausting. It was exhausting because I was always under the microscope, pressured to be an overachiever, and suffered emotionally after frivolous mistakes. I grew up believing that there was a social hierarchy within the Black community. I thought the Black educated elite sat at the top, vs. the Blacks who succumbed to systemic violence were at the brunt bottom. At the time, I thought they were at the bottom because they chose to be there.

My ignorance back then allowed me to buy into the talented tenth ideology (Dubois, 1903). The talented tenth terminology was coined by a white philanthropist in 1903 and endorsed by W.E.B. Dubois. The talented tenth suggested that only one tenth of Black college educated men was capable of leading the race (Dubois,1903). I thought they refused to put in the hard work necessary that could land them to the top. As a child I did not understand the depth of racism, social violence, and disparities as I now know. I thought education was a shield that would protect me from succumbing to the same disparities that haunted my parents. After all, education had allowed my parents to make their way out of poverty into middle class status. I comprehended at an early age that being poor was expensive. I did not want to pay more to obtain a qualitative life. This made me eager to pursue my education because I never wanted to be treated as if I was disposable.

I attended a community Catholic school for kindergarten for a short period of time. I later transferred into the magnet foreign language school program in the early eighties. The magnet school I attended was in south St. Louis. I was bused

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from the northside to the southside. This was the first time I sat among a diverse group of children. Ironically, in an allegedly culturally diverse school would be my first encounter with racism. The white kids usually played together at recess, sat together at lunch, and engaged after school. The Black students also sat together and stayed within the confinements of their own space. The white female teachers outnumbered the Black teachers. I can recall times when some of the white boys would have altercations with me on the playground and fluently call me a nigger when they could not get their way. I now look back at those scenarios and think about how they were exerting their whiteness. My knowledge about Critical race theory now helped me to understand they were exerting their whiteness as property (Harris,1993). Those white boys on the playground were aware of their privilege and power. They knew the school was a sacred space that they owned and operated. They saw the blatant distinction in the treatment of Blacks and whites. Most of the Black and white teachers treated them better than Black students. I can recall several times when there was a conflict outside or in the classroom, often the Black students were reprimanded more severely. The white boys were shown empathy and compassion, while Blacks received suspensions. Actually, there was nothing diverse about my school because whites outnumbered every racial group. I believe that they were reaffirming that the school and the world belonged to them and I was just a stranger among them. Consequently, the Black teachers also treaded a thin line when it came to discipline and white kids. The variables around disciplining white children were minimal and included pep talks, delaying recess time, and moving to the back of the line. I did not have a rapport with any of my white

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teachers. I felt at the time that they were tolerable of my existence. They displayed their hidden biases in many ways. One way was that they had low expectations of Blacks. Many of my Black friends were in remedial and special education classes. The reality of racial segregation and sorting still did not click until third grade. I am now in tune with the fact that the third-grade blues or trauma for me was about disparities in racial sorting (Darby & Rury, 2018). Sorting practices impose injury in education because it sustains academic achievement gaps based on a racial hierarchy (Darby & Rury, 2018).

The blues and negative impact of racism in education started when I was a new third grader in Ms. Bancroft class. Ms. Bancroft was an older white mild-mannered teacher. She stuck to the script of lesson plans and had little interaction with Black students. It was Ms. Bancroft who recommended that I be placed in remedial reading. This was the first time a teacher insisted that I read below standard. I felt so humiliated getting pulled out of my normal class setting to go to reading. She sorted her students into groups based on their reading ability. Unfortunately, I did not land in the highest reading group with most of my white peers. I was stuck in the lowest reading group always attempting to move up. All the students in third grade knew that the students that were pulled out either were going to remedial reading or special education. The school system labeled special education as a resource class in the eighties. Most of my Black peers who went to special education were bribed with parties and candy. They were lured into those classrooms as a way to balance out the ridicule and stigma associated with being in special education. Sadly, their contentment with candy replaced the embarrassment

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of being pulled out of class. For me it was still humiliating for Ms. Bancroft to call me a slow reader and imply that there was something inherently wrong with me mentally. Ms. Bancroft eventually suggested that I be retained in the third grade. She used the scores from the CAT test, a standardized test, to make her claims. I now understand the concept of standardized testing being used as a tool to sort children into different schools and classes (Darby & Rury, 2018). Data also suggested, “that between 1978 and 2008, the gap between the average mathematics and reading test scores of children from high- and low-income families grew by a third and the rate of affluent children who completed college increased by 21 percent, while the graduation rate of children from low income families increased by only 4 percent” (Duncan & Murnane, 2011, p. 47-70). I felt like she used remedial reading as an entryway to imply that I was deficient academically in other areas. I was not in a special education placement, but Ms. Bancroft suggested that other areas of concentration were not proficient based on below average reading scores. On the last day of school, we always had a party. Afterwards, we would line up as our names were called and led to our next grade level classroom. This was an exciting time for most students. They would chuckle and chatter about how excited they were to pass on. The last day of third grade was torture for me. I had to explain to some of my peers why my name was not called and why I did not follow them to fourth grade. At that point, I just wanted to break down and cry. The same institution that was supposed to foster academic development, growth and safety for me became a site of suffering. Dumas captures this visualization as the persistence of disregard, subjugation, and school malaise (Dumas, 2014). Suffering

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can best be ascribed as social and cultural forces working against a person and how they maintain their dignity through pain (Wilkinson & Kleinman, 2016). The things my parents tried to instill in me were emotionally flushed out. It was at that moment I felt inferior to the white students who sat up front, got called on often, and praised. I was infuriated with my parents as well for allowing me to become a victim of Ms. Bancroft hidden biases. Approximately, five blacks and one white girl out of a class of twenty-five were left behind with me in third grade. The latter part of my third-grade blues was that I continued to have Ms. Bancroft as my teacher the following year. The third-grade blues altered me mentally and emotionally. I felt abandoned by my parents because they did not advocate enough for me. Reflecting back, I believe all options and resources were not exhausted prior to the retention. The blues continued through the constant teasing about flunking third grade up until around seventh grade. My parents forced me to attend summer school every year after my first year in third grade. They also invested in buying bulks of Weekly Reader books to keep me on task. I continued to carry the trauma and the blues of inferiority into high school. My transfer to Ladue was another attempt for my parents to rectify my own academic securities. They believed the busing program would be a better option for me academically.

### ***It's A Different World from Where I Come From***

I left the magnet school system and became a part of the busing program. I was encouraged by my parents and others that I would have a different experience at Ladue. I went under the assumption that the experience would give me more opportunities to grow academically and engage with diverse peers. My brother, five

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years younger, also participated in the program prior to my arrival. I anticipated that there would be a magical euphoric experience awaiting me. I was hoping to have had a better encounter with teachers, students and staff than that of my prior years. At the time I was thinking going to a new school could make up for the blues I encountered from third grade. The first day of freshman year was likened to a missionary sojourning into a foreign land in a distant country. I journeyed into the sunrise and landed on an isolated corner a few blocks away from my house to catch a crowded school bus. My bus traveled many miles around town picking up other Black students from the inner city. My twenty-minute bus ride took up to an hour to get to school. The bus usually became quickly crammed like sardines with black bodies of all ages and genders. I thought then the idea of desegregation was integration. The busing program of educational desegregation meant that there would be an influx and shipment of black bodies from the inner city into predominantly white schools. Later, this same shipment would be treated as property undergoing close surveillance, sorted, and disciplined at a higher disproportionate rate than whites. Therefore, I perceived inclusion was an illusion at Ladue Horton Watkins.

When I entered the commons section of the building the permanence of racism was inevitable. Now I can correlate the permanence of racism through a Critical race theory lens (Delgado & Stefancic,2000). There was a thick fog of racism that filled the room that was beyond fumigation. The fog was thick in a sense that students were blinded and could not see beyond their own subgroups. The first thing I noticed was that it was natural and normal for Black students to sit in one

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area and every other race to sit on the opposite end. Through the lens of Critical race theory, racism is an ingrained feature of our landscape because it looks ordinary and natural to people in the culture (Delgado & Stefnacic, 2000). There was a great divide when it came to segregated spaces. All of the vending machines and pay phones were placed on the white side of the commons. The only thing that stood on the Black side of the commons was a security guard. I remember we always had old white men that stood with walkie talkie radios on the Black side. They would stroll around calmly, but their presence was strong. Black students knew that they were being watched and monitored. Sometimes the security guards would smile and hold small conversations to conceal their microaggressions. They anticipated that Black students were deviant and more apt to be engaged in criminal activity. Therefore, the presence of Blackness must be heavily surveilled (Browne, 2015). The security presence also reminded Blacks inadvertently of space restrictions. I was to stay within the confinements of the Black commons, unless I was using the phones or vending machines. In the beginning of my freshman year academically I was placed in a few developmental classes, but later on at Ladue I did well academically. However, there were other social and cultural clashes I encountered there. I still remember holding a conversation with a white guy in my acting class. I was discussing going home and cleaning up my room before I went to my after-school job. He expressed that he had maids that looked like me to clean for him. This was my first encounter with classism as well. I relived all the times I was pulled in the office and questioned about petty things. I remember getting my beeper taken because it accidentally went off in the commons area. I remember

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being suspended for the first time in my life as a junior because of a beeper. Disparities in the discipline processes in the busing program are no different. I saw the same racial trend of exploiting Blacks at Ladue that I had witnessed throughout education. More Blacks were still being placed in special education and remedial courses than whites. Blacks were also being suspended and expelled at higher rates than whites. Ladue had host families for inner city students who could not participate in afterschool activities because of the distance. At the time I thought it was a kind gesture, but later found it to be exploitative. The role of a host family was to allow mainly Black students to come into their home and ensure they were able to participate in after school activities. The host families would usually drill Black students with questions about their living arrangements, parent's employment status, or the family transportation situation. They acted neutral, but their privilege and biased assumptions were masked by niceness. Acknowledgements of Black contributions were seldom incorporated in all curricula. There was an overwhelming pressure to succumb to fitting in. I thought if I assimilated well, I would be accepted. Assimilation for me was defined as altering my appearance, voice, and style to that as whites. I recognized in high school that whiteness was the standard. One day as I was reflecting back, I wrote a poem centered around the stress associated with assimilating in high school. As I exited high school, I regretted hiding my Blackness and dumbing down my dignity to fit in. The poem I wrote, "*This Dress*," is about the constant frustration of being displaced and demanded to fit into a white world. The dress is created and

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manufactured by society for women of color. It is a superficial imagery that has to be worn in order to cope inside a standard of whiteness.

*I got Ak's, shotguns, and oozies up under this dress,*

*I am armed, dangerous, educated, powerful and qualified,*

*Yet, I refuse to allow anyone to continue to keep me in this dress,*

*This dress that says I must remain in silence, while being a victim of white violence,*

*This dress that says I must cook, clean, bare kids,*

*This dress that causes blood to bleed through the pleats and creases of my humanity,*

*This dress that only masquerades in the sphere and psyche of white ideology,*

*This dress that covers the evisceration and mutilation of my identity,*

*This dress that buttons my neck so tightly and causes me to loose air, wishing my death by suffocation,*

*This dress that shares the ruffles of life neatly woven in detail in every aspect of life,*

*This dress has been laced by fabrications and embroidered by stereotypical assumptions*

*and engraved with hands of guile,*

*This dress that forces me to code switch, wear my hair straight pressed, keep my weight thin,*

*keep my voice low, enunciate my words clearly,*

*Live in neighborhoods that see my value as less than good,*

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*Go to schools that deny my Black creativity, and assimilate into a system that will help in my demise,*

*This dress, this rose-colored*

*dress engrafted with thorns, is what I'm supposed to pass on to my daughter?*

*I think not,*

*I will not be a partaker in her demise,*

*I will not shed innocent blood,*

*I will not see my future lineage be castrated, or left condemned and abated,*

*Instead I will take off this dress ripped and torn,*

*Thinking about how many other women and Black children have worn this same dress,*

*And that are now living in a state of delusional distress,*

*If I have to peel it off layer by layer,*

*Today, what was inseparable becomes separated,*

*I confess and pledge allegiance to the recollection of me,*

*'Therefore, let this dress burn on the altar,*

*May the flames engulf every stitch,*

*May the smoke send a loud signal to those that manufactured it,*

*and weaved every stitch,*

*May the ashes of this dress crumble and deteriorate far beneath the earth,*

*Never to breathe, live, or be worn again.*

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### **The Road to Damascus, Hope and Healing**

College was a requirement and not an option in my household. Shortly after high school I attended Lincoln University in 1996, a historically Black college and university. Lincoln University was established in 1866 and founded by the 62nd and 65th Colored Infantry soldiers. In 1890 Lincoln became a land grant institution. I found myself again at the crossroads in life and along my educational path. I anticipated Lincoln to be vastly different from any school I had ever attended. I settled in Dawson Hall, the campus female dormitory early. According to biblical records Saul's conversion on the road to Damascus transformed his life (Acts 9:3-9). Similar to Saul, I too would be forever changed at Lincoln. Lincoln served as a place of hope and healing for me. Lincoln reminded me that I mattered, and I had a right to be there. I remember rediscovering who I was as I participated in activities centered around Black excellence, Lincoln was bursting at the seams with Black culture, support, and community engagement. Lincoln was a small campus that fostered a tight knit community. I was able to build a healthy rapport with most of my Black and white instructors. I can still recall the trips I went on with the student support service department. I felt a sense of home at Lincoln. I build long-term strong relationships with my peers there. At that point, the scales began to fall from my eyes allowing me to see myself, and others through a different lens. It was also at that point I started having a greater appreciation for the scholarship of learning. I took several courses that imparted Black history and education. I could recall that it was at Lincoln that I first read the Mis education of the Negro and other profound readings. I was intrigued by several Black speakers such as Sista Soulja

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that spoke in the university auditorium, reminding me that my presence within academia was pivotal as a Black scholar. After years of experiencing injustice in education, Lincoln was a safe space for me to heal and be restored. The powerful impression Lincoln left within me gave me the skills and tools to survive at University of Missouri- St. Louis, a predominately white institution. It was because of my past academic struggles that led me on my social justice journey as an activist and advocate.

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### **Chapter 5**

#### **Narratives**

##### **Tango Walker**

##### **Experience is a Good Teacher**

I was a young Black girl, born in the early 70's, on the cusp of the Civil Rights Movement ending and the birth of the Women's Liberation Movement. My mother was the first female scholar athlete and Valedictorian of Vashon High School the Spring of 1972. I was born late Summer and my mother started her college career at Cornell University on a full scholarship. My grandmother was my primary caregiver. My mother graduated from Cornell University and began her career at IBM in 1976. She also enrolled me in daycare. I entered the school setting at the age of four, attending JVL daycare in the city of St. Louis. My earliest experiences at daycare (now known as early childhood) are remembered as entertaining and fun. I remember painting and playing outside a lot. I even remember my teacher, Ms. Claudia Simmons. She was tall and statuesque with skin like a Hershey bar. Ms. Simmons was organized and nurturing. She always encouraged us to sit up straight and to try each activity that she planned for us. My experience with my first teacher taught me that school was a safe and supporting place. Supportive relationships with adults at school are critical to student engagement. (Bottiani et.al, 2016). Unfortunately, that experience was quickly muddled by my future schooling endeavors. I attended an all-Black elementary school in St. Louis Public School for kindergarten and first grade. I entered kindergarten excited because this teacher too was stately and had skin like

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a Hershey bar. However, my teacher rarely smiled, constantly yelled directives and provided very little student teacher interactions. I recall how Mrs. Brown, my kindergarten teacher, would humiliate me for raising my hand to answer questions. She would remind me that I wasn't as smart as I thought I was and to put my hand down because other people deserved to answer in her classroom. She would then proceed to call on a student she thought was pretty. If they answered wrong, she would say, "Awe it's ok your pretty eyes will get you by." Mrs. Brown would allow certain students to use the bathroom during class time. She would say things like, "Go ahead cutie pie, since you have that long pretty hair", to the light skinned girls when they asked to go to the bathroom. As I continued to reflect on my time at Dunbar Elementary, most everything good happened to the light-skinned girls and the teacher made sure to let them know how cute they were. I was treated the exact opposite way. Mrs. Brown discriminated against me because of how I did not look. Pinkney (2012), states, "black people discriminate against each other based on skin color, hair texture, and facial features" (p. 1). By first grade I was rarely raising my hand to ask a question and heaven forbade if I really needed to use the bathroom during class because I would rather wet my pants than be humiliated by asking to be excused. Afterall, I wasn't cute, light-skinned and my hair was definitely not long. "I was a lost kid" (Love, 2019, p. 47) The enthusiasm that Ms. Simmons taught me in daycare was gone by first grade.

By second grade my parents (both Cornell graduates) and I moved to St. Louis County. I began second grade in the Normandy School District. I went to Jefferson Elementary school from second through sixth grade. Jefferson

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Elementary school was comprised of Black and white students of lower middle class and middle-class families. I reluctantly went to school. My teachers were nice. I made friends and used school as a ground for rebellion and socializing. The teachers would often tell my parents about my abilities, but I rarely applied myself. “They did not understand how a child who had been an exceptional student be so disengaged” (Love, 2019, p. 47).

By fourth grade I was known as one of the best athletes in the school and also one of the biggest troublemakers. I was in the highest reading and math groups and did just enough work to stay in those groups. I enjoyed being allowed to work independently. The next several years of school were up and down. I spent seventh and eighth grade in two different middle school settings. Any comment or decision made from a teacher during those years that I thought was against me I would make a fuss about. It was embedded in me from my early learning years that I would be treated unfairly, and I had to stand up for myself. I was in trouble often because of this.

I began my high school career at Rosati-Kain high school. There I encountered many instances of racism; mostly from our principal, a white nun. The incident that had me completely up in arms was when a white peer stole money out of my Black friend’s purse. I saw the incident and reported it to the principal. After speaking with the student and getting the money back the principal met with me. She told me that I did a noble deed. The principal asked me if I saw how upset and remorseful my white peer was when she left the office. I said, “she wasn’t remorseful, she was caught!” The principal goes on to say, It

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was important for me to preserve my friendship with the white peer because she was white and I was Black and I did not have the right to judge my white peer or think negatively of her. I said, “What, are you kidding me? I no longer valued the school nor had a desire to be there. My behaviors became less than stellar, and I was asked to leave.

I finished my high school career at Normandy Senior High school. Normandy was the place that rebooted my spark of curiosity that Ms. Simmons, my daycare teacher, instilled in me, although it took some time. There were two teachers, Mr. Camp and Mrs. Isom. Two principals, Mr. Baker and Mrs. Tayborn. The head principal, Mr. John L. Young and the secretary Phaedra who constantly breathed life into me as a troubled student. I was brash and angry. Mr. Camp and Ms. Isom saw the creativity in me. Mr. Camp encouraged me to write. Mrs. Isom encouraged me to create whatever I wanted to create. The principals provided discipline in ways that were natural consequences opposed to punishments. They had conversations with me and brainstormed how I could do things differently the next time or how I could avoid certain situations. I was also an athlete which means I had to keep my grades at a certain GPA. My basketball coaches, Mr. McGowan and Mr. Todd were not only phenomenal teachers of the game, they both taught their players how to own who they were. It was at Normandy where I learned how to exert my brashness in a more effective way; no need to trash talk, show up and play your game on and off the court. I have learned to use that motto in my later years in life. Looking back, I learned that “I required a village to survive and to understand how I mattered” (Love, 2018, p. 83).

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As I continued to reflect on my educational journey, I wholeheartedly understood that teachers and administrators that cared mattered; from the early learning years through high school. According to Brown, (2018), “Black mothers reminisced of their own educational experiences where teachers of different races and different socioeconomic statuses and Black students who ranged from (poor to middle class) in various school types had sincere healthy relationships where students felt affirmed and loved. Teachers and administrators must show the children that they fundamentally matter (Love, 2019).

As I finished high school, I did not take advantage of the college scholarships that I was awarded. By 1994 I was the mother of three children. I taught in quality early childhood programs and they attended as well. From my experience as an early childhood educator and understanding that early childhood education is defined as birth through third grade, I knew I desired an educational setting that would see each of their academic potential and nurture their social and emotional wellbeing. The weary question was where that would be.

### **Automatic Sorting & Low Expectations**

I searched long and hard for a school district that would be conducive to my expectations (a nurturing learning environment with high expectations for academic success) for my children. Some parents’ educational decisions were driven by the desire for their children to have access to rigorous academic programs and curriculum. In their estimation, the way to achieve this was to attend predominantly white schools. (Brown, 2018). I also searched with the belief that

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getting a good education would shelter them from some of the negative experiences I had due to race.

“As lower working to upper middle-class parents with middle class values and aspirations, some of the educational decisions they made for their children were based on intergenerational beliefs of Blacks that get a “good education” can somehow transcend racism. However, despite conventional beliefs, the majority of the mothers’ efforts did not yield the desired results.” (Brown, 2018, p.105).

My oldest daughter entered kindergarten at Glenridge Elementary school in the Clayton School district in 1997 under the busing program (also known as the desegregation program or the voluntary transfer program). I liked the district’s statement about being committed to inspiring each of its students to love learning. We lived a few blocks east of Skinker and Delmar which made the ride to school no more than ten minutes. It was also an easy location for me or my parents to get to for family involvement and emergencies. The first few years went fair and smoothly. However, three weeks into second grade things went awry. I showed up to my daughter’s classroom to volunteer on a different day than my original day. As soon as I entered the classroom, I noticed the children were separated into groups. As I roamed around the classroom seeing how I could support the students I noticed how they were grouped. It appeared that the students were grouped by race. All the Black students were grouped together. I walked over to where my daughter was sitting, and she was providing directions to her peers on how to complete the work. I pulled my daughter to the side and asked what was going on.

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My daughter stated that this was how math class went. She went on to tell me that she told her teacher that she already knew this stuff and she was bored. I looked around for the teacher and saw her engaged, in a lecture style, with a large group of white students. Once the teacher was finished with her lecture and gave the students the assignment, she came over to me. She said she wasn't expecting me and was surprised to see me. I asked her why the group had been split up. She took a deep breath, tilted her head towards the group of Black students and said, "Well that group just didn't get it. They didn't grasp math concepts in first grade, so they were reviewing those assignments." I was confused. How did she come to this conclusion? I asked, "What tasks have you completed with the students to know which ones were and were not on grade level and how were they reviewing something they don't understand with no adult support?" Before she could answer I said, "I found it hard to believe that no Black student understood the math concepts from first grade! Especially since my daughter was one of them." The teacher did not have a logical response. She stammered over her words, mumbled that she had worked with these students every day for three weeks and many of them didn't turn in their homework so she couldn't gauge if they knew the work or not. She admitted that my daughter seemed to be one of the smarter ones. The teacher went on to say how my daughter shocked her when she answered most questions correctly; more often than all of her peers. "Shocked you," I stated emphatically, "So you assumed she couldn't do the work because she' was Black?" This assumption-that black or Latino students could not possibly know the answers to deep or complex questions-is at the crux of the racism still embedded in many teachers' belief systems.

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(Landsman, J. 2004). The teacher responded by saying, “stick to coming on Wednesdays.” I repeated her words back to her, “Most students didn’t return their homework so you couldn’t gauge if they knew the work or not. Ma’am, my daughter returned her homework daily and it was correct. Why was she in this math group?” The teacher said I disrupted her classroom and asked me to leave. It was at that moment that I knew the students were grouped strictly by the color of their skin. Sorting practices impose injury in education because it sustains academic achievement gaps based on a racial hierarchy (Darby & Rury, 2018). The teacher had no intention of seeing if any Black student knew the work.

Educating black people has never been a priority in the United States. Looking at our history beginning with slavery in 1619, black people were treated as property and commodities. Laws prohibited slaves from learning to read and write. Throughout history, racism continued to manifest itself through Jim Crow, Black Codes, and Segregation (Anderson, 2017).

The achievement gap and injustice go hand in hand.

“From color to race, segregated schooling became linked to a particular notion of human difference, hinging on cognitive ability and other qualities of mind. Blacks required an educational treatment different in some respect from that of white children. White children, on the other hand, were judged superior in faculties of invention, comparison, and reasoning. Black children were held to be inferior” (Darby & Rury, 2018, p.43).

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I left the classroom, fought back tears, and went to the office to speak with the principal. The secretary asked me to have a seat and she would see if the principal was available.

Being present at my daughter's school was imperative. I understood that being present meant so much more than merely showing up. Being present as a Black mother meant performing or being on my best behavior in an attempt to get equitable experiences for my daughter.

According to Bailey-Fakhoury (2014), presence consisted of the keen awareness of one's aesthetic appearance and the role it plays as mothers advocate for their daughters; maintaining visibility in the school and at school functions; and being strategic in interactions with school personnel to gain leverage that will benefit daughters (p. 63).

I took a deep breath and sat down. Then I got nervous. Did the secretary think I sounded aggressive? Had I demanded to see the principal? Did I talk with my hands? Did I make eye contact? Did I have a headscarf on? Did I wear makeup that softens my high cheekbones? Was I sitting up straight? Was I aesthetically pleasing to the eye of white people? According to Bailey-Fakhoury (2014):

Presence has three aspects. It is conceptualized as a mother's aesthetic presentation, as a mother being visible in the school, and as a mother's strategic interactions with school personnel. "Repeatedly, mothers across every focus group spoke to the importance of appearing kempt and appropriate while being visible and interacting in various school settings. Over three-fourths of the mothers spoke to feeling as though they bore a

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burden—that of representing all African American/Black women when encountering the predominantly White school or community setting. These mothers felt the need to carry themselves in the best light as they might be the African American/Black person by which White neighbors, parents, or teachers would judge all others” (p.63).

The principal and I met. I asked the principal how children were grouped for math class. She said the teachers grouped students based on their abilities. I explained what I observed in my child’s second grade classroom. The principal looked away and did not respond. I went on to say that my daughter was actually teaching the group and I wanted her moved to the larger group where all the non-Black students were. The principal said, “That will be fine but if she couldn’t keep up we wouldn’t give her one on one attention.” “Excuse me,” I said, “you and the teacher both seemed to think my child was incapable of being on grade level with her work simply because she was Black. Racism in educators’ attitudes—and in how students are placed in advanced classes—still robs minority students of chances for success. (Landsman, 2004). Both the teacher’s statement about being in awe of my daughter’s capability to answer most of the questions correctly and the principal’s comment about my daughter keeping up with the work were microaggressions. They both had as Brown (2018), states “an assumption about Black students’ low academic abilities.” (p. 113). Throughout the conversation the principal asked me if I needed time to calm down and assured me, we could schedule a time to talk another day. She stated multiple times, “You seem angry.” I would take a deep breath each time I heard that sentence spew from her mouth. I

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was exhausted as I attempted to speak in what wasn't perceived as a threatening manner. Aesthetic presence also encompasses pronunciation, tone of voice, and the awareness of gestures used. (Bailey- Fakhoury, 2014). After speaking with the principal, I knew that my direct involvement with my daughter's education would need to be on a higher level for her to be provided with equitable learning experiences. I planned to join as many committees that would keep me directly engaged at a district and elementary level. I knew I would have to bring forth circumstances, interactions and situations that I endured for change.

When African American parent involvement in schools is historically and racially contextualized, it becomes clear that there may be many parent involvement strategies that may be brought to light. Due to the persistence of American racism and the complexity of structural racism to perpetuate racial hierarchy, African American parent involvement must extend beyond traditional forms of school-sanctioned parent involvement strategies to include advocacy work and different types of agency to combat racism. (Brown, 2018, p.7).

I reached out to the parent teacher association where I was the secretary at the time to express my concern which fell on deaf ears. I knew I needed to find a space, in the district, where my voice would be at the least heard. That day I joined the group P.A.A.S (Parents of African American Students). I was an active member of the group for many years. However, even there, little effort was made for prominent and systemic change.

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### **Resisting Mistreatment of my Black Son**

“Mommy, they have my brother handcuffed in the office,” I heard my daughter scream in my ear as I attempted to answer my cell phone. As I responded, a call clicked in. I told my daughter to hold on. “Hello,” I say. “Hey Ms. Walker, this is Coach, there had been an incident that your son may or may not had been involved in” says the man on the other end. I say, “Why was he handcuffed? I am on my way.” “Ok, I won’t let the police take him.” I tell my co teacher I had to go. I worked at Kingsland and Vernon at the time. My children were students at Clayton High School. It took me approximately eight minutes to get to the school. As I am pulled up, I saw my freshman son and two other Black boys being driven away in the back of a police car. The Coach that called me was standing on the middle step of the high school. I hopped out of the car and yelled, “I thought you said you wouldn’t let them take him” and hopped back in my car and drove away. I frantically called my parents and told them to meet me at the Clayton police department. I wiped tears while driving. I got to the Clayton police department and they told me I am at the wrong location and that I needed to go to the juvenile center in Brentwood. On my way there I called my son’s friend’s dad who was a criminal attorney. He told me to be prepared for them to keep my son all weekend, but they should not have taken him off the premises without me being present. The attorney told me to tell my son not to talk and he would be making some calls to find out what was going on. I pulled up to the juvenile center, called my parents and gave them the location. I took a deep breath and walked into the building. I gave my son’s name and am asked to have a seat. After

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a fifteen minute wait a door opened and I was asked to come inside. My son was sitting in a room across from two police officers. One officer I recognized as the SRO at Clayton High School. Both officers greeted me. The SRO said, “We just wanted your son to answer some questions.” I responded, “We have been instructed by our attorney to not answer any questions.” My son says, “But Ma I didn’t do anything.” I responded again, “We have been instructed by our attorney to not answer any questions.” The SRO says fine and told me that my son was free to go! I take my son and leave the office. I hug my son and am inconsolable. My son repeatedly says, “Ma I didn’t do nothing.”

Because this incident happened on a Friday, I was unable to reach any school administrators until the following Monday. I had no written report of what occurred nor any real explanation from the police officers. I was only told that the head principal called the police when she deemed it necessary and the police followed her orders. When we got home, I read the disciplinary policies. The policies were very general, and left room for subjective judgment. I felt helpless, angry, frightened. I felt humiliated. I was a mother that purposefully volunteered in a multitude of capacities, sat on committees with board members and actively engaged in dialogue about systems and how many of the school district’s systems affected all children in ways that were completely unhealthy and not even a phone call from the head principal!

Monday morning came and I was at the high school bright and early. I demanded to see the head principal. She refused to meet with me. I ended up meeting with the grade level principal and the assistant head principal who was

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also my son's basketball coach that called me Friday. I listened to both of them stumble over their words and tell me that my son had been suspended for 10 days; 5 in school and 5 out of school. They went on to say the head principal believed that my son was the lookout person while two of his friends robbed another student in the school bathroom. "Believed," I state. I later learned that the student that reported being robbed was a white student that had just transferred to the district. Long story short, I finally met with the head principal weeks later. I asked her to explain to me how she took the word of a new white student who just got to the district over my son, a student who has been in the district since kindergarten and has never been in trouble. She made up as many excuses as she could as to why she believed my son was involved and why she called the police. The principal's final rational response was, "Well we have a zero-tolerance policy." This zero-tolerance policy has only perpetuated racist discipline acts as fair and justified. Current research shows black males are four times more likely to be suspended than their peers and an alarming percentage of black male suspensions are for subjective rather than objective wrongdoings (Caton 2012, Kang-Brown et al. 2013). I felt an array of emotions as I left the principal's office. I felt defeated. My freshman son, embarrassed and traumatized from being accused, handcuffed and hauled away in a police car by people he's spent all of his school life with because of subjectification.

I anxiously waited for a call or a court date to come in the mail.

After several weeks of waiting I went to the juvenile center and inquired. I was informed by the clerk that no charges were filed against my son because my son

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was not involved in any wrongdoing and should've never been arrested! I was furious and sad. I went back to the high school and met with the head principal. I told her what I had just learned from the clerk at the juvenile center. She shrugged her shoulders. I told her I wanted her to apologize to my son for her huge error and help him heal from this situation. I said to her, "You being of the LGBTQ community should know how it feels to be discriminated against. You should not hold such a position of power where you can destroy a group of people that you are against." The principal showed no remorse or sympathy. Brown (2018) states, "school officials were responsible for being the perpetrators of being unwilling or insensitive about reconciling America's racist past, and culturally disconnected and distant to Black children (making them feel unloved)" (p. 109). The principal refused to apologize.

I headed straight to the superintendent's office and demanded a meeting. I explained the situation. The superintendent stood looking befuddled. He said he had no knowledge of any arrests at the high school. This I couldn't believe. "So, you mean to tell me that you had no knowledge of when students got arrested and taken from the premises of your school", I said sarcastically. He responded, "No." I went on to tell him how my son was treated unfairly, and I wanted this taken off of his record. The superintendent said, "Well what if I launched an investigation and found out that he was involved." I went off and left no room for being strategic with my interactions or my words. I no longer cared about how I was being perceived. After all it didn't matter how polite I was, my son was still being

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racially profiled and traumatized. The meeting with the superintendent left me empty.

Several months pass and I received a phone call from the basketball coach (the person who initially called me when the incident occurred). He asked if we could meet for lunch. I agreed. We met at a restaurant in Ladue Crossing. Once we sat down, he immediately apologized to me for what happened. He said my son was not involved and he felt bad for not speaking up. He went on to say how he was telling his mother what happened, and she scolded him for not being an advocate and doing the right thing. I told him I was not impressed or moved by his confession and if he wanted to really do something then he would've spoken up about the head principal's disdain for and ability to destroy Black boys. He never did. He assured me that if I ever took the case to court he would resign. I met with several attorneys. None would take my case. I was told that the Clayton School district was too powerful to take on alone. I felt even more defeated.

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### CHAPTER 6

#### Conclusion

We never guessed, in a million years, that my experience as a Black mother in the Clayton School district and a Black student in the Ladue School district would be filled with such disdain and racial trauma. We took for granted that their mission & vision statements truly meant all children. We did not have enough knowledge or do enough digging to understand that the busing program was more about good intentions (or not) and about money. From our experiences the district did nothing to their curriculum, nor did it have any expectations or thoughts on how to be culturally competent for Black students and their parents. Black families were not a part of the cultural norm of the Clayton or Ladue School districts and it showed. Educational expectations, practices, and policies reflected the values of the individuals who created them. Therefore, judgments about student disruption are imbued with cultural norms. (Monroe, 2005).

Because white and middle-class individuals occupy most positions of power in educational settings, decisions concerning behavioral expectations and infractions are set forth by a culturally specific bloc. juxtaposing the leading reasons for disciplinary referrals with qualitative research findings make the culturally influenced nature of school discipline” (Monroe, 2005, p. 47).

As a Black mother I knew the seriousness of being visibly present for my Black children, even in what was ranked as one of the best school districts in the country. I purposefully worked in places that would afford me the flexibility of

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doing so, often sacrificing higher paid positions or better employee roles.

However, my ability to be actively and physically engaged made no difference in how my Black children were treated.

“The majority of parents made sacrifices in order to ensure their children had access to what the parents perceived at the time were “better schools” for their children to attend. However, while some of the expectations were met, in some ways, 21st century schools have racial barriers that created gaps between the mothers’ expectations that once drove the educational decisions they made for their children and the reality of the racial barriers that exist at these schools.” (Brown, 2018, p.108)

As a Black mother in the busing program I found myself constantly on edge and disappointed in my school district choice. The Clayton School district was not affirming that my Black children would be supported, safe or secure in their school success. The racism was so embedded in the school’s fabric that it was difficult to unravel. I often felt scared, stuck and unheard. As Brown (2018) stated, “Mothers’ views on racism in 21st century schools ranged from schools being un-affirming to hostile, exclusionary, and culturally disconnected institutions, which sometimes left Black children and families feeling distant, invisible, or emotionally unsafe. (p.102) I didn’t know if I would survive the attacks on my Black children. If it wasn’t a call from a teacher about my Black daughter rolling her eyes, I was being called by an administrator about my Black son horse playing. Both situations were seen as insubordination and my responses seen as antagonistic. I was in the school buildings enough to know that these

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behaviors were also being done by white students so I would ask if the white parents were being called too.

Black children receive harsher punishments than their non-Black peers. According to Taketa (2018), Black students tend to be four times as likely to be suspended as white students. Students, even in the early learning years, kindergarten through third grade, are being harshly disciplined, suspended and even expelled from school, especially Black boys. According to Metropolitan Congregations United (2019), even with the new no out of school suspension commitment from many school districts that are in the busing program, children are still out of their learning environments. A lot of this unfair treatment stem from implicit biases. Hathaway (2016), tells us that:

researchers used sophisticated eye-tracking technology and found that preschool teachers “show a tendency to more closely observe black students, and especially boys, when challenging behaviors are expected. Preschool teachers’ belief that Black males would harm other children, were less innocent, more mature, and most likely to be perpetrators of misbehavior, contributed to the action of using exclusionary discipline (p.1).

Teachers and school officials were seen as perpetrators of 21st century racial barriers across RDs and SES. They were seen as perpetrators of exclusionary practices (honors programs, leveling), perpetrators of negative assumptions or harmful pathologies (Black boy threat, sassy Black girl, and angry mother). (Brown, 2018, p.102)

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I was labeled the angry Black mother, another racial hindrance that impacted how others viewed and interacted with me. Research states this labeling results in guarded interactions with school officials. (Brown, 2018, p.114).

I routinely told my children they could do anything because I knew they would spend the next six to seven hours being given an opposite message in subtle and overt ways. My fear of my Black son being viewed as the Black boy threat was real. According to Brown, (2018), “negative assumptions applied to Black boys can have an adverse impact on their children emotionally, socially, and academically.” (p. 119). My agitation with my Black daughters being observed as angry or intimidated was real. I knew I had to remain involved or the assumptions and actions would go unaddressed and my children would suffer greatly. As Brown (2018), reiterates, “negative assumptions held by teachers and school officials impacted the children and, in some cases, led to the following outcomes: hyper-monitoring, hyper-sensationalizing, and hyper-restricting Black children’s behavior and to the children feeling diminished self-esteem, low self-worth and even self-loathing” (p. 119).

I often felt microscopic and unwelcomed. Across all school types, SES, and RDs, mothers described teachers and school officials who have not made Black families feel included, loved, welcomed, and affirmed. (Brown, 2018). The school lacked the ability to connect and had no cultural competency. The school community’s disconnectedness from the Black experience was evident (Brown, 2018). It wasn’t until several years later that I realized just how dangerous the Clayton School district was for my Black children. As Brown (2018), states,

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“a predominantly White school, with little to no intentionality of diversity in staff or students, an environment where her children are invisible or ignored and/or schools where curricula omit Blacks’ contributions to America from history as an environment that is “emotionally” unsafe for her children” (p.126). Emotional safety is compulsory for academic success.

Critical race theorists legitimize the everyday experiences and perspectives of historically underrepresented and disadvantaged populations to come to a better understanding of how Americans see race (Delgado, 1989). Brown (2018), states,

“In the same spirit of slave narratives written by Frederick Douglass and Olaudah Equiano, which were autobiographical accounts or auto-ethnographies written by African Americans who were enslaved and whose voices were marginalized from literature, counter-storytelling or counternarratives are written accounts from oppressed people. They are encouraged to share and document their own perspectives on, experiences with, and perceptions of their oppression and racism. Due to the uniqueness of their experiences and suppression of their voices, in CRT the everyday experiences of ordinary people who may be normally marginalized from these conversations are pushed to the forefront.” (p.19)

Our theme throughout our educational experience is that racism and white supremacy shows up in bodies and can be bodiless. White supremacy was

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personified in many ways and clearly reflected in our stories. Since racism is fluid it can travel and lodge into places of education. Our encounters as a Black student and mother solidifies our claims that institutional racism is a permanent fixture in America as indicated by Critical race theory. The hope and healing come in addressing pertinent issues that plague Black people participation in the busing programs. This autoethnography acknowledged racial trends and practices surrounding the academic achievement gap, teacher biases, the distribution of funding, and the need to recreate culturally safe spaces for Black participants and Black mothers in the busing program.

The journey in this doctoral program as African American women allowed us to rediscover ourselves. We discovered that we have been impacted by racism through encountering similar experiences. We both have lived and survived the busing program in different capacities. Ketosha had been a student participant from 1993-1996. Tango had also wrestled through the same busing system advocating for her children from 1997-2013. The more we dialogued the more we concluded that the busing program was negligent in educational practices towards Ketosha, a Black student, and in how they received parental involvement from Tango, a Black mother. We both witnessed the exploitation of Blacks students in marginalized communities. Racial exploitation served as a barrier in excluding Black children. We also agreed that such policies and procedures had caused brokenness in our spirit and disabled our potential growth within the program.

As education practitioners we believed that it was pertinent to tell our stories and to shed light on the busing program from a different perspective. As

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activists and advocates of social justice we believed our narratives must be shared. People usually link the busing program as a stellar educational experiment that worked for all Black students. However, we have chosen to highlight on the causation of the educational traumas in busing. The stories told in this autoethnography remain valid because they are stories of colonization.

We have invited people to view busing from a different lens and hope to provoke conversations around equity. Conversations in education should challenge why certain schools receive more funding than others (Harris, 2013). The focus should address the severity of trauma and suffering Black students are exposed to in predominantly white schools (Dumas, 2015).

### **Recommendations**

Our autoethnography is designed to allow people to view and reject that racial differences in educational achievement are a product of innate cultural differences (Darby and Rury, 2018). Practitioners must become aware of the historicity of race and American schooling. Practitioners should become aware of that programs like busing are socially and institutionally constructed. Our belief is that it is detrimental for practitioners to have in depth discussions around the historical legacy and aftermath of racism in education. Some proactive strategies to dispel trauma for Black participants may be to offer more mentorship for students before remedial or special education placement. Provide positive intervention for Black students that are at risk of being suspended or falling behind in class and effective communication with these students' mothers. I believe student outcome rates will improve when teachers take the time to build a

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healthy rapport with Black students and Black mothers. There are at least seven steps practitioners can incorporate to dispel racial policies and practices (Burris, 2015). Carol Burris mentions the following;

1. Establish a stable and committed leadership
2. Eliminate low track classes (level up rather than down)
3. Build support structures for struggling learners
4. Support and engage the staff, especially in curriculum planning
5. Start small and build outward
6. Collect and disseminate achievement data regularly
7. Respond to the concern of parental and external parties

We recommend as part of professional development that all teachers, administrators and board members read *Becoming a Social Justice Leader Using Head, Heart, and Hands to Dismantle Oppression* and form discussion groups. This book is intentional in helping school leaders and staff be able to turn comfortable dialogue into gutsy conversations that will dissect and take on the impact of racism and other forms of oppression on disciplinary patterns, instructional practices, and school policies. (Hunsberger, et al., 2016).

There should be more training on assisting white teachers with unpacking their invisible biases before entering the field of education (McIntosh, 1989). Perhaps white teachers can begin to ask themselves what it means to have white privilege (McIntosh, 1989.) As a Black mother I suggest white teachers, especially white female teachers, take a step back and gauge how they interact with Black children and Black mothers. Then do the work to change said

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behaviors and thought patterns. I have often explained to white women teachers how they taught and engaged with my children was oppressive and it was indeed their privilege of simply being white. As McIntosh (1989) states:

I remembered the frequent charges from women of color that white women whom they encounter are oppressive. I began to understand why we are justly seen as oppressive, even when we don't see ourselves that way. I began to count the ways in which I enjoy unearned skin privilege and have been conditioned into oblivion about its existence (p. 1).

We challenge white teachers to look at how they were educated about racism and how they in fact do contribute to the oppression of others. We ask teachers to see how their skin color is an asset for any move they are able to want to make.

(McIntosh, 1989.)

Research studies found that the busing programs made school desegregation less about the constitutional rights of Black children and more about the desires and fears of white parents (Clark, 1958). It illustrates that former research on the busing program is contradictory in a sense that it is biased and discounts individualization (Clark, 1958). Our encounters have allowed us to reimagine and examine if the busing program legalized by Brown were in our best interests. It is through reimagination that this research can re-envision the idea of education and the busing program from a broader scope.

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