3-31-2023

A Middle-Class Mother's Journey on Navigating the Educational System: The Impact of Critical Race Theory, Intersectionality, and Class in Schools

Amy A. Hunter
University of Missouri-St. Louis, aarvp7@umsystem.edu

A Middle-Class Mother's Journey on Navigating the Educational System: The Impact of Critical Race Theory, Intersectionality, and Class in Schools

Amy A. Hunter

B.A. English, University of Missouri-St. Louis, 1993

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate School at the University of Missouri-St. Louis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in Education with an emphasis in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

May 2023

Advisory Committee

Dr. Thomasina Hassler, Ph.D.
Advisor

Dr. Rob Good, Ph.D.

Dr. Billie Mayo, E.D.

Dr. Phyliss Balcerzak, Ph.D.

Dedication

I dedicate this work to my mother and grandmother, who were role models for me in being a mother. Even though neither of them are here to see the written text or celebrate the completion of this journey, I feel their presence often. If there is a heaven, I hope they are smiling. I remembered and realized how much time, effort and love that goes into being a mother as I wrote the pages in this document. I am thankful and grateful for their love toward me and preparing me for my greatest job ever. I also dedicate this work to my children. They patiently cheered me on while I worked on accomplishing one of my greatest lifelong goals. It is because of them that I have the courage to work to create a better world. Lastly, I need to acknowledged my brother, Brandon Johnson, and sister, Julie Barrett, for supporting me in motherhood as the best aunt and uncle my children could ask for. I never felt like I was doing this alone because I always had you by my side.

Acknowledgements

I want to acknowledge the late Dr. Matthew Davis. He was my first professor, and he cheered me on throughout the process. I want to thank my advisor, Dr. Thomasina Hassler. She swiftly picked up the pieces and kept us all going through the fear and tears. I want to thank my committee: Dr. Rob Good, Dr. Billie Mayo, and Dr. Phyllis Balcerzak. This process was great because of your support. I had some amazing teachers along the way, and I want to thank all of the UM-St. Louis professors. You are doing the real work and creating new paths for students.

I want to thank my childhood friends, Traci Moore, Karla Sutton, and Anne-Marie Batchelor, and their partners for cheering me on since grade school. I want to thank my YWCA, St. Louis Children's Hospital, Boeing, and Caleres families. I want to thank my friends I made as an adult: Michele Holton, Rudy Nickens, Maxine Birdsong, Mary Ferguson, Cynthia Wilson, Shendorah Fisher, Pam Bolden, , Leroy Shumpert, Chris Phillips, Angie Bass, Jackie Wilson, Michael McMillian, Karen Morrison, Doug Koch, Danika Williams, Val Patton, Yvonne Sparks, Christina and Vince Bennett, Dana Kelly, Nadida Amatullah-Matin and Mohammed, Pat Cox Karen Stewart and Christy Fry, Mon Trice, Alex Stallings, Traci Blackmon, Cassandra Gould, LG Flowers, Dr. Barbara Love, Kevin Green, Pat Turner, and all of BLCD.

A special shout out to my cousins, Vicki, Staci, Betty, Rhonda, LJ, Charmin, Jason, Ari, Saeed, Majeed, and their spouses, and my dear Aunt Veda and Uncle Bryant. Finally, to my love, Ron Parks, your support and care for me made this possible. Thank you to all my friends and extended family.

Abstract

This is a qualitative autoethnographic study of a Black mother in the Midwest region as she navigates the educational system for her children. This is a research document that informs the reader of the impact of racism and the intersectional identity of race, gender, and motherhood. The importance of intersectionality is highlighted in this research, and so it is that the mother is middle-class to articulate that poverty, access to resources, or the educational attainment of the mother are not necessarily mitigating factors for the treatment she receives within the educational setting. Moreover, is serves as a guide for other Black mothers and teachers who care about Black families to call for a change (e.g., shift, deconstruction, and reconstruction) in the educational system at large.

Key terms: Critical race theory, intersectionality, Black middle-class.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

Background

The first article I read in my graduate program at the University of Missouri St. Louis was by Gloria Ladson-Billings (1998) and addressed critical race theory's (CRT) role in education. A question in the title intrigued me as a new graduate student. What was racism doing in a nice field like education? Moreover, how might it show up in the field of education, and what might this mean to me as a student, mother, and educator? Next, I was introduced to Dr. Derrick Bell and Richard Delgado, scholars who work has transformed the education, social movements, and a deeper understanding of the legal connection to land, race, education, and the access to resources.

Derrick Bell, the first tenured Black faculty member of Harvard Law School, brilliantly explained the link between legal studies, and race or the social justice movement. As a mother, I see the link between motherhood and activism. I was not only drawn into this body of work but absorbed by it. I was drawn into the link of place and citizenship, of race and the intersection of gender. It not only clarified what I as a Black mother had experienced, it explained what I felt as a student. It is intentional that I mention class and my identity as a middle-class mother. Primarily because with a few exceptions, most of the literature I read until this article utilized a deficient lens on Black children and almost always pointed to a poverty rational for the failure of schools on the lives of Black children. Bell, Delgado, and Ladson-Billings work allowed me the space and permission to question, research and challenge the system of education. That permission, then allowed for the dismantling, challenging and activism that Black

mother's face within the education system to be reframed as activism, loving, acts of justice, brilliantly and beautifully enacted to support Black children. It allowed not only my children to be seen as worth fighting for and worthy of a loving education, but it also provided the space for Black mothers to ask for the same type of relationship with the educational systems that White women seem to enter the room with. When sexism is discussed, sometimes the article or research is not inclusive of all women, including women of color.

In my experience, many articles that talk positively about motherhood, may not be inclusive of women of color or Black women's experiences. Race is often associated with space, citizenship, and privileges. Utilizing a CRT lens into education, means that scholars and researchers are looking at where these mothers bore or live with these children, and do they belong here? Of course, all women including women of color, Black women specifically also sexism. However, our intersectional identity as Black women (Crenshaw 1994) constantly challenges if they belong in schools and if their children belong, deserve, or are entitled to the same education as their White counterparts. This is research differs in that it offers that there is nothing inherently wrong with Black children, or their mothers. It challenges that the system of racism and sexism support the inhumane treatment of Black women. It is the additional label of motherhood that forces the actions to navigate intuitional spaces as Black women that deserves attention, scholarship and the ethnographic lens of truth telling.

If scholars and researchers are to believe Bell's assertion in CRT that racism is permanent in America, then scholars and researchers are forced to answer the question,

what will we do about it and what is it doing in a nice field like education? Ladson-Billings article was the first of many of articles I would read on the topic. What is clear then and now is that there is no option for Black mothers; Black mothers must fight for their children and assist in navigating the system of education with and for their children. My greatest fear as a Black middle-class mother is not in losing my children to the streets, it is losing them within the educational system. Every day was a check in to see if their souls were still intact, to see if their natural love of learning was still alive, to see if the fire they were born with had been extinguished by a teacher, school policy or the racism in the nice field of education.

My middle-classness allowed me to make choices, request specific for teachers and navigate the system for my children. It was in the witnessing, the heroic moments of motherhood to get them back to themselves, the heartbreaking tears that needed to be shed in order to fight for them again, all the while questioning, “am I doing this right,” “am I a good mother,” and “are we going to get through this? All of these questions before they would finish high school. I have to believe; it should not be this hard to be a Black mother. I have to believe that there has to be a better way for the educational system to treat and partner with Black mothers and I have to believe that it is indeed possible.

This is an autoethnographic study using CRT as the base and foundation, intersectionality, and Black middle-class motherhood. The foundation for this research begins with CRT and its tenets which include that racism is real and part of American culture (Ladson-Billings, 1998). This makes it challenging to research schooling and

education without the inclusion of the marginalized experiences of Black children and their mothers. Which presents the opportunity to provide research and context to the lived experience of a Black mother from the Midwest. However, there are other CRT tenants for this research I will utilize; the ability to recognize and value experiential knowledge and the counter narrative, liberalism is not effective in addressing the social inequality in America and the framework of interest convergence, which acknowledges that the impact within Black spaces, is had with the interest of White people's acknowledgement of how it also benefits them (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

The impact of CRT has also provided context for recognition of intersectionality (Crenshaw et al, 1995) which allows for multiple identities of race, gender, and class. It also provides the opportunity for deepening the lens of identity as political (Cooper, 2015) and the need for additional research in the form of autoethnographic research (Allen, 2014). The framing and context of race, gender and class will be supported within the ethnographical research and the CRT, intersectionality, and class researchers; to better understand the impact of racism, sexism, and Black middle-class motherhood as political identity with the education system.

It is intentional that I mention class and my identity as a middle-class mother. Primarily because with a few exceptions, most of the literature I read until this article utilized a deficient lens on Black children and almost always pointed to a poverty rational for the failure of schools on the lives of Black children. Bell's (1975, 1980, 1987, 1992, 1995, 1999), Delgado's (1984, 1989, 1992, 1995), and Ladson-Billings's (1998, 1999, 2009) work allowed me the space and permission to question, research and challenge the

system of education. That permission, then allowed for the dismantling, challenging, and activism that Black mothers face within the education system to be reframed as activism, loving, acts of justice—brilliant and beautiful. It allowed not only my children to be seen as worth fighting for and worthy of a loving education, but it also provided the space for Black mothers to ask for the same type of relationship with the educational systems that White women often enter the room with.

When sexism is discussed, often scholars or researchers are talking about White women. This is also true when scholars and researchers talk about motherhood. Race is often associated with space, citizenship, and privileges. Utilizing a CRT lens into education, means that scholars and researchers are looking at where these mothers bore or live with these children, and do they belong here? Of course, all women including women of color, Black women specifically also sexism. However, our intersectional identity as Black women (Crenshaw, 1994) constantly challenges if they belong in schools and if their children belong, deserve, or are entitled to the same education as their White counterparts.

Problem Statement

The clarity and understanding that that the system of education is connected to the work in critical legal scholarship, to CRT affirms that racism in America is a problem (Bell, 1992). It is a problem that inadvertently affects all of us. Although the understanding of racism may be more widely understood in all racial and ethnic groups. The laws, policies, practices, and practiced bias is often expressed according to the U.S. caste system (Wilkerson, 2020). Wilkerson, explains that the caste system in the United

States operates as a system of racial oppression, placing Black people at the bottom. Therefore, the counternarrative of Black people, specifically Black women is paramount to understanding depth and relational identity of oppression from the lower caste members, the delits, the untouchables.

There is also an opportunity to better understand the intersections of race, class, and gender within the education system. Intersectionality is utilized as gaining clarity of the experiences unique to Black women (Crenshaw et.al 1995). This framing provides context to the outward identities and the experiences that are unique to that identity, as potentially experiencing racism and sexism and at the same time. In support of that lens, Brittany Cooper (2015) identified the context of intersectionality as political. This political lens of identity provides an opportunity to understand the impact of systemic and institutional racism and sexism. It provides and opportunity to deepen the understanding of the politics of race and gender within systems, like the system of education. Autoethnographic research includes the insider's view while respecting the multiple identities as targeted and political (Boylorn & Orbe 2020). Visible and political motherhood is worthy of deeper research and provides a much-needed counter to the narratives created about Black mothers.

Rationale for Study

The importance of this research is to understand the intersectional identity of Black mothers within the education system. This study uses an autoethnographic lens from a Black, middle-class mother as much of the current research offers deficient model thinking about Black children and Black mothers. This study provides a counternarrative

to the negative biased images of the Black woman. Harris-Perry's (2013) work illustrates that.

> "Jezebel's sexual lasciviousness, Mammy's devotion, and Sapphire's outspoken anger-these are among the most persistent stereotypes that Black women encounter in contemporary American life. Hurtful and dishonest, such representations force African American women to navigate a virtual crooked room that shames them and shapes their experiences as citizens. Many respond by assuming a mantle of strength that may convince others, and even themselves, that they do not need help. But as a result, the unique political issues of Black women are often ignored and marginalized" (Harris-Perry 2013 pg. 55).

Black mothers enter the educational spaces with these stereotypes already embedded in the minds and system of education. Scholars and researchers are constantly trying to prove or disprove Black mothers are one of these, all in the necessary navigation of our citizenship, our humanity and for our children. This research will serve as a navigation tool, an insider's view, and a source of strategies to navigate the complex identity of a Black mother. This data may provide us with the careful analysis and impact on the individual It may then be a tool or resources to be utilized in other communities. This research will utilize the lens of race, gender, and class. As a Black woman in America, I have had to navigate the intersections of race, class, and gender in ways similar to my ancestors who strived to obtain opportunity and justice in a White supremacist culture.

As a Black woman in America, I have had to navigate the intersections of race, class, and gender in ways similar to my ancestors who strived to obtain opportunity and justice in a White supremacist culture. I became a mother of twins in 1991. They were the first two children of the four children I had. I have enjoyed being a mother. I understand that my identity shaped and modeled their experience within the educational system. There is a juxtaposition of being a Black mother. Other than the birth of Beyonce's child Blue Ivy, I do not recall another time in U.S. history outside of chattel slavery that White Americans were happy to see Black children born.

Significance of the Study

There is a joy and a grief that comes with Black mothering. A joy in the birth of a child and the grief that racism will have on their lives. There are so many negative images about Black mothers, I wanted this to be a moment to notice our humanity, love for our children and our desire for happy and healthy outcomes for our children. There appears to be a misunderstanding of our love, advocacy, fear, hopefulness and sometimes heartbreak. Our intersection of race and gender leave us often at the crossroads of navigation, fear, and resistance at the same time and sometimes within in the same moment. I do not believe there are enough stories, counternarratives or examples of gendered and racial navigation (Morris, 2008).

The United States has recently become aware of the terminology of CRT; however, it is being used as a scapegoat and target and it has caused a miseducation and miscommunication of this theory (Utter, 2021). This study will utilize the framework or the study of racism in America is captured in Derrick Bell's work with CRT (Delgado &

Stefancic, 1993). Background and clarity of this topic are also uncovered in the scholarship of and Isabel Wilkerson's research for her book *Caste*, which looks at the system of racism in the us and compares it to the system in India, and the White supremacy strategies of Germany and the United States (Wilkerson, 2020). This historical and foundational work further explains the need to study the effectiveness of this program to unlearn, shift or become allies and activist in ending systemic racism. It is intentional system along with other scholars on race. Scholars and researchers furthermore understand the relationship of Whiteness as property through Cheryl Harris' (1993) work in Harvard Law Review. All this background and research highlight the need for this autoethnographic study and research of a Black mother in the midwestern state.

Although scholars and researchers understand that racism is systemic and part of the historical narrative of the United States, scholars and researchers are also hopeful that individuals and systems can and will change towards equity in America. Many agree that racism and White supremacy are inherently a problem in the United States. Scholars and researchers understand the deeply rooted messaging, laws, systemic and institutionalized practices of racism within the United States with our clarity of CRT and the U.S. caste system. With this understanding also comes a need for research, strategy, and measurement to shift the current reality. Scholars and researchers enter this research with hope and understand that change is inevitable. The hope is that this will impact change within the educational system, teachers, and parents, that it may serve as a "roadmap" within education.

Limitations and Delimitations

This research does not include mothers of other races or White mothers with Black children. This research is an autoethnography and does not include the experiences of the Black father. This research is based upon chronological events and are not inclusive all the events, situations, or unrecalled events. The research is regional and does not encompass all Black mothers nationally. This research is limited to the span of the researchers' children in K-12 education and does not include college or post college experiences.

Research Methodology

This study is conducted as a qualitative study and will employ an autoethnographic design. The method was selected to best mirror the practice of the CRT counternarrative and it is based upon the review of scholarship aligned with CRT and intersectional identities, specifically the identity of Black middle-class mothers.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction

This literature review outlines the major themes of this research: critical race theory (CRT)(Bell, 1980; Ladson-Billings, 1998), intersectionality as personal, identifiable, and political (Crenshaw, 1996; Cooper, 207; Harris-Perry, 2013), and class as it relates to socioeconomic status (Graham, 1999; Pierce, 2017). The research begins with CRT to understand the context of race and racism within the education system, and the key writings which provides the framework for the remainder of the research, middle-class Black motherhood. CRT has several tenets, for this research there are three main tenets: (a) race is a social construct, (b) racism is real in the United States and impacts every system including the education system, and (c) the counternarrative has the power to combat systemic racism (West et al., 1995). The use of the autoethnographic qualitative approach assisted in providing a lens with counters the deficit models of Black mothers and their children (Valencia, 1997; Valencia & Solórzano, 1997).

The movement from CRT to intersectionality is to provide context to the epidemiological epistemology of Blackness. The identity as a mother and a Black mother, easily recognizable with my dark hue of brown skin, which in context also matters within the intersection of identity (Norwood, 2013). Identity, which is visibly noticeable is also political and noticed as I navigated the education system as a Black mother (Cooper, 2015; Hooks, 1984). The third identity, which is intertwined with race and gender is class. It is relevant as an intersectional identity that shaped the experience and access of

resources and choices made as a mother. Middle-class status also provided a community of mothers and children with shared experiences and affirmations (Pierce, 2017).

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework: CRT, Intersectionality, and Class

The review of the literature will include the review if literature pertinent to my research on the experience of Black middle-class mothers navigating the education system. There are serval lenses that applied to this research foundationally based in CRT and the relationship to other frameworks: intersectionality, race, gender, class, and the identity as a mother. My epistemological identity, with my gender, class, religion, marital status, age, and national origin all impact my experience as a mother. It begins with the identities that are visible, palpable, and real: this is coupled with the identities that are hidden.

Three key identities were the focus in this research: race, class, and gender. With a lens towards liberation, equity and love for all children, this fight is shared, fractured, and sometimes broken and at the center is intersectionality. My experience as a child, has shaped my experience as a mother, I was born Black, female, and middle-class, then I became a mother. The use of qualitative research and the power of narratives or stories provides a researched and contextualized insider's view within the system of education (Hellawell, 2006) This review provides a deeper lens into intersectional identities and their relationship to access, power, wealth, and education and a counternarrative to the prior research with provides a deficit lens on Black women and their children (Valencia & Solórzano, 1997). This review provides context to the interconnections of identity and its relationship to society and firsthand experiences (Collins & Bilge, 2020).

CRT

CRT provides the framework of looking at race within the system of education must include the scholarship derives from Harvard University and the work of Derrick Bell in Critical Legal Studies. It allows the research to include an understanding of the tenants of CRT and place them in context to the research. There are several tenets within CRT. However, the literature selected provides the scholarship to understand, race as a social construct in the United States, which places our need to understand the impact of racism within schools. It also allows the formal movement of counternarratives as s form of liberation and, truth telling within the structure of research (West, Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, Thomas 1995). The link to legal studies and the educational system, policies, procedures, and structures allows us to understand the impact of race and racism in America (Bell, 1987, 1992; Ladson-Billings, 1998).

CRT, has several tenants. Systemic and institutional racism also welcomes another tenet of CRT, which is the theory that liberalism will is not enough to effect social inequity (Ladson-Billings,1998). Unfortunately, liberalism is not enough, in order to radically change the system, hope and wish cannot be the strategies. Moreover, recently there has been widespread misinformation about CRT (Utter, 2021). Which is why there is a need for the third tenant of CRT, the power of the counternarrative. This is the clarity and understanding that experiential and lived experiences can provide to the scholarship that currently exists (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

There is power in the counter story or counternarrative to understand an insider's perspective. This is not new to acts of liberation or resistance against majority narratives,

we have other researchers like Kunjufu (2006) that have written to expose the false narratives and othering of dominant groups. The counternarrative gives voice and power to populations that are marginalized and often ignored (Ender, 2019). In Derrick Bell's *Silent Covenants*, he discusses Brown v. Board of Education. As researchers tell the stories of race and education, scholars and researchers may hear the stories of pre-Brown v. Board and then what happened afterwards. The approach to this landmark case is instrumental in CRT because it begins the conversation around educational inferiority because of racial identification within the system of education.

Furthermore, it requires that the United States confront the systemic racial disparities within the educational system and other systems. The legal case Plessy v. Ferguson establishes that separate but equal is not equal. It also confirms "the existence of a dominant race and the concept of color blindness are polar opposites" (Bell, 1999, p. 26). To apply a CRT lens to my research or any research the acknowledgement of race as a real fixture in American society is paramount to applying the lens to the system of education. Moreover, it allows scholars to reimagine a world without racism and work to dismantle and create that reality in all systems. I am grateful for Bell's work and creation of CRT as a theoretical framework, its application can be helpful in understanding racism within all systems.

Bell (1975) connected CRT framework to critical legal studies (CLS) because of its relationship with laws and policies that have a political impact on the lives of marginalized people (1975). It is important that CRT is applied and that the lens of the counternarratives is not only heard but believed. The counternarratives allow us to hear

from a group of people other than the dominant group (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). The legal framework and beginnings also allow us to see the educational system as on to be challenged and disrupted through practices, policies, and laws within the educational system.

Bernal (2002) explained the CRT through a Latcrit lens which also applies to Black students and their parents. She goes further to explain through a series of interviews the racial epistemological experiences of students. Bernal utilized CRT to expand the conversation and the experience Bell and others provided a road map to in CRT scholarship. It is an example of the power of the counter narrative, the other side of reality for people of color. This relationship to cultural capital (Yosso, 2005) provides the connection or interlocking of racism experienced in schools not just by student but by parents as well. Bernal's work highlights the impact of marginalization and no or little acknowledgement of the Latino students and students of color as holders and creators of knowledge (Bernal, 2002).

CRT provides a way for researchers to access, gather, report and research in a respectful and culturally relevant way. CRT tasks the researcher to challenge, question and sometimes ignore the Eurocentric norms and views of people of color. Bernal's (2002) work provides researchers with additional information, language, and context to extend CRT research with, for and by people of color. Bernal's work does not just give voice, power and a platform for students and their parents, it provides a platform for other researchers of color to conduct intercultural research to offer a varied and experienced perspective. It allows students like me to see themselves in the researcher and the

researcher and that feels like a balance that education should provide to all students. The normalizing of European history, literature, art, and education leaves a void for students of color to see themselves (Bernal, 2002).

With the absence of teachers of color it is possible and, in some places, likely that students of color may never experience a teacher of color. Bernal (2002) offered a lens that it is the system of education. The system not necessarily the teacher, the teacher is part of the system that is orchestrated to marginalize the identities, knowledge, and experience of Latino and other students of color. CRT provides the liberation of questioning the system, articulating the microaggressions of daily life at schools and the platform to imagine and create a system of education that is radically different.

Rooting of CRT in the legal system and then applying it to the educational system allow us to look at education like law as a system. Crenshaw et al.'s (1995) work is rooted in this ideology of the laws of education along with the practice of education provide a platform for scholars to apply CRT scholarship within the context of any system and especially in the educational system (Crenshaw et al, 1995). Her research highlights the need for the counter narrative within a system where racism should be closely examined. The resistance to the counternarrative within the educational system is a resistance to hearing the truth of the marginalized people. The truth telling in the narrative is so vastly different from the Eurocentric view of the system it is met with resistance.

Within the context of European schooling in the United States, there is not practice from humanizing, believing, or researching the voice of the people of color.

Crenshaw et al. (1995) offers an opportunity to look not just at the school but the racialized instruction of the teachers, the European and whitewashed curriculum within the school, the lack of representation of people of color globally, which is an inadvertent way of saying people of the global majority have not created or produced anything worth studying (Crenshaw et al, 1995). Furthermore, because CRT is rooted in CLS,

Crenshaw et al.'s (1995) research encourages us to look at identity as political (Crenshaw et al, 1995). Identity as political is an important aspect of her work and the lens of CRT. CRT asserts that racism is real and fixed (Bell, 1987). If this true, and scholars and researchers believe it is, then the question of Crenshaw and Bell is not a question of racism within laws or education. The question then becomes how does racism impact law and education. It is with this question that scholars and researchers see the connection between CLS and CRT and also the pattern of legalizing racism within laws and withing schools. The legalization of racism within laws is clear with an over representation of people of color in prison. In direct mirroring is the overrepresentation of children of color in suspension and expulsion. This poses a problem not just for the student but for the family. Black mothers are often the navigators within schools.

With the marginalization of students of color, the impact and the marginalization of Black women is included in the experience. Which also means the counter narratives of student and the mothers is greatly needed, relevant. The narratives of students and Black mothers is often silenced, because the system of racism and sexism often silence women and people of color. The intersectionality, which is a subset of the CRT (Crenshaw et al, 1995) highlights the need for Black women to tell their stories, to be the

center of the research and to be the researcher. The in community and identity lens cannot be fully captured by outsider status. The research from the insider's view often includes cultural norms, the notice of cultural patterns and cultural aspects of respect. It is incredibly important that the counternarratives are heard, honored, and respected. The link of legal and educational oppression allows us to better understand how scholars and researchers got this system and why it is working so well,

Guinier's (1991, 1994) contributions to CRT are also rooted in CLS. Guinier was a student of Derrick Bell and much of her research is based off the brilliant scholarship of her professor and mentor. I learned of Guinier's (1991) work not through my graduate courses but with the election of Bill Clinton and his desire to add her to his administration in 1993. She was not granted that appointment because of the published work in 1991. I was curious and then read what she had written. Tate (1997) also captured this moments and experience in his article in 1997. Tate asserted that Guinier's stance on race and racism and the harm of racism within laws and systems was indeed real (Tate, 1997). Guinier's agreement, assertion, and publication cost her a role in the administration.

Guinier's (1991, 1994) identity as a Black woman are also at play withing the CRT and intersectionality lens. This clarity of CLS ad CRT and research and articulation in racism in education from a Black woman were an afront to the racist, sexist, and systemic marginalization of Black women scholars. Bell's works were challenged too, and CRT is a lens that allows us to notice, not just her race but her other identities as political. It further encourages us to hear from Black women, their lens, reality, views, and scholarship on topics of race. The 1993 event made it even more important for the

counternarratives to be told, for the lens of Guinier to point out without apology the racism within education (Guinier, 1994). If a Harvard Law School scholar is questioned within the system, if her voice can be marginalized and demonized, where is the voice of a Black mother?

Guinier of course continues with her scholarship and in this case, class is relevant, she was already a highly accomplished Black woman from one of the schools lauded for being the best. And still, even with her degrees and accomplishments she was a Black woman speaking truth to racism and racism within systems and for that the U.S. government could not break the pattern of oppression and provide her with the opportunity. Guinier's research was not incorrect then, and some would argue now welcomed in the racial hostile systems. It is welcomed in spaces where people can imagine a different world and are not afraid to the hear the truth from individuals that have been systemically oppressed. Guinier's work in CRT and her lived experience for all to see and provide context and examples to the need for counternarratives in every system, especially education.

With the knowledge of CRT and the tenants and political nature of race in America, researchers lean on the scholarship of Ladson-Billings and Tate for a foundational grounding that race and racism in education are real and experience daily by students and their families. The power of CLS and its relationship to CRT are significant in understanding how the laws in avertedly affect Black people. The patterns of inequity and the rationalization of the patterns are seeded in racist ideology, The belief that Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) people are intellectually inferior is seeded in

racism (Ladson-Billings, Tate, 1997). The impact of this statement within the context of education indicates that children and their families are perceived as less intelligent and less likely to accomplish the same academic success as their White peers. This practice of marginalization exists within the schools and a deficit lens is placed on children because of their epidemiological epistemology. Blackness is perceived as less than.

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1997) not only apply and assert the CRT lens on education, but they also understand and explore the intersectionality of race and gender. They approach this research with a complex and inclusive broadening of CRT. They acknowledge the work around racism from W.E.B DuBois (2008) and Woodson (1933) and expand their work with gender and class. Their research is an afront to meritocracy and an equal or diligent educational system. Instead, it applies the tenants of CRT, expands the conversation to ask when is education equal, and for which group of people? It asserts it is not equal and never has been equal, so unequal that the legal system had to rule, to state for the world that the educational system is nothing close to b being separate and equal. Moreover, with the racialization of Black and Brown people in American there has never been an equal system.

Education is in the mix of unequal systems, and not just because of class, it is unequal because of race (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1997). Racism as a fixed part of CRT allows these scholars to spend time explaining and researching the racial inequities which they do extremely well. Ladson-Billings and Tate look at the accomplishments and the failures of the system of education. Its disparate treatment of Black children and the need for Black scholars to research Black education. This afore belief that education and

research around race and education with color neutral or without bias is now open to the critique through the CRT scholarship (Bell, 1992; Bernal, 2002; Crenshaw et al., 1995; Guinier, Heriot & Moran, 2007Guinier, Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Yosso, 2005).

Moreover, Bell's work is the work of activism within the system of education on one of the most elite campuses in the United States, Harvard (Crenshaw, 2002). His work, action and modeling gave rise to the act of protest and activism within education. His physical acts of protest in speaking up for Black women not allowed to receive full professor titles or tenure at Harvard, are examples of the possibility of change and the complex relationship between law, intersectionality of race, gender, and education (Crenshaw, 2002). It is with this spirit that I too get to notice the places and spaces where I am welcomed, or my voice is heard as a Black mother. Racism and sexism are not new to education, therefore the intersectional identity and the navigation, may be expected instead of surprising. The clarity of Crenshaw's work to notice the impact of racism as permanent and the difference experiences of Black women specifically, adds to the understand that the intersectional identity within CRT is often ignored (Crenshaw, 1994).

Solórzano and Yosso's (2002) work in CRT and the importance of the counternarrative allows researchers the depth of knowledge and understanding on why the counter narrative is important in understanding race, racism, intersectionality within the system of education. Their work expands on Bell's previous work to explain the five elements of CRT. The first element of CRT is that race and racism are endemic and permanent (Russell, 1997). This is a significant and central theme rather than marginal factor in defining and explaining individual experiences of the law. Although, many

people would like to argue that these conversations about race are really about class. CRT to ascertain that race and class cannot be separated. In other words, White people can be poor, but they are not poor because of their race. This of course does not negate the educational injustice around class, it includes this with race, which is often ignored.

The second element of CRT is the questioning of meritocracy and a system that is not racial biased or is racially neutral (Calmore, 1992; Solórzano, 1997). There is often an attempt to discount race or use deficit model thinking about people of color, specifically Black people within the system of education. This element provides an opportunity for scholars to challenge what has been socialized as normal or deficit. It offers a lens that the researchers were not objective or neutral in prompting the questions, collecting the data, or translating the realities. This is an important theme because it allows provides an opportunity to not just study and examine race within the system of education but to challenge and change the system.

The third element of CRT is the commitment to social justice (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). It also offers an opportunity to see the intersections of race, class, gender within the system of education and other systems and the tie for liberation for all the groups collectively (Matsuda, 1991). This is an essential element of CRT. It provides an opportunity, for individuals and systems to turn away from charity work within systems and work for liberation and equity. Although the charity aspect is socially acceptable and even encouraged at times. This commitment to social justice allows systems to think about solutions systemically and with clarity that ending or interrupting racism also provides an opportunity to end and interrupt poverty and sexism. It also provides an

opportunity for everyone, regardless of race, class, or gender to participate in ending the oppression. The liberation for others is tied to the liberation of all.

To get to the next level, researchers will have to listen, understand, and believe the experiences of the marginalized or targeted communities of people. There are two or four sides to every story or experience. CRT allows for the other stories and experiences to be recognized as valid as well. For some researchers, this added information will be new, and for others this research offers the proof needed in the research field. The challenge to the questions and research and the expansion of research and the findings helps balance out the reality and truth. It also provides additional information to inform the research to expand and acknowledge information simultaneously.

The final theme of CRT is the transdisciplinary perspective (Bell, 1987). The beauty of this theme is that it challenges the dominant story as factual and creates an opportunity for us to situate race and racism in historical and contemporize contexts (Delgado, 1984, 1992; Garcia, Meyer & Billon, 1995 ; Harris, 1993 Yosso, 2005). CRT also provides the opportunity for intersectional lens in the broader sense of property rights of identities. It provides an opportunity for us to view education from the lens of race, land ownership, status with class and more than one marginalized identity at the same time. It offers the framework for the considerations to look at institutions as systems, and systems as methodology to perpetuate inequalities within institutions, policies, practices, and laws.

CRT allows us to look at all of the identities and compare them to the laws, customs or practices that appear to be normal or historical. Crenshaw’s work explores the

lens as a person that identifies as Black and female, which in turn signifies that she is experiencing racism and sexism at the same time. Her intersectional identity therefore means that she cannot separate the two identities with her experiences. Imagining what it is like to be Black and male or White a female would be futile since she will never be either. However, it also means that her collective identities also shape her lived experiences and her lens. Within the system of education, this is vitally important, particularly after Brown v. Board of Education. Crenshaw's work offers an opportunity for us to research the now experience between Black mothers and White teachers and the impact on Black children.

Yosso (2005) framed race as having an insider and outsider lens. Yosso also understand cultural capital as racial distinctions with hierarchy attached to race. Yosso's work highlights a higher order aligned with race. It encourages the scholarship to examine culture from the individualist to collectivist lens. Furthermore, it questions the framework that individualist, which is mostly White and European is the best or only culture to have value. In the context of race, it means that all other cultures are less valuable or less correct compared to the dominate or White culture. Its relevance is in how Black women show up as mothers with their culture in hand, which their traditions and rearing of their children as less than, modes of compliance or assimilation verses our inherent desire to be free, liberated and considered whole.

Yosso's (2005) work allows us to consider how the capital of Black children and their families is recognized or ignored in the context of school. It offers that is it not often recognized and that it indeed is assisting Black people in navigating a racially hostile

institution. As a Black mother, it is the reason or rationale for my practice of teach African American heritage, pride, and socialization at home. It is apparent as a mother, my children would receive little if any affirmations that they are born brilliant, that their cultural norms are valued, useful and appreciated. It aligns with CRT in the need for the counternarrative. It also aligns with the premise that racism is fixed, and that identity or property rights extend the epidemiological epistemology and caste system of race. Whiteness as value and culture as currency are part of the educational system. As a Black mother, I am able to hand down the counternarrative but race in inherited and my Blackness prevents my children from inheriting the property and cultural rights of Whiteness. Unfortunately, the research of the past is not so far in the past that it is not still relevant today.

Intersectionality

With an understanding that identity is political, and some identities can be seen, while others are invisible. Our identities are intersectional, and difficult to unravel (Crenshaw 1989) For that reason the second framing for the research is intersectionality because it is a byproduct of Bell's work. With respect to Crenshaw's coined term of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989). This term captures the identities that are quickly visibly seen, it is the identity that I enter the room with (Cooper, 1892). This research includes the intersectional identities of race, gender which are visible and class. Crenshaw (1989) named the feeling and reality that scholars like Anna Julia Cooper (1892) identified and describes years prior. The identity of Black womanhood is indeed a unique experience.

Cooper argued that Black people are not free until Black women are free, free from racial and gendered oppression. They are identities that are impossible to ignore and adversely then to respond to as a society and within the system of education. In addition to the brilliant and thoughtful scholarship of Cooper, Paula Giddings (1984) added to the conversation about the importance of Black women and the intersectional lens that it brings to the world. Giddings asserted that progress of race and gender cannot be had without the Black woman. With this visual and political identity is also the culture of respectability (Higginbotham, 2003).

Respectability politics are explored through Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham within the church, which spreads through the Black community as culture and symbolism of Black middle-class culture (Higginbotham, 2003). Within this context is also the push and pull of sexism, racism, and respectability. The activism and resistance of the Black women in the Baptist church, mimics the activisms and resistance of Black mothers within the system of education (Higginbotham, 2003). The ending of racism without the ending of sexism will not serve Black women and as children inherit the status of their mothers, it will not serve the children well either. Womanist scholars understand the link between race and gender.

The feminist movement has not served Black women as well as their White counterparts, which is not new. As researchers look at the work of Ida B. Wells and the anti-lynching legislation of suffragist movement, it is clear to see that it was her intersectional identity that was in the way of her voice being heard, taken seriously, and included in reform (Giddings, 2009). It is for this reason that I continue the literature

review with the framework of intersectionality, and it is connection to CRT. It is when, where and how I enter this research as a Black middle-class mother with a counternarrative that differs from the image of Black women as weak and poor. It is because of these brilliant Black women scholars that I have a voice and the courage to enter this space.

As the researcher and the subject in the autoethnography I enter into this conversation as a Black, middle-class, mother with this intersectional identity. It is with this lens of Black, woman, and middle-class that I navigated the educational system, with and for my children. It is an identity (different than White women, Black men, and poor Black mothers. There is clarity that although these identities alone can stand and also have a story to share, researchers honor Crenshaw's work in her brilliance to acknowledge, notice and name the intersects of Black women.

Black women, Black mothers are often written about. Melissa Harris-Perry's (2013) work speaks to the historical and stereotypical framing of Black women as Jezebels, Sapphire, Mammy, and the strong Black woman. These are the lenses that Black women, Black mothers are railing against as they enter school. This pressure is indescribable. It is a constant threat to us and our identity and to how our children may be treated or perceived. Harris-Perry's work also introduces the concept of the "crooked room." She describes being a Black woman in America as being an off set, a not perfect White woman, that something is not quite right about Black women, in our total being. It offers within the context of schooling that Black mothers are compared to the ideological patterns of White womanhood of White motherhood.

White mothers are not perfect either, however, if researchers look at the images of White women and how they are portrayed and the images of Black women, researchers will see the stark contrast between good, pure, and bad and lazy. This is where Black mothers enter the school buildings, with their identity questioned. Black mothers, even Black middle-class mothers enter the school with their children that they love and adore questioned on their womanhood, worthiness, citizenship to be in the space with other children. Because Black women are not perceived as sisters to White women, in a fictive kinship framing (Stack, 1993) where White women see Black women as their sisters, they are instead judged, viewed, and treated like a threat or an outsider.

The intersectional lens of race and gender are the visible identities that schools respond to immediately. These identities are often discussed in the educational settings by, school administrators, teachers, and parents. However, often there is a negative connotation to Black women specifically as mothers. The intersectionality lens provides an opportunity to not separate the identity of a Black mother. It offers the richness, depth and questioning of what it is like to be a mother, and a Black mother. It includes the racial identity as a factor, or significant shift in motherhood, womanhood, and privilege. Intersectionality allows for the addition of complexity by adding class, ability, and age. All of these identities are significant in my experience as a Black mother.

Brittany Cooper's research allows us to see intersectionality as political (Cooper 2013). Cooper's work allows us to see CRT and intersectionality as intertwined and the impact of the politics of respectability for Black women (Cooper 2013). This identity allows and permits, the counternarrative as ethnographic research as necessary and the

need for Black women to see themselves as political, activist and resistors of racism within the education system. Cooper's framing as identity as political (2013) in concert with Ladson's Billings (1999) clarity of racism within schools, invites research on how Black mothers navigate the system of education as political agents for liberation for themselves and their children.

Class

To provide context to the caste system in the link to the education system researchers start with the work of W.E.B. DuBois. Pierce (2017) noted that DuBois framed the education system in the United States as the *caste education*. DuBois's framing then and now is directly tied to the education system and the access of well-resourced education aligned with where a family or child lives. This acknowledgement of race as a defining factor, connected to property and the property rights of Whiteness bridge the connection of the impact of race, place and its relationship to school. With an intersectional lens on gender, this places Black women at the bottom of the bottom.

Pierce (2017) argued that today, DuBois's framing is whitewashed with conversations of choice schooling, charter schools, gifted programs, and school vouchers. None of these programs focus on equity for all kids, instead they are utilized as tools in this caste system to segregate, harm, and create a scarcity model for education. It is not by mistake wealthy children are doing better academically than poor or middle-class children. If researchers believe that all children are born brilliant. A statement I often say and affirm; then researchers would have to inspect why all children are not thriving in the education system. Yes, poverty has an impact however, for this research poverty is

removed and still Black middle-class kids are not doing as well as their White peers. The caste system is not about money, it is about status, rank, category and systemizing the oppression of people based upon race, hue, and identity. Pierce (2017) echoed DuBois argument that ending of the caste system within education would liberate Black people, and not ending it would be the death of Black people.

When researchers compare literacy, death rates and poverty rates to the level of education people have, researchers can see the correlation between schools and outcomes. Moreover, researchers can see the discrepancies in the data when a White man with a high school education can out earn a Black man with a college degree (Kipling 1999; Woodard & Mason 2005). The suburban Black family will still face racism with the education system. Fancy degrees, nice homes and nice clothes cannot prevent racism from happening, not even in schools not even too little children, they were born into a caste system, and they are treated accordingly when they arrive at school. The curriculum, pictures on the wall and teachers will all remind them of their second-class citizenship and the caste system they were born into.

Kendi (2016) argued that the caste system in the United States was designed, and Black people were “stamped from the beginning” (p.22 The color of Black skin is easily identifiable and was different enough to establish laws, policies, and practices around skin color. This heinous act of White supremacy and colonization permeates every system and especially the education system. The assignment of goodness, intellectual ability and resources is determined by racial hierarchy, a caste system in the United States. The justification of this treatment is not simply rooted in racism and sexism, it is

also rooted in Afro-pessimism (Nash, 2021). Afro-pessimism describes a concept that Black people do not deserve the rights of humanity because they are not human, at best subhuman (Wilderson, 2003; Wilkerson, 2020). Researchers understand the weight of this when evaluating legislation like Plessy v. Ferguson (Myrdal, 1944). The segregated schools by race, with separate and unequal resources are the example of racism and caste within education. It is institutionalization of caste, normalized, explained, and defended daily. What other system could fail 20-50% of it is customers and still stay afloat? Not all White Americans get a good education. It would appear a fight for quality education in urban areas would also benefit White children in rural areas, but the caste system in education encourages even the poor White people to withhold resources, education resources from Black people and urban children.

Understanding the U.S. caste system is important and linked to CRT and the education system. James Weldon Johnson argued that White supremacy was the assignment of status based upon race (Tyler, 2017). This argument was deepened by the analogy that Black was synonymous with disability (Tyler, 2107). The deficient model of thinking is not new in the United States or in the world around skin color (Valencia & Solorzano 1999). India's caste system has been examined closely and its links to power and poverty often align with the U.S. caste system. The need for racial hierarchy is patterned after the cognitive dissonance and use of laws to explain, rationalize, and expand inequitable treatment. However, this analogy of Blackness and disability are not well aligned.

The only reason that Black skin is seen as a disability is the assignment of inferiority based upon a racially biased system (Norwood, 2013; Tyler, 2017). This provides the context that uncovering the system of racism within schools as CRT would encourage the scholarship and research means acknowledging the inequities of a caste system exists in the United States and within U.S. schools. It also encourages the sharing of knowledge from the insiders to uncover the unearned and often taken for granted privileges of Whiteness. It also encourages the research and scholarship of policies and practices that target and oversee Black people and children in schools. James Weldon Johnson is often named and revered because his poem became the Black national anthem (Gibbs, 1984). The question is why was there a need for a second anthem? The second anthem was needed for a population of people that were called refugees at the end of chattel slavery, in a land without a home. The anthem was needed to restore humanity, speak of liberation, and provide hope to a marginalized and oppressed people.

It came into question why middle-class status or generations of higher education cannot and did not shield this Black mother from the intersection of racism and sexism. Moreover, it was clear that the racial identity and the status or privilege or lack thereof was also the inherited by me and passed on to my children. Regardless of class, I was treated as a second-class citizen. The notion of race and race as currency is affirmed by Harris's (1993) work with Whiteness as an identity and that identity, like land, is property.

As a Black middle-class mother, I cannot pass down Whiteness. Even with my class status, I cannot provide the same cover and access to my children. My skin tone and

theirs are outward symbols of second-class citizenship. Even in spaces where I have more monetary or educational wealth; Harris (1993) asserts the privileges of Whiteness are more lucrative than educational status. Her scholarship affirms that racial privilege or targeted identity is passed down or inherited. In some U.S. states, the race of the baby is determined by the race of the mother. Chattel slavery was at the helm of creating such laws and policies, to ensure that Black bodies remained void of citizenship, rights, and freedom.

Isabel Wilkerson (2020) invited this historical research in her book *Caste* with the framing of "Medical History." Wilkerson invited readers to better understand why doctors ask about family history. Like educational history researchers need to further understand what has happened in the past to prevent the same ailments or problems to happen in the future. It is this element that allows for us to think about the whole experience of people, gender, race, class as a lens and experience that is real and may be different from the dominant group. Different is valid and different. This lens of CRT has allowed us to deepen our knowledge, research and understanding of what is happening and our strategies for change, liberation, and equity.

Through Harris' (1993) work around CRT and Whiteness as property, researchers understand the inherited nature of race and all the citizenship and insider privileges that is granted based upon this property right. Yosso's (2005) research challenges the dominant ideology that only White people have something to offer within the system of education. It also challenges the system of White supremacy and all the right and privileges that surround Whiteness. Yosso's groundbreaking research uncovers the language and lens of

the dominant group and uncovers the capital that children of color bring to the classroom and to the educational system. Today, those skills and abilities are not expressed as genius or gifts, instead they are framed as resilience and grit, the language of the oppressor. Tatum (1997) calls us “smog breathers” (p. 65). Researchers are all inadvertently inhaling messages about people, and it is unavoidable. This research of Black mothers within the educational system is needed a necessary to continue the CRT scholarship. It is to uncover what researchers have learned and how it all fits together.

Like race is inherited so is class. Class is the other element in the intersectionality identity that I will play close attention to during this research. Graham (1999) explored the upper Black middle-class experience in the book, *Our Kind of People*. Although, it is not completely my experience, it indicates that there are a lot of factors that go into being or identifying as Black middle-class. It is not a monetary identity necessarily in Black spaces. Class may be determined by historical educational attainment, the number of generations that your family afforded a college education.

Like any privilege, class is not just financial backing. Class represents the shared communal and abundance of knowledge, access, and resources. It is possible and for me throughout my life I have had access to money and resources and at a few points in my life, I was financially poor, Black, and a mother. However, the identity of class, provided benefits of reduced childcare, a job in corporate America, a middle-class husband, a suburban address, and access to suburban schools for my children, and access to all the other people that were like me, Black and middle-class. This identity also afforded me the insider view of the education system.

My mother was a teacher and so was her grandmother, which makes me fourth generation educated. Although my grandmother's mother died when she was four, the Black educated friends of her mother made sure she had all of the privileges that educated Black people had at the time. Even though her mother had to leave teaching to get married and have children, her educational status remained, and kept her in the middle-class. My grandmother was a at home mother and wife, a symbol of status and later had a career as a politician. My intention here is not to brag, it is to undergird the importance or weight of class.

Graham speaks about the Back middle-class belonging to clubs like Jack and Jill, a Black mothers club to socialize with other Black middle-class families. I was raised in this club and when I became a parent joined as a mother. My previous membership as a child guaranteed me the membership as a mother. My children are also legacy children, and they too are guaranteed a spot in the organization if they wish to join. This is significant in the lens that it provides for success, accomplishment, expectations like the expectation that you go and graduate from college and marry within your same class status. This is significant in the realm of education because the perception and maybe the reality is that you will be treated better in the White schooling system in America if you have more money. Along with grooming tips and access to museums and other cultural outings, there were living examples of Black millionaires or extremely successful Black people as norms.

Children in second and third grade discuss which sororities or fraternities they are going to join like their parents and grandparents. It sets a stage that Black and educated,

Black, and successful are linked and tied together. It also mimics a lot of the White middle-class norming. Jack and Jill girls wore their hair strait and often were light skinned. This was not the case for me, but my mother was light, and I understood that color, the closer to White the more access and privilege that brings in the world generally speaking and at school specifically speaking. Again, the intersectional lens is applied to race and gender. The need to be light was more important for the woman, darkly hued successful Black men can then access lightly hued Black women. All of this is linked to racism and the hierarchy of race, and the oppression of women even in Black space. All of this information when applied to education and the system of school are significant as Black women navigate, even Black middle-class women navigate the system of education.

Middle-class Black people have had access to advance classes, books on loan or purchased, the identity of having and not needing to ask, beg or borrow. This identity is significant along with being Black and as a woman. It is clear that Black people are marginalized, and it is clear that women are marginalized. The intersectional identity of two marginalized groups with a small power identity of class are the lenses that are added to the identity of mother. Mother is an identity alone. It shifts when other intersectional identities are added, rural, urban, White, Hispanic, poor, single etc. It is a shift in either a power or oppressed direction. It is important to note that being in a marginalized identity or several is not malleable, it is fixed, and creating a path of resistance or liberation is as complex. Researchers are watching children in an unequitable education system and our

witness to this violence cannot be ignored. It should not matter if a mother is White, Black, Brown, or rich, poor, or middle-class; children deserve the best.

Carol Wallace in the book *Our Kind of People* highlights some of the organizations, definitions, and rank of the Black elite in America. She references membership to private organizations like the first Black male fraternity Boule, women's organizations like: The Links, Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority and organizations for children like Jack and Jill. These would be similar to the fraternal orders, Junior League, and private clubs in White spaces. This is an organized and identifiable membership into a community of W.E.B. DuBois' talented tenth. There was little confusion that the children themselves also identified as middle-class and because of their home, family dynamics and extended family and social organizations like fraternities and sororities, social organizations like Jack and Jill, a Black middle-class social club for Black families, and their interactions with the faith-based community, also Black and middle-class. The mother, father and children were consistently surrounded by affirmation of this standing within the Black community and the available resources of the middle-class. Class status will not save Black mothers from the experience of racism or sexism, these systems are base in political and historical laws, policies, and norms.

Black Motherhood

This section is dedicated to the scholarship of Black motherhood. Black motherhood has been a conversation in America since chattel slavery and the commodification of Black babies. In truth, Black women's bodies and motherhood have been political (Roberts, 1997). Navigating the spaces of education are an act of

resistance, liberation, and struggle within the political context of education. Black women have not owned their bodies without the gaze, policies and legal community weighing in ever.

As researchers look to reproductive rights, the impact of the legal system in taking and removing Black babies from mothers, motherhood is fraught with joy, pain, fear, and a preparation of loss White mothers cannot image. I start with chattel slavery because that is where the dehumanization for Black women in America begins (Rousseau, 2013). It is the start of systematically justifying the mistreatment of Black women and their children. It is the foundation for the caste system, defining the rationale for the hierarchy of race and the legalization of mistreatment, rape, and torture for Black mothers. Becoming a Black mother has never been celebrated in America, with the exception of selling children. Blaming Black mothers for the social and societal inequities is a pattern to obscure the need for radical and transformational reform. This is politicized, verbalized, and reinforced with *The Moynihan Report* in 1965 where America is provided with a racist image of Black women as welfare queens (Roberts, 1997). This is an attempt to negate the politics of respectability in the Black community and the civil rights movement, a movement to gain equal rights is undergirded with the cognitive dissonance to justify the inequity. The negative images of Black women and motherhood are carried forward. It is important that researchers tend to the ways in which the education system is linked into this conversation.

Teachers are often the first to report issues with children to the authorities. It is part of the system, to report Black mothers to another power source when there is a

problem. Laws were put in place to support this system like the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) to combat the images of the lazy, uncaring and welfare queen Black mother (Roberts, 1997). I understand that I identify as a Black middle-class mother, however these images, stereotypes, laws, and policies affect all Black mothers. It comes with the other racialized stereotypes of Black women. It is the start and need for our radical imagination and liberation theology to move and shift the educational system for ourselves and our children. The negative images of Black motherhood in schools' places Black women and White teachers at direct opposition of each other.

The socialization that rewards the reporting of Black mothers is the same system that understands that our children are not always safe in the hands of teachers and at any time our rights as mothers can be taken away, legally. I cringe when I think about the power of a twenty-two-year-old teacher to get my child removed from my home on her perception of what is going on in my life or in my home. I understand we are all caught in a web and loop, and this is why and autoethnography is so important from the counternarrative of a Black mother. I was able to escape the eugenics movement to reduce or stop Black women from becoming mothers with tested birth control that led to permanent sterilization (Roberts, 1997). Again, Black motherhood is political. In many ways giving birth is an act of resistance. Black feminist moved from conversations of birth control and abortion to social justice acumen of reproductive rights (Roberts, 1997). This allows for the broadening of the conversation to include health equity outcomes; the political nature of Black womanhood and motherhood connect and begin to fight back

within the systems (Roberts, 1997). This fight for reproductive justice mimics the political fight and nature of Black motherhood in schools.

The desire to have a child and then educate a child with the best resource is a wish of all mothers. The lens of CRT is helpful to note here in the ways in which housing laws and education are intricately linked. The more housing a person can afford the more educational resources they have available. The criminalization of Black mothers to get a quality education for their child by using another address, even a family members address is another example of the CRT and CLS playing role in the navigation Black mothers face. By the 1990s, Black mothers were being sentenced to jail for using a false address outside of their neighborhood (Roberts, 1997). The offense prior meant a child was kicked out of school and asked to register in their home district. Black mothers, they horrible people that love their children and wanted the best education for them were now facing real jail time. It fit in with the narrative that Black mothers are bad mothers and not deserving to have their children. This is the song that plays over and over again in America, and researchers enter the school system fighting stereotypes, not trusting teachers, and keeping any need for assistance or help a secret, with the fear of losing the role of motherhood,

Motherhood is a role and mothering are an act of loving Black children that may or may not be your biological children (Nash, 2018), Black motherhood including Black middle-class motherhood includes looking at all of the Black children as your own. My biological children belong to me, and so do the children down the street, around the corner and in my children's classrooms. I became a room parent for 23 years because part

of my Black middle-class socialization and privilege was to take off from work, volunteer to through parties, bribe my children's teachers with nice gifts throughout the year and watch out for all the Black and Brown children in the room. I was raised with a collectivist culture that included schools. For the children without mothers for whatever reason, I became their mother's sister. That means that mothering was second nature to me and part of my life. It also means that getting my children to college and all of their friends was the task and mission at hand.

Like Roberts (1997), Nash (2018) argued that Black motherhood is a political status. Within that political status the politics of equity within education and the liberation for Black people through education is part of the political and liberatory act against the violence of Black women and children. Seeing the intersectional lens and intersectionality as a praxis, a way of changing reality, the future and the system are linked to CRT, Crenshaw's intersectional identity reconfirm that Black motherhood is political (Collins, 2015). With clarity of the political nature of this identity, the role of Black motherhood is the role of an activist. Being an activist is more than protest, it requires a radical imagination of life unseen. It requires the skillfulness of an artist and the acumen of a CEO.

The scholarship and research countering the deficit narratives of the media and the political nature of race and gender are supported by the work of Sheron Davenport. Davenport's work reflects upon the Black mother, educator. This is in direct response for the need for Black mothers to advocate for themselves and their children. In this research she uncovers the patterns, beliefs, and actions of Black mothers as educators from the

lens of their children (Davenport, 2019). In interviewing adults and asking them to reflect upon their education and how they saw or witnessed their mothers navigating the system of education for them. This is not a new phenomenon within the Black community. It does mimic the pattern that only men should or can be given the title of leader, even within Black spaces. As researchers look towards naming the historical leaders, of the civil rights era, researchers find that the Black women's voices are often negated, muted, or completely left out of the narrative (Murtadha & Watts, 2005). It follows the historical patterns of chattel slavery, the lack of rights at the intersection of race and gender and the need for more Black women scholarship and counternarratives. The relationship between Black mothers and teachers will shift when the narratives and experiences shift.

Often when Black mothers enter the school building, they are met with resistance (Allen & White-Smith, 2017); primarily because there are narratives that state Black parents do not care about their children or their education (Cooper, 2005; Fine, 1993). Which of course is not true. However, this narrative plays out throughout the course of a Black child's life. Black mothers have to prove to the teacher that she cares, as if sending her child to a complete stranger daily to be educated for their success and advancement is not an act of care, of course Black mothers care about and for their children. With this deficit narrative Black parents are often misunderstood or described as hostile, combative, uninformed, and uneducated (Diamond & Gomez, 2004; Larea & Horvat, 1999). Within this conflict there is a lack of teaming for the best interest of the child. Moreover, there is a lack of recognizing the cultural wealth, lens of CRT or the political

nature of Black motherhood and its role within the education system (Allen & White-Smith, 2017).

The images of Black women and Black mothers is filled with the repetitive, commercialized, racist and commodified images, it is difficult for teachers to see Black mothers any differently (Ladson-Billings, 2009). These images of nappy headed, and uneducated Black women give permission for society at large including teachers to approach the relationship with Black mothers as deficit (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Instead of Black middle-class mother's having an experience close to their White counterparts. It is vastly different and an uphill battle to prove they love their children; they are involved, and they want the best education they can get for them.Summary

In this literature review the framework of CRT with the tenents of racism as a social construct and real (Bell,1980; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Provides the structure and lens to view schools as institutions that experience, systemic and instutionalized racism. Moreover, it provides the platform to deepen undertsnding of the experiences of others within the institution of education. That experience is then shaped by the experiences of the particiapants, parents, teachers and student. Bell's (1980) foundation in Critical Legal Studies, connects the laws, policies and practies within the education system to other legal and reacialized policies like housing, community and identity. The review also provides context to the intersectional and political identity of Black mothers and the need for navigation and advocacy, for themselves and their children within the education system.

The insertion of class in the intersectional idientiy removes the socioeconomic and political narrative that all Black mothers are poor. All Black mothers are not poor and yet, there is still a need to navigate and advocate, mothers as political activist for equitable education (Lacy, 2008). A through window into the nuances of Black middle-class identiy and the acknowledgement of external and internal politics of race, class and gender. Black women with the historic narrative of respectability and movement leaders within the Black community (Higginbotham, 2003). This prior research creates and opening and opportunity for the counter narrative (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Bell, 1980 & 1995). This is the groundwork for understanding the research presented in an autoethnographic study.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This chapter outlines the methods used to conduct the study. This research was conducted utilizing the critical autoethnographically methodology utilizing Black feminism in qualitative inquiry (Evans-Winters, 2019). This methodology is helpful in hearing, understanding, and collecting data from the researcher that is caught in the intersectional margins. The impact of systemic oppression for Black women and their children within the institution of education is often missed in the quantitative deficit model questions of race and education. Moreover, the erasure of Black women and their experiences as mothers, is often missed, misinterpreted, and misrepresented in research conducted by outlining cultures.

Ethnographic research creates an opportunity for stories, experiences, and information to be shared and studied from an insider's perspective (Ellis, 2004; Ellis et al., 2011). It also allows for the questioning of how qualitative data is captured, collected, and then presented within the scholarship if research and education. However, there are other approaches to this work like utilizing interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), which is the qualitative approach aimed at providing the experienced of a personal lived experience (Smith et al., 2009).

The themes of this research are consistent with the impact of racism and sexism and the intersectional identity of Black mothers as both Black and female (Crenshaw et al., 1995). The concept and practice of grouping themes in this research may not be necessary and for some may not clarify the lived experience of this Black mother. Therefore, the allowing the narrative or counternarrative to be told from the researcher,

mother's perspective is preferred. There was also a possibility of this research being conducted through the qualitative approach as a narrative. However, this research will include the lens and experience of the mother as the researcher along with her relationship with her children within the system. Although W.E.B DuBois (2008) asked the question "How does it feel to be the problem" in *The Souls of Black Folks*. I would offer the "problem" has never been Black people in America. The problem has been White supremacy and patterns of colonization within every system in America. Black mothers do not have the shared racial identity of White teachers.

The methodology of autoethnography was selected to hear, recognize, understand, honor, and give voice to Black mothers and Black motherhood. This methodology allows for truth telling, honest and firsthand experiences to be shared and upheld as research and as scholarship within the system of education. Journaling and collecting narratives will encourage sharing of personal and reflective experiences. This research comes as a counter to the narrative that Black mothers are bad, ignorant, absent from their child's life or uninterested in their child's education. This research approaches the system of education with a CRT lens, intersectional identities, the U.S. caste system, and afro pessimism. This research is important in understanding and recognizing the humanity of Black women and their children.

This inquiry is based in framing of intersectionality, the U.S. caste system, and CRT. The research is in direct response the shift in pedagogy of race, class, and gendered oppression during the mid-1990s within the educational system. An autoethnography of a young mother provides a counternarrative of young Black mothers and the use of this

qualitative methodology allows research that shares an insider's view without dismantling the humanity, or intersectional identities.

My journey in motherhood is unique in a way, I was married at the age of twenty and gave birth to identical twin sons. I was divorced by the time I was twenty-two and remarried to someone else by the time I was 24. I tell this part of my identity because as a Black mother, I faced the shame of an early pregnancy, the shame of being a single parent and then redeemed by second husband that would eventually lead to another divorce after twenty years of marriage. As a Black mother, I have been marginalized because of my single parent status and then redeemed by educators by my marital status to my second husband. I have experienced single motherhood along with married status within the educational system. I wish that only I had experienced this, unfortunately, my children also felt the differences within their education. It is the shifting and compounding of this status from me to my children, of race and gender that I am paying close and steady attention to. Although my marital status changed my socioeconomic status remained the same. I lived comfortably in a middle-class neighborhood and surrounded by support by my family and friends.

The use of an autoethnography provides the research to be personal and supported by scholarship, not just what happened but why it happened (Ellis, 2004). There are reasons for all the navigation and much of the reasons begin with race and gender. Selecting educational opportunities for my children was one of the hardest decisions I made throughout their lives.

Black feminism in qualitative inquiry which focuses and centers the research on Black women's qualitative research (Evans-Winters, 2019). Much of the current research on Black people and begins with them centered as deficit. For this reason, the researcher and researched must identify as a Black, a mother and middle-class. The identities are self-defined, meaning the Black mother may not be the biological mother but someone that as "mothered" a child that also identifies as Black. For this study, Because I am Black middle-class mother, I am an appropriate subject for this study.

Middle-class is not defined solely by monetary considerations. In Black space it is possible to be middle-class with or without secondary education. It is also possible to identify as middle-class because of an educational attainment (e.g., bachelor's degrees or advanced degrees) yet still struggle financially because of life circumstances. Therefore, the researcher must fully identify as Black, as a mother, and as middle-class. In this research the researcher fully identifies as a Black Middle-class mother. Not only was the researcher raised in a Black and middle-class family, but she also married a man that also identifies as Black and middle-class.

Data Collection

The data collection includes my words as a Black mother. Within an autoethnographic study, this will need to be written, vetted for cultural shortcuts within the language and rewritten and explained. The data will be a collection of stories collected and recollected, organized by year. The stories selected will provide a window into the moment and a revolution, if resolved. Therefore, not just a sharing of the story but the inclusion of how it was managed and resolved. Qualitative study in this research

allows for the uncovering of details, not captured in a licker scale. It allows for the research to be conducted by the people that are typically marginalized and reported on. It allows for the voice of the participant to be told and understood as factual, actual and research. The first capturing of the date may be to capture the "what and how" of an event. However, the next analysis of the data must include the impact, feelings, perception, and emotionally strategic responses to the events. This allows for full, through and robust research.

Questions for the researcher to consider:

1. What was your experience as a Black girl in schools? Do you think your race and gender impacted your experience and why or why not?
2. What was your experience navigating school for your children? How do you think your race and gender impacted their educational experience?
3. Were the times when you thought you had to advocate for your child because of their racial identity? Please provide an example.
4. What advice or recommendations would you give Black mothers to navigate the educational system?

Researchers Role

In the use of an autoethnography from a Black feminism qualitative inquiry, the researcher and the researched are the same individual. The use of ethnographical study is through the lens of the participant. The trustworthiness of the research is reliant on the reader and the ability for the researcher to share the research in a way that is meaningful, palatable, and easily understood by other readers and researchers. The researcher is

encouraged to utilize reliable sources to vet the information and events as accurate and inclusive of the setting, location, and memory of the events. The researcher is encouraged to share this research with the young person that they "mothered" for accuracy and perceptions of the occurrences and events.

The researcher is encouraged to use other articles, books and research conducted for triangulation of the data collected, scholarship studied and previous research on this topic. The validity and the ability to prove and validate the voices and experiences of the individuals with intersectional marginalized identities is paramount to being respected, believed, understood, and heard by the majority population. Additional research and scholarship on this topic and topics closely aligned to this one will also add credibility to the research, the need to provide and conduct this research and the potential to provide additional research.

Data Analysis

The data alone within the narrative may not fully uncover the emotion of sadness, sorrow, heartbreak, or joy that Black mothers see while navigating the system of education. Furthermore, because this is a navigation within a racially unjust system that not only oppresses but at times targets Black children; the navigation explained about what did and did not happen and why. For example, the mother may navigate her child's schedule to be allowed to take an honors course, which may be a win, or joyous moment. However, that is only one part of the navigation. The joy may be met with fear that her child will be mistreated, hazed, belittled, or berated within the class and her role as mother, advisor, counselor, and advocate will also need to be part of the navigation

process. This may be the moment when additional probing of how you felt, and what did you do within the situation is asked or vetted. It is important to balance the negative stereotypes of Black women or Afro pessimism of Black people with the reality of feelings and actions that Black mothers have and may not be encouraged to share or express openly.

In the first analysis of the data the questions about what happened and how did the Black mother or child respond to the situation and capturing this information accurately is important and vital to the narrative and the research. In addition to capturing the events, it will be helpful to other Black mothers, students, and teachers to hear "how" the event impacted them, prior to deciding of finding a solution. The benefit of CRT, which was embedding within critical legal studies is the power of witnessing (Bell, 1995). Witnessing is not only important within the legal field, but also within the spiritual realm. The analysis of the data initially may be for facts or capturing the event. However, the power of the counternarrative (Bell, 1995) within CRT is the ability to give voice to the people that have experienced the event. It is an opportunity to hear the other side while challenging the validity of research that only captures what happened.

While conducting an autoethnography, it is important to integrate the literature in the narrative, experiences, and analytical contexts. The theoretical frames I used are intersectionality, CRT, and the caste system in the United States. This is a necessary framework to capture the multiple identity of motherhood, race, class, and gender. This allows the researcher to explain, the impact of these collective identities and the experiences they yield. Additionally, Derrick Bell's work with CRT allowed the literature

and the researchers' identity to outline the permeance of race, the structural inequities withing education and the need and usefulness of the counternarrative (Bell, 1995).

The third integration of literature is the work of Isabel Wilkerson (2020), which further explains the difficulty of movement of Black children within the system of education. All of this literature with the contextual framing of race, education and CRT provides a foundation for the question and a prompt for the research to share best practices and solutions to navigating the educational system. The literature serves as the research needed to prompt the question, clarify the historical nuances, and solidify the need for radical reform and solution-oriented strategies for future generations. I am hopeful for meaningful change; the literature is an example of the power of scholarship and the application of activism within the educational setting.

Ethical Considerations

As the mother of four children, I have not included their names or the names of their teachers, schools, or the actual year of the event to protect their identity, as well as other people in the narrative.

Limitations

This research does not include mothers of other races or White mothers with Black children. This research does not include a global lens of women who identify as Black from the African diaspora. This research is a cumulation of experiences of a Black mothers' experience which provides a lens and context, and which also captures the research, with an understanding that Black women are not a monolithic group of individuals. It is research conducted within the middle-class and does not include Black

mothers and their reality within class and socioeconomic status. This research does not include Black women that may identify as more than one race or Black mothers that may have children that identify as more than one race.

This research does not capture the lived experience of Black mothers as Black students, or their identity as a learner or student. This research does not include Black fathers or parents as a whole unit, it is limited to the experience of the mother. This research does not include other institutions like healthcare, the criminal justice system or the corporate on no profit sectors. This research does not include moments of poverty or a shift in marital status. Further research and inquiry of Black mothers, parents, and children with a lens of humanity is important and necessary.

Chapter Four: Black Middle-Class Motherhood

Naming Black Children

Black names, particularly in the 1960s and 70s, contextualize racism's impact on motherhood (Fryer & Levitt, 2004). The first job of a mother is to select a name for her child. However, this act that many people take for granted has a unique and deeply rooted significance for Black women. Many Black mothers cannot simply choose their children's names based on whim or preference. These women often agonize over this choice, weighing the unintended consequences of selecting a name perceived as too Black or wondering whether a name that emulates White America may help their child in the future (Fryer & Levitt, 2004).

My mother selected names that sounded like European American names. She was convinced that teachers and employers would judge her and her children, based on their names. She outwardly admitted that having to think about the impact of a name and racism on one of the joyful days of motherhood was unfair, racist, and undermined the agency and rights of Black mothers to name their children anything they wanted. My mother also informed me that people would assume race, class, and gender based upon the name of your child. I believed her.

She was not alone in this feeling. Research has shown that teachers' attitudes toward their students are based on their birth names. Names given at birth exposes the socialized racism, bias, and teachers' attitudes toward children (Stewart & Segalowitz, 1991). Stewart and Segalowitz (1991) interviewed fifty-three teachers and exposed the teachers' attitude towards students' names and academic performance.

All of my life, my name Amy has been a conversation. Some people ask if White people adopted me. Other people assume my parents are college educated to have given me such a name. Their names are also European American and intentionally given as a strategy to navigate racism in America. This trick or tool to navigate racism in America particularly within the education system in backed with research about teacher bias, the bias is around race and socioeconomic status (McDavid & Harari, 1966). For that reason, I too selected names that are historically European American, with the exception of one child who is named after a famous Black gay poet, my favorite poet. There was a range of emotions as my children were born, anger, sadness, fear, joy, and love all at the same time. We selected names we thought teachers would respect and that may be called for a job interview. It is less about assimilation and more about subversive navigate on to get into spaces that do not welcome Black bodies.

The political nature of Black motherhood is fraught with images and messages of who we are in a political context, constantly being defined by others (Nash, 2018). My mother was a teacher and often talked about the other teachers laughing at Black children and their mothers when they had a well imagined name. She was dedicated to honoring the mothers and children in her classroom and affirming them for their liberatory spirit in naming their children the names they liked and not the ones the majority would accept. With a clear understanding of the risk, importance, and possible consequences, I followed her action and did not consider any other names for my children. The child I named after the poet suggests that I am literate and educated.

The naming of a child is the mothers responsibility. However, the perceptions of the child based upon that name by the teacher may have a lasting effect on a child's access to education (Stewart & Segalowitz, 1991). Teachers were often surprised and delighted that I knew of him and thought to name my child after him. Naming a Black child an important act of motherhood. It positions a mother and her child for judgement from the majority community. This choice and others regardless of the name selected is an act of political activism for the mother and the child (Nash, 2018).

Black motherhood is political (Nash, 2018). The role of a Black mother, even in naming her child may be either an act of resistance or strategy to navigate a racist world. The depth of this decision is significant in communities of color in the United States. Wealthy people can name their children whatever they want: Apple, Seven, North, Storm, etc. Their children may never have to enter the workforce, and their educational experiences will likely be exclusive and private. The name given at birth for White children is noticed, their names are normed as acceptable (Fryer & Levitt, 2004). I received several messages of my role as a mother and what I was going to name my child was discussed while I was a child. Racism, education, sexism, and class have always been a conversation in my life and the preparation for motherhood including the naming of my unborn children.

The Training and Trauma of Middle-Class Motherhood

The Black middle-class is real (Lacy, 2007). Although the images of Black motherhood are often negative images with the element of poverty associated with that Black motherhood (Nash, 2018). That was not my experience; I grew up with and

understanding that I would the fourth generation of educated people in my family. My maternal grandmother's mother was a teacher. Her identity as educated provided me with a legacy of entrance into the insider rules of education. A least one grandparent on each side of my family was college educated and so were their parents. My family also owned property. The ownership of property as status or wealth and intergenerational status and wealth, impacted where my parents attended school and the segregated and then desegregated neighborhood is they grew up in. Property ownership establishes citizenship rights (Delgado, 1995). My parents also owned a home in the suburbs in the 1960s. My mother was a homemaker for much of my childhood, she was also the room parent until the last time went to middle school, she was PTO president, the Girl Scout troop leader, and an amazing woman. I can remember my mother advocating for me and my siblings.

The navigation of Black motherhood in the dual identity is political and requires that Black mothers not only act as advocates but as activists (Collins, 1993; Crenshaw, 1991; Roberts, 1997). It is also important that I too was raised by an educator; everything about her was a teacher. We went on trips or outings in town, and she often referred to them as field trips and adventures. These trips were often teachable moments in navigating both worlds (Martin, 2010). When she wanted us to activism in Black motherhood requires a certain amount of acting ability in order not to raise children that are fearful of the outside world and to lower the buffers that shield racism (Martin, 2010). If she wanted us to learn new things her voice would raise with excitement, and we would get excited too. She prepared us for standardize test taking, as if it were our birthday or celebration.

Our mornings would start out with a great breakfast, bacon, eggs, pancakes, and fruit and then a great dinner to celebrate our success on the test. She framed test taking as a way to show the world how "brilliant" we are, and she did this every year. All of this done to assist us in navigating tools that mean something to the external world but have no or little value in defining who we are as Black people (Martin, 2010).

Her engagement and arrangement of self, status, and presence were understood from the failed attempts to see Black children as brilliant at school (Walker, 2015). She sat in classrooms to pick out teachers for the next room, explaining that she wanted a teacher that respected and knew how to instruct her child. She established relationships with teachers prior to us attending their classroom and stayed connected throughout the year. These were acts of activism, acts of resistance to a system of inequity and a utilization of her Black body as political (Roberts, 1997). It was an attempt to be seen and her children seen and not disregarded. However, it did not always work. When I was in third grade, I had a teacher that did not like math, so we did not learn any math in third grade. My mother did not pick her, for some reason I was placed in her class anyway. In fourth grade I was placed on the side of the room for slow kids, my self-esteem tanked. I was depressed and defeated.

My mother's navigation and my own navigation within the system of education is with an understanding that racism exists within the education system (Ladson-Billings, 1998). It is with that understanding, experiences like the one shared above that demands that Black mothers know how to navigate the system. My mother's insider view and intersectional identity modeled for me how to use knowledge, clarity that racism exists

and activism within the education system. The radical and activist imagination and determination required to navigate the systems of oppression are encouraged by Black feminist thought and practice (Collins, 1993; Crenshaw, 1991; Roberts, 1997).

That summer my mother allowed us to go to summer school. It was available in the suburban schools; it was free, and my mother could pick us up at the awkward mid-day dismissal. This summer her strategy was to allow us to take one serious class and one fun class. She understood without an intervention, several interventions my reputation at the school as a valued Black student, a smart girl would be jeopardized. This was a strategic move to gain back my confidence, and also secure a place at the school. Black motherhood is political, this was a political move (Love, 2019). She understood the importance of literacy.

Literacy was strongly encouraged in my house and an act of liberation (Perry et al., 2003). I took and acting class and a reading class, I was not a good reader and I wanted to be. As another act of advocacy, and activism; my mother met the summer-school teacher and explained that I was working on my reading, and it would be great if she would allow me to read any book in the room. The teacher agreed to let me pick any book I wanted. I have fond memories of being read to by my mother and of her coloring in all the faces to be Brown like mine in all of my children's books. To be clear, my mother was an early childhood educator. Her clarity and understanding around literacy were wholistic, talking, recognizing the McDonalds emblem all count as access and moments of literacy. This falls in the face of added information and knowledge of how this is spoken about in racial and classist ways. Much of the conversation around literacy

comes from the negative images of Black motherhood during *The Moynihan Report* of 1965 (Compton-Lilly et al., 2019).

The navigation for literacy in schools for Black mothers is heightened and reviewed through literacy. However, I do not remember a specific book, but I remember sitting in her lap and smelling her perfume, Cierra, while she read to me. When I read now, I only feel joy. That summer I picked the book all the smart kids were reading. It took me all day, night, and weekend to read the book bur I finished it. I felt such a sense of accomplishment after reading the book. I started and finished a book, and my self-esteem was restored. My mother bragged about me reading the hard book and I felt loved. I knew she spoke to the teacher, and I was glad. She cheered for her children in private and aloud all the time. She was fun, and funny and a wonderful actor and singer. She was good at school and even better at navigating the system for her children. I learned teacher lingo from her when I became a mother; literacy was a language.

In the United States, literacy tests have been used and utilized as a form or oppression, to keep people away from gaining access to resources including but not limited education (Compton-Lilly et al., 2019). She was my coach through motherhood and womanhood. My access to education as a mother came from her insider track, which cannot be ignored. In some ways, her insider information allowed me to advocate for my children without apology. I understood at an early age that having an education and getting married were my number one and number two priority, in that order.

I was encouraged to attend college to meet my husband. It was engrained in me, that college was to obtain an MRS. degree; four years to sell myself as good wife

material. Marital status and the acquisition of that status are closely tied to middle-class identity (Martin, 2010). I was raised in a family of gender hierarchy and a clear understanding that my role in life was to be of service to other people, be involved in charitable causes and raise more college bound children. The patriarchy of Black middle-class families often follows the same lines and rules to White middle-class families (Martin, 2010). I was trained in cooking, keeping a clean house, throwing a great party, and holding my virginity for my husband. The patriarchy of virginity and rules of sexuality are socialized in girls at an early age (Roberts, 1997). Sexuality as defined as valuable and as a tool or instrument to bargain with were messages given in multiple institutions including church and school and mothers as holders of life without the right to define themselves or their children (Roberts, 1997).

Roberts (1997) contended that it is sexism and racism that subjugate Black womanhood and motherhood to lower standards of humanity. The idea that our bodies are not our own and our value it determined by others is White supremacy and patriarchy at the intersection of our Black and female identity (Collins, 1993; Crenshaw, 1991). To support these messages, I was given analogies of no one wants to buy the sample shoe at the department store that has been tried on by countless people. Or my vagina was like a special present, which could be unwrapped and wrapped back but only once or twice without people noticing the wrinkled paper and not wanting the gift at all. I received messages that my value and worth were tied to my Black womanhood intersectional identity. Being a mother was always considered a possible and future identity (Roberts, 1997). The training for all of these identities relied on the navigation of identity and

Black and White spaces (Lacy, 2007). The rearing of my childhood and the childhood of my children was dependent on the ability to "arrange" life in a way that affirms Blackness and navigates Whiteness (Lacy, 2007).

I was raised in an organization that supports middle-class Black families, Jack and Jill Incorporated. I loved being a child in this club. Jack in Jill was founded in 1938 as a social and cultural club for Black women and their children (Barnes, 1979). This Black mother's club was established 75 years ago and there is a chapter in my city where I was raised. This organization has been criticized and critiqued by members of the Black community as elitists and bourgeois (Graham, 1999). There are a national organization and membership is by invitation. My mother helped start a chapter when we live in New Jersey. She transferred her membership when we returned to St. Louis.

The desire for Jack and Jill members and their children was and is currently to assist their children in understanding their roles and responsibilities as members of the Black middle-class (Barnes, 1979). This includes philanthropy, charitable giving, being proud of their racial identity and participating in teen conferences, and Black cotillions (Graham, 1999). This intersectional identity of Black and middle-class is often determined by the parents' educational attainment. There is not a formal criterion to become a member, however, since the invitation to become a member is by invitation only, the invitations are limited often to people like the members (Graham, 1999). My parents owned a home in the suburbs and rented it while we lived in New Jersey for a few years. They owned a home in New Jersey too, while my father worked in New York. I grew up in both places in an all-White community; my sibling was the only Black child at

school. The need and desire to navigate both spaces exist for many Black children (Lacy, 2007; Martin, 2010). There is a dual identity of being Black and holding on to Black identity while navigating White spaces, which may be unfamiliar to other Black people (Lacy, 2007; Martin, 2010).

For me, Jack and Jill events were the only times I got to see children that looked like me and had similar experiences. Initially, the organization was founded under the premise of segregated spaces and Jim Crow policies (Barnes, 1979). The need to create a space for Black middle-class children who could afford the cultural events of White people but were not allowed in White spaces (Barnes, 1979). Growing up in majority White spaces with a name like Amy meant that often I was teased by other Black children at school.

Being mocked and ridiculed in Black space, with questions to test Blackness was part of the experience for many Black people that also identify as middle-class (Lacy, 2007). For example, I was asked questions like “is Amy your real name,” “Are you adopted,” “Why do you talk like you are on TV”? I did not understand that I sounded differently. However, when I went to Jack and Jill meetings, all the kids sounded like me and no one ever made fun of me or others for our speech patterns. We also were able to participate in magnificent events like the opera, plays, ice skating and traveling together for teen regionals. I learned how to ski with my Jack and Jill’s friends. I received a lot of messages about motherhood, class, and Blackness from this group. The goal of Jack and Jill was both to affirm children of their identity and inform them of their responsibility

(Barnes, 1979). Most of the mothers were teachers, they were educated women married to educated men, education and Blackness were normalized for me.

The blend of education and marriage secured the middle-class status (Martin, 2010). Some of the affirmations, came through events hosted like a Black trivia night with fun facts about other successful Black people, this was a cultural and social event. We hosted Christmas Vespers were all the families would come together for a meal and each age group of children would present or perform something for the parents. Black children reading poetry, dancing to ballet, playing classical music was a norm in my childhood. I never questioned to occupation of the parents, I assumed that their large homes sometimes with a pool, fancy cars and lavish vacations were a sign of success.

Many of the members of Black social organizations were perceived as leaders in the Black community (Graham, 1999). Since my grandmother, the politician, and my father the businessperson were in the Black newspapers and sometimes *Ebony* or *Essence* that Black success is emanate and that I too one day would be in the Black newspaper. Being Black and famous within the local community was all I could see. I did not just see my family I saw the parents of my friends in the paper. My parents would point out who was there and why they were getting an award or being featured.

The membership of Jack and Jill normalized the experiences for Black middle-class children (Barnes, 1979). In many ways they were unfamiliar with the separation from other Black people because of their class status (Barnes, 1979). As innocent as this act of separation may appear, Lacy (2007), argued that the strategic assimilation practices

require some intentional buffering or separation between the Black middle-class and the lower-class.

The rules and rituals would also need to be clear and clarified often. Because I knew my job was to get a husband one day at 12, I promised myself to a 13-year-old Jack and Jill boy. We were excited about our future, too young to date and we both understood that college would come first for both of us. We were willing to wait for it all. I was not planning my career at 12, my indoctrination stated college then marriage, I was lining everything up for the future.

The socialization of the Black middle-class starts early and the criteria for a mate are outlined almost at birth (Graham, 1999). There are clear instructions not to mix classes and for many not to date too dark (Graham, 1999). My aspirations or having a career was hardly mentioned and not focused on much at all. I understood that if I followed the script, I would have a successful life. He was second generation educated and his family was extremely successful and respected in the Black community. It was not until high school that I was informed it Jack and Jill was an elite group. I was like a fish in water, I did not know that everyone was not in the group or that others wanted to be in the group, but they were not invited. The signals of acceptability for a husband by class were defined (Lacy, 2007).

One of my teachers found out I was in Jack in Jill and the church I attended and called me a “dark blue blood.” I had no idea what a blue blood was and went home and asked my parents. They informed me that a blue blood is a Black person so light in hue that you can see their veins. The Black middle-class were often Black people that were

light enough to gain some White acceptance and access to a respectable job (Graham, 1999). They were also deemed as the most beautiful, closely resembling White people with a tan skin, which gained them favor in the Black community too (Graham, 1999). Status was important to navigate the education system.

Status by socioeconomic, education, or inherited class was the goal. This categorization was not by race, all the people are Black, this is a classification within a racial classification, like any other group. The goal here was to marry the lightest or wealthiest Black person (Graham, 1999) Both churches I attended, one Catholic and the other Baptist were considered blue blood churches. My family was not rich, my parents like all parents struggled with money, substance abuse and marital problems. However, eventually I started to hide the fact I was in Jack in Jill and eventually stopped attending the meetings and activities. It did not change my status, but I understood that class is something to hide.

From my childhood I received messages that the Jack and Jill, college bound and educated boys and men were the only ones to entertain, consider or date. The underlying goal of private Black organizations is to maintain social status (Graham, 1999). I am the darker of two girls born to my family and to navigate around my brown skin. My extended family would often inform me and tell me that I would have to be smart in case I was not selected to be a wife. My brown skin might actually mean that I would have to work to take care of myself monetarily and have a job, career, or roommate.

The impact of internalized racism is real for Black Americans (Martin, 2010; Wilkerson, 2020). That impact is in the delineation of people by hue, with the lightest

near White being the most valuable (Wilkerson, 2020). This is part of the caste system in America. The system rewards privileges and access to resources to individuals that are White or close to White (Wilkerson, 2020). Furthermore, if, not when a man expressed his interest in me, I should be grateful and thankful that he could see past my hue and like me for my personality, education, and family status.

On top of being smart, I was trained to be talented. I was classically trained in voice and by the time I finished high school I could play four musical instruments, was the lead in my high school musical and graduated with honors. I was selected to participate in the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Cotillion as all of my Jack and Jill Friend saw this as normal and a rite of passage. The signals of class and worthiness to some extent depend on the organizations Black people belong to, Jack and Jill or the sororities and fraternities; all of these are signals of Black middle-class status (Graham, 1999). Participating in these organizations would affirm that I was marriage material and worthy of a Black middle-class man. Now with all of the training and preparing I was ready to attend college to find my husband. All of this training and preparing was to compete academically, marry well and produce more children. The ability to show and navigate both spaces is necessary for survival and success (Lacy, 2007; Martin, 2010).

Training for Black Middle-class

My intersectional identity of Black and female made going away to college a conversation (Collins, 1993; Crenshaw, 1991). I graduated from high school 11th in my class of over 600 students. I received several academic scholarships and was accepted the Hampton University. Although, I was recruited by Vassar, Earlham and Spelman,

Hampton was my one and only choice. My childhood Jack and Jill sweetheart attended Hampton a year before I was to arrive. We promised to marry each other when I was 12 and he was 13. I was lined up for marriage by middle school. We agreed until we were ready to marry, we would see other people and maintain our platonic relationship. We both understood my value as a virgin and respected the waiting period. Marriage as an identity was important in maintaining my middle-class status (Johnson & Loscocco, 2015).

Like at many historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), housing was hard to get. I did not get housing. My parents would not send their 17-year-old daughter that far away without housing. I had no other choice but to attend a state school in another city. It was a predominantly White school; they were happy to have me, and they had plenty of housing. I was not as excited to go there as I was to Hampton, but I was excited to go away for college and happy that my grades, and talent had afforded me a scholarship to college. I must admit I was excited and then disappointed I would not get to go to college with my promised husband. Social status and the belonging to the Black middle-class community, meant securing an education and marrying the right person (Graham, 1999).

That summer was filled with disappointment. My high school boyfriend decided that since I was going away to school, we should break up. I was devasted. I decided to go on a date with a young man that had been asking me for a date for almost 2 years. I was wearing a white linen shirt with a peter pan collar piped in light green trim. With a long light blue shirt, ballet slipper shoes and a bright pink taffeta sash wrapped around

my skirt with the bow in the back. He took me to lunch and then to my favorite place to visit the St. Louis Art Museum. After the date, he asked if I would meet his mother.

I was used to meeting mothers, I was raised to be a nice girl, it did not feel unusual it felt respectable even though this was our first date. He was a year older than me. Patterns of Black middle-class etiquette included introduction to possible marriage candidates (Graham, 1999). I walked into a dark apartment, through a room and then into a bedroom. He shut the door to the room and said he was going to get his mother. He came back and slapped me and knocked me to the floor. I was hurt, startled, and freaking out. I tried to talk to him, reason with him and then scream. He slapped me again. I started crying as my face was throbbing. I cried all the way through the rape. He took me home and told me he would call me later.

Everyone in America is socialized around sexuality and Black female sexuality specifically (Roberts, 1997). The images of Black women as highly sexual being or not sexual beings at all imprints ideologies in the minds of men about what they are entitled too (Roberts, 1997). He was outraged I did not want to have sex with him. He ignored by words and advanced on my body as if it was his right. Black women's bodies and agency to their body is often articulated as accessible (Roberts, 1997). The identity of Black and female, placed my intersectional identity in his hands (Collins, 1993; Crenshaw, 1991). I doubt that he believed he could get away with it if I had been White. I immediately took a shower and cried. I confided in a close family member and told her what happened. She advised me that it was too late to call the police. I had already made the mistake of taking a shower that the police would be mean to me, and my parents would be upset. Upset is

the word to explain, my mother would just ignore it and ask me to move on, as she did with my sister and my father might actually kill him for raping me. I listened to her, I trusted her wisdom and advice and surprisingly to me had a lot of information about this topic, she was a survivor too.

Weeks later after I left for college hoping to put all of this behind me, I found out I was pregnant. At 17 I was with child. I knew this could not happen, my family had hinted in the past that when this happens to Black middle-class women, even before legal abortion, we have access to abortions. Long before abortions were legal the elite Black people had access to abortions (Graham, 1999). I traveled to place to get the procedure done. I have no regret, not just because this was a pregnancy because of rape, if it had happened with a boyfriend, I would have made the same choice, shaming my family at 17 was not an option. The rules around status were taught and defined (Lacy, 2007; Martin, 2010).

I had been told in high school I would be sent away, if I chose to have a baby young but would return without a baby, having children out of wedlock was not an option. The messages around fit mothers and poor mothers were highlighted repeatedly in mainstream media, as if it were real and true (Roberts, 1997). Black middle-class motherhood had rules and processes. This was not part of the plan and far away from the goal to get educated and then married. None the less, I secretly knew, felt spoiled, and ruined. Messages Black women get around sexuality and reproductive rights are messages of shame (Roberts, 1997). Moreover, this was not the first time I felt shame. This mimicked the shame Black women carry (Harris-Perry, 2013). This was added to

the fragile reality that someone like me, a brown skin, awkward young woman was already at the bottom of the desired list for wife and mother. Now I held the secret that I was not pure either.

I have never regretted my choice. I also understood that this is proof that all Black women that seek an abortion are not poor (Roberts, 1997). That in fact, we are good and sometimes we are survivors of violence. My mother use to say, "nice girls get pregnant." That quote and words of resistance from my mother some days helped me remember, I am still a *nice girl*. Unfortunately, now in my state women will not have this choice. They will have to travel to another state, hopefully within time to regain their lives and plan for their family if they want to have children. This was not the first secret I would have to keep. I was used to keeping secrets to maintain the appearance of being a Huxtable. I loved watching the Huxtables, they too were middle-class, she was light like my mother, and he was dark like my father. Black middle-class images showed up in media in shows like the Cosby Show (Lacy, 2007). Their lives were not so dissimilar to mine, they were familiar. Except in my life there were secrets we had to keep in order to maintain a reputation of respectability. This incident was outside of respectability and would remain a secret for most of my life.

Moving Past the Scarlet A

Shame is different for Black women, it is not an event that happens and then is forgiven; it is layered, shame on top of shame (Harris-Perry, 2013). This secret and shame were added to all of my other family secrets of alcoholism, incest, and temporary financial strain. Like Harris- Perry explains, the layering of shame is why it is so hard for

Black women to get free of shame. It is the intersectional identity and not comparing to the standards of White women and the layer of sexism within the same body (Collins, 1993; Crenshaw, 1991). This shame of being raped is layered on top of my desire to be a wife and mother. None the less, I got some therapy in college, for my rape.

I had experienced therapy throughout my life. As a middle-class child therapy was just another tool to be used and utilized like borrowing money from a bank; not something you brag about but a necessity of life. I wanted a chance to start over, I transferred schools my sophomore year, hoping that changing states and schools would allow me to lie better and start over. It worked, I was back to being unknown, middle-class, and worthy of being considered as wife and mother material. I was also suffering from depression, low self-esteem and worth. It colored my choices of men to date.

My sophomore year, I met a man to marry. His family was working class and I decided love was more important. The rule to maintaining middle-class status is to marry someone that also has middle-class status (Lacy, 2007). However, he did have some of the criteria for maintaining class status; he too came from a two-parent household and a nice family (Johnson & Loscocco, 2015). It is college, by my junior year he decided I was too serious about marriage, and we broke up, he broke up with me. He was not raised in a Jack and Jill culture, his norms for life and expectations for marriage were much further delayed than mine. Middle-class norms were well defined, and marriage was one of the expectations (Lacy, 2007; Martin, 2010).

Now at 19 and a junior in college with time slipping away I met my first husband. He was 25 I was 19. I rationalized that he was a real adult and more ready for marriage,

the age gap was similar to my parents. He fit the standards and background of a middle-class man (Graham, 1999). He attended a boarding school for middle and high school, and he too was from several generations of educated people. He fit the goal for marriage. Following the formula for Black middle-class status he was on point for strong consideration and marriage (Lacy, 2007; Martin, 2010). Unfortunately, his childhood was complicated by mental illness of a parent. His fear of loss was evident in our relationship. He decided to get me pregnant. Again, the messages received by most are the access to women and our bodies (Roberts, 1997).

I challenge the notion that he would have tricked and intentionally impregnated a poor Black woman or a White woman. He felt the trauma of the abortion would bring us together and make me more dependent on him. My goals and dreams and aspirations were ignored, his need to control my actions and my body were more important. Of course, he did not know I had already experienced this. He still does not know. Now pregnant at 20 years of age. I hid it from my family until I could not. My close family member was prepared to take me in if my parents disowned me. This was far from the direction, understanding and training as a Black middle-class child (Lacy, 2007). We told my parents.

My father cried for days. He later explained that he was not crying because of shame, he was clear that I did not want this, and his grief was for my hopes and dreams. He stated he would support me 100% and that he loved me. I was looking at being a single mom. I was facing all of the rhetoric I had heard growing up and in the Moynihan report, images of Black motherhood (Compton-Lilly et al., 2019). My mother forced me

to lie and say I was married before people would find out I was pregnant. My father and I flew down to talk to my then boyfriend. I am not sure what he said but I came back engaged. I cried. I did not want to marry this man. My parents informed me that this was not an option and that if it did not work out, they would pay for my divorce.

Marriage is part of the goal, and it was required to maintain respectability in Black space, extremely important (Lacy, 2007). Here I was, a Black middle-class woman guilted by the shame I would cast on my family, first forced to lie then to marry. We went to another state so our friends and family would not see it in the paper. I cried in front of the judge; he stopped it three times to ask me if, I was sure. Who marries a woman that is crying the entire time? I was now married and soon would be mother.

The goal from here was to survive, fake happiness and prepare for motherhood. These actions are part of the Black assimilation (Martin, 2010). This was an act to be respected and respectable in both communities. I found out I was not pregnant with one child but twins. Twins dashed my hopes of returning to my HBCU and finishing my last year. I had to create a new plan for education. My twins were born at 28 weeks, 2.8lbs and 2.15lbs. They were so tiny. The nursing staff was so mean tome. They assumed I was a high school student, I looked so young for my age. I was everything embarrassing, on welfare, a mother of two in an abusive marriage, uneducated and without any skills to take to work. I remember saying to myself, I will never be here again.

The twins gained weight and were allowed to come home at 4lbs. On the day we were to pick up the children my husband left me. My parents were out of town, I went to the hospital by myself and picked up my children, I was alone with them for 6 days. I

figured out I n the 6 days I could do this as a single parent with the support of my parents. I was frightened and liberated at the same time. I also realize I just lowered my status. I was a middle-class Black mother on welfare, single, uneducated, and unskilled. I had become the Black mother, referred to in the media; except, I was in the suburbs, I had support and I knew all of this would be temporary.

The Neighbors

I was born in a "Lucky Zip Code." The family that lived across the street from my parents were White, most of the people on the block were White and it had been that way my entire life. They had two kids and were new to the neighborhood. They arrived with a sense of belonging immediately (DiAngelo, 2016). They even questioned if we belonged on the block and asked other neighbors how long we had lived there and how we could afford the neighborhood. The surveillance of our house and our bodies began (Browne, 2015). They are a shining example of "interest convergence," they in theory do not have a problem with equality unless they fear it may have an effect on them or their lives (Bell, 1980). They purchased a home across the street from my parents. However, when they heard I was coming back from college and then saw that I was expecting a child they looked at me with disgust. The bias and racialized lens of Black women in America was visible on their faces, their looks and refusal to smile, may have been influenced by their racialized socialization of White identity (Harris, 1993).

My parents were used to being snubbed by their neighbors, they were the second Black family on the block and bought their house with a White man that fronted as my father to get them to sell the house to them, this was in 1968. There is a teetering between

living in White space and belonging to Black space for middle-class Black families (Lacy, 2007). My parents bought the house without seeing the inside. They drove by and looked at it and they were excited. However, this was the fifth house that my father qualified for but had not gotten in majority White neighborhoods. A White activist offered to pretend to be his "broker."

The real estate company was impressed that my parents had someone securing a home and assumed because of his name, title in corporate America that they were White. He agreed to show the broker the house and then arranged for the closing after all the paperwork was approved by the bank. At the closing my parents appeared and signed for the house. The real estate agent was upset, he was not the only one the neighbors were visibly upset and no one except the other Black family came to welcome them. My parents worked hard to obtain their property, even with racist realtors. However, this White family, these neighbors were new, the original owner died, and a new family moved into the home. They had no reason to worry about the property across the street, my house. Their racial attitude and sense of entitlement, as property managers, a role White people often give themselves was in full force (DiAngelo, 2016).

Soon after I returned, my husband came to live with me at my parents' house. The new neighbors petitioned to get me thrown out of the house. Their racist behavior was in line with their idea of who belonged in this White space and who did not. This pattern of managing Black bodies was part of their social conditioning and an act we often see with teachers in classrooms (DiAngelo, 2016). She had found a housing code that states that only one family can occupy a home at a time. Per the code, my mother and father are

considered a family and me and my husband and children were also considered to be a family. This was not about my wellbeing this was about their Whiteness and their perception of their surveillance of Black bodies (Browne, 2015).

To be transparent, my parents lived in a two-story brick four-bedroom home; with a rear addition, it was beautiful. There was more than enough space for me, my husband, and my children. We had an eat in kitchen and formal living room, dining room and family room. We were not overcrowded and moreover, why did the neighbor care? Why was she so preoccupied with our situation. As a White woman and mother as her identity, there was no acknowledgement of our sameness in womanhood or motherhood. She could see her Whiteness clearly as an inherited right to citizenship and belonging (DiAngelo, 2016). She surmised that my family did not belong and, on some level, must be breaking the law to be in White space, we were strangers to her (Allen, 2014). My parents hired an attorney.

It took over a year to get a court date. By this time, a number of events occurred. The first significant event is that I became a mother of twins. I was diagnosed with preeclampsia and in the hospital for 2 months prior to the birth of the children. I was in the intensive care unit for most of the time hooked up to medicine to delay my delivery. Black motherhood is an identity prior to the delivery of a live birth (Roberts, 1997). The intersectional identity of race and gender were noticeable in the healthcare system (Collins, 1993; Crenshaw, 1991). I was a Black woman, and the healthcare system also checks for class markers. Some of the signals were the attire and frequency of my family. My heart stopped at one point, and they had to bring me back to life.

My parents came to visit me every day from work, both were professionally dressed and so did my husband. The politics of respectability were upheld to advocate for equitable treatment (Lacy, 2007). My parents came first and then would leave when my husband arrived, but my husband only stayed for 5 minutes. Although, he did not get back to my parent's house until late in the evening. They assumed he was sitting with me, instead he was bar hopping. I carried a married status and that mattered a lot as part of my middle-class identity (Johnson & Loscocco, 2015). By the time my labor was induced, I was really sick, my blood pressure would not level off and all of my clotting mechanism had failed. I was told I would not receive any medication or cutting during my delivery. I was also given a form to sign in the event that my children could not be delivered vaginally that a cesarean would end my life and I would have to decide now if that were to occur would they like for them to save my life or my lives of my unborn children.

I signed for my children's life to be saved. I am a mother, I will always choose their lives over mine, without hesitation. Infant and maternal mortality were part of womanhood, there is knowledge and close experiences that is possible for Black women regardless of socioeconomic status (Roberts, 1997). My mother did not feel the same way and instructed my doctor to save my life instead.

My children were born weighing a little more than two pounds each. They were so small each one fit in the palm of a hand. They were beautiful. I was given steroids prior to their birth and their lungs were well developed, other than being low birthweight overall, they were healthy just small. I went to nurse them every day and all day in the

neonatal intensive care unit (NICU). I pumped so much breast milk for the feeding when I was not present that the nurses asked if they could use it for the other babies. I told them about my diet, I did not smoke, or drink and I ate healthy and agreed to let them have the additional milk. The markings of my class were evident in my name, my straight hair, my standard American English, and my marital status (Lacy, 2007; Martin, 2010).

The twins progressed nicely and the week that my parents were out of town, I received a phone call that we could pick them up from the hospital. I was excited, they both weighed a little more than four pounds. My husband then asked me to ask the hospital to keep them over the weekend so he could go and party with his college friends. I assured him that we had to pick them up when they call, the hospital is not a hotel. I also, informed him that if he left town that he would not be welcomed back, that our marriage would be over.

This was the first time I would advocate for my children, his leaving was not about me, it was negligent of his responsibility to take care of his first-born children. These were the children he tricked me into having. I was pregnant because of his deception, and now I was married to him to save my family from disgrace. I was following the rules of high society Black people, women that had participated in cotillions and were raised in social groups (Graham, 1999). In my mind, this act of neglect for our children was unforgivable. Afterall my parents were out of town. He left anyway and I went to the hospital by myself to pick up my twins. The nurses looked sad for me, and I cried all the way home. Shame, the shame that was layered thick already and now another layer of shame was added (Harris-Perry, 2013).

I had never been a mother before and now I had two babies to take care of all by myself. All of my friends were back at school. The first day was the hardest. After the second day I realized that I could be a single parent with some support, like housing from my parents. My parents had already agreed to pay for me and him to finish school and they agreed to watch the children while were in class. He told me he would go back, and I would wait until he was done. Well, he was gone, and my parents were supportive.

My parents came back, and I packed all of his things in black trash bags. A week later he retrieved his things. Eventually, he got an apartment and invited me over. I went and he beat me, punched, kicked, and hit me repeatedly. I am sure his neighbors heard me screaming but no one called the police. Our relationship was verbally abusive from day one and I was too ashamed to tell anyone. Shame and Black womanhood, which includes motherhood, another layer was being added (Harris-Perry, 2013). I remember coming home from school and my mother holding my face in her hands and telling me that no one was allowed to steal my spirit, she knew, and I cried. I gathered the children and ran home and told my parents. No police were called my father went and "spoke with him" after work the next day. He never put his hand on me again.

It was official, I was a single mother of two living at my parent's house finishing my college education and the neighbor reported us to the housing authorities. My education and status were on the line, which meant my children and their status was on the line. Class like other identities are inherited (Graham, 1999; Lacy, 2007; Martin, 2010). I was worried about my future and my children's future, straddled between Black

and White spaces and class identity. I was still safe in my parent's home, and only a year away from graduation.

The political identity of Black motherhood means the preparation to lose a child before your own death (Nash, 2018). Although the public morning of Black mothers is prevalent, the fear of the loss of a child is part of the socialization of Black motherhood (Nash, 2018). Both my parents preceded their parents in death. My father's death impacted the housing case from our neighbor. One morning while the children were sleeping, I was talking to my mother while she combed her hair. My father came to the door, and I started to cry immediately. He had a look on his face that brought me to tears. He told my mother; he was sick, and she got dressed. He said he was passed out on the floor in the bathroom and "you will never believe what I saw" she answered back, "don't tell me." She said, "time is not what you think it is, it is much faster" and then asked if I would help him down the stairs. I complied still crying and he looked up and down the street like he was taking pictures in his mind, he rubbed my head and said, "tell your mother I am ready to go." They got in the car, and he whispered "I love you" to me.

My father passed out in the car on the way to the hospital and it was determined that he suffered from a brain aneurysm. He was scheduled for surgery the next morning. He joked and asked for peanuts and jellybeans after the surgery. He never said he would be okay, or I will see you soon. My mother told him this was serious and made him promise that he would do everything he could to come back to her. He promised he would do everything he could. After the surgery, he was never the same. Somethings he remembered but most of the time he was out of it. He had a few lucid days, he was happy

to see my siblings, both lived out of town at the time. He asked my mother if he had been a good husband, and she assured him that he was a great husband. He died 10 days later at the age of 50. Hundreds of people attended his funeral, including most of our neighbors. He was a well loved and respected man, and he was an excellent father.

My mother and I now lived in the house together with the twins. The patterns of White identity do not recognize Blackness—this includes grief (DiAngelo, 2016). The neighbor did not stop the litigation and claims against my family, even after my father's death. However, according to the law, we were no longer two families, me and my children were a family, but my mother was just a person. The law did not apply to us any longer and the case was dropped. I was facing homelessness without an education, job, or income, and there would have been nothing my parents could have done.

I had not given my neighbor any reason to hate me, I was not shocked at her bigotry I was disappointed. We were not bothering a soul, life happens, and single parenting is hard. I had lost my father, the rock of our family. My mother was sick and not able to work. I was now 22, divorcing my husband, caring for two kids and my mother. My identity was attached to housing, access to resources, education, and marriage (Lacy, 2007; Martin, 2010). I did not have the luxury of long mourning or feeling discouraged. I had a lot to take care of privately and publicly. I understood I would be stereotyped and cast as the single Black mother. Black womanhood had already placed me in the lower rung of the caste system (Wilkerson, 2020).

I had to use the strategies around race and class to navigate the world for myself and my children's identities (Lacy, 2007; Nash, 2018). I wore a wedding ban for years

and knew I would have to marry quickly to get rid of the stigma for me and my children. They were young and, I had until they started school to find a new husband. Being divorced was better than never being married, However, I worried about the stigma and ramifications for them if I was still single by the time, they started school. Marital status is part of Black class identity (Johnson & Loscocco, 2015). I was concerned the treatment and surveillance I received from the neighbor would be similar to the treatment I would get from the teachers (Browne, 2015). I made getting married a priority again, along with graduating from college. I finished my degree after switching my major at the last minute and I was remarried by the time the twins turned three, successful in reestablishing my middle-class status and respectable motherhood.

Bribes, Room Parents, and Parent Teacher Conferences

I understand that when I enter the room race enters the classroom with me (Ladson-Billings, 2011). My dueled identity of Black and mother are always present when I enter (Collins, 1993; Crenshaw, 1991). Therefore, entering a room with clarity and an understanding that my identity includes an understanding of cultural capital (Yosso, 2005). One of the benefits of having a Black middle-class mother as a teacher is the insider view and secrets. The first advice I received from my mother was to bribe my teachers. Yes, bribe. She advised me to give my teachers “nice” gifts, gifts you would give a family member you loved and adored. I remember asking her if this worked and really matters. Her response to me was that it did not hurt and only worked to the favor of the mother and the child. This is steeped in an understanding that the teacher may not

understand cultural relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2011) or racial literacy (Horsford, 2014).

I listen and purchase gifts up to $100 for my children's teachers. This exchange is not about my kindness or thoughtfulness, this is an example of Black middle-class people straddling the individualist culture and the collectivist culture (Lacy, 2007). It is necessary to speak their language even if they do not speak mine. I often purchased gifts just under the cutoff line for the school, and gifts they could justify as parent support.

I understood being the child of a teacher that often teachers spent their own money on supplies and extras for the classroom. I sent these items with my children, to reinforce which Black child you should be nice to. Even if it was temporary, it was worth it. The truth is that educational system is not just unfair and unequitable based upon race, other identities like class are affected too (Guinier, Heriot & Moran, 2007). In addition to gifts, gift cards to teacher's stores and items for the classroom I was advised to volunteer.

This practice of parents in the classroom did not exist prior to the 1960s (Compton-Lilly et al., 2019; Hannon, 1995). This proof of good motherhood as a volunteer is a relatively new request and requirement. Based in White middle-class hegemony (DiAngelo, 2016). With an attempt at strategic assimilation (Lacy, 2007) I volunteered for 23 years straight as a room parent for at least one of my children's rooms. I also volunteered for diversity committees, Valentine's Day parties, dances, and fundraiser events. The school would not be able to say I did not care for my child, or I was not an involved parent. I was there at least once a week in some capacity. In all fairness, I am sure I took a hit in my career being this involved at my children's school. I

also understood that my White counterparts did not have to prove they were good parents there was already and assumption they were not simply good but amazing parents even if they were not.

There were no Moynihan reports for my White mothers to navigate around (Compton-Lilly et al., 2019) or Black stereotypes of women (Harris-Perry, 2013). I understood that as a Black mother, the assumption was that I was not a good parent and my goal each year was to disprove that assumption. I also understood that the role of teaching racial literacy fell on me as a parent (Horsford, 2014). To be racially literate means that teachers are aware that race is constantly a factor within the system of education (Horsford, 2014). As a mother, I am aware and often navigated assignments and teachers with that understanding. In reality my class privileges, afforded me the advantage of offering nice gifts, time, access to resources from work and benefits for teachers and students. The intersectionality of class and race matter in the educational system (Guinier, Heriot & Moran, 2007Guinier, Heriot & Moran, 2007). Children whose parents have monetary resources have access to some of the best learning institutions in the country. Since I do not belong to the wealthy or owning class, I would need to strategically utilize my monetary and time resources to position my Black children as worthy, invested and members of the learning community.

Racial literacy encourages us to see the intersections of identity, while not losing site of race in a power dynamic within the system of education (Horsford, 2014). Time is just as significant and powerful as money. My corporate America job afforded me paid time off to volunteer at my child's school. A benefit hourly employee's rarely if ever got

to access. Room parent gave me accessibility to the school, teacher, and my child throughout the entire school year. Being present in my child's classroom allowed to fill in culturally relevant pedagogy while visiting or at home with my child (Ladson-Billings, 2011).

As a Black mother activist, I was aware of the impact or race and the acts of surveillance of my child and of the Black children in the classroom (Browne, 2015). To negate the feeling of surveillance I had to be present and offer a counternarrative (Bell, 1995; Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998). Often this meant the coordination of a party with students, gifts to teachers and most importantly a physical acknowledgement that I was a good Black mother. I was "involved" in the school and my child's education. I was privy to the school gossip, critique of students, parents, and teachers. I had an insider's view of the politics of the school and sometimes the plans for the next year. I was available for field trips and teacher appreciation days, I have no doubt that my children benefitted from my time in the classroom, utilizing none of my professional or work-related skills. This time was leverage for citizenship in the classroom for my children. I spent over twenty years as a school volunteer. Showing up is a privilege of class within schools. All of this time spent in the school is an act of activism and an afront to the idea and notion that Black parents do not care. Of course, we care about our children.

The language of parental involvement placed upon the shoulders of Black parents as is racialized language hurled at Black parents (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003). This framing of Black parents is not actually true (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003). Black parents show up for their children's activities at school and that is considered involvement at

school. Often the measurement and the bar for parental involvement is not actually about Black parents showing up, it is about what they show up for (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003). Teachers are judging parents on conferences and open house events. This is marked in the racial identity of middle-class Whiteness (DiAngelo, 2016).

Showing up for parent teacher conferences is another strategy to place labels, blame and proof of the bad Black mother myth. I understood quickly that participating in PTO, coming to the school's open house or meet the teacher night were important but not as important as coming to Parent Teacher Conferences. This creation of rules, without communication and unrealistic expectations is what I call the hazing of parents. The communication between the parent and teacher is what leads to successful education outcomes (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003). Black parents do support and historically have always supported their children's education (Allen & White-Smith, 2017). As a Black middle-class parent, teachers' perceptions of missing parents were often shared with the parents present. The comments made by the quiet and almost empty parent teacher conference rooms that I attended included teachers' words that were celebratory of parents that made the event and sharp critiques of parents that did not make the event. I was shocked and horrified at the idea that all of my efforts as a parent could be lost by missing this meeting in the middle of the day or after a long day of work.

Without cultural literacy and reform, teachers do not process why they feel betrayed by Black parents (Horsford, 2014). Throughout my parenting I heard teachers talk disparaging about students and their parents that missed the twice a year event. The absence and presence of racial talk prevented mothers and teachers from finding solutions

to the problem (Horsford, 2014). The problem was not the absence of parents at mid-day, during the workday meeting. The problem was that teachers had a preconceived notion of about Black children and their mothers (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003). The stereotypes of Black women and mothers was on a recorded loop (Harris-Perry, 2013). So much so that I was sure to never miss a day or evening appointment. I was a single mother of four and the perception of attending this event was so significant I would arrange time with my husband and eventually ex-husband to make sure he too could make the meeting.

I did not want the teachers to think my children did not have two parents. Two parents' identity is part of Black middle-class status (Lacy, 2007). I heard them talk about single mothers and even after my separation and divorce I made sure we presented as a united front for the safety of our children. My gender, class and work status alone would not impress the teachers enough (Horsford, 2014). I clearly understood, even though he had abandoned his responsibilities and returned to life of bachelorhood his gender and appearance would solidify our children's access to the education and resources the school has to offer. No, he did not have to be a room parent, go on a field trip or bride a teacher, his maleness was worth all of time, money, energy, and resources I was putting forward.

It is hurtful to see how much weight his mere appearance meant to the school, usually a female teacher. It further reinforced the U.S. caste system within education (Steele, 1997). All the while I was jumping through hoops and working to prove my children deserve a quality education. It was not just hurtful it was disrespectful.

Getting Through the Disrespect

My generation was following *The Moynihan Report*, which had depicted all Black mothers as welfare queens (Compton-Lilly et al., 2019; Harris-Perry, 2013). Navigating education as a Black mother, was fraught with stereotypes of Black women, specifically mothers (Harris-Perry, 2013). Although I was reestablished as a married woman, I was also a divorcee and had been on welfare. I understood the twins last names no longer matched my new name. I would have to keep explaining to teachers and parents that I was divorced and remarried. My class identity was questioned because of my marital status, my race, and my gender (Collins, 1993; Crenshaw, 1991; Lacy, 2007). It was important to keep my new marital information front and center to explain the blemish of divorce.

Few teachers understood racial literacy (Horsford, 2014). The context of race and shift from the 1960s of marriage in the Black community (Johnson & Loscocco, 2015) was evident in my marriage and impacted my family. The attempt to strategically assimilate with White middle-class status led to swift choices in relationships (Lacy, 2007; Martin, 2010). I understood and it was affirmed by the teachers that my class and marital status were important to them and mattered in how they treated my children. Often, as they spoke about single Black mothers, with me or they reminded me and my children that they were lucky to come from a two-parent family. My new husband was in law school when the twins entered school and received praise from the teachers for marrying a woman with twins. His status in the Black community was middle-class too, he was also praised for marrying within the same socioeconomic group.

Education status and family reputation is important in establishing class (Graham, 1999). He was the lauded as a man's man and a hero, and I was the victim, and my children were lucky. Holding on to this status of Black middle-class motherhood was important to the educational system (Lacy, 2007). This framing was the structure of constant and repeated disrespect of Black motherhood. The pattern that controls the narrative and definition of Black womanhood and Motherhood under the racist and patriarchal lens (Roberts, 1997). I should have been considered smart and savvy, not saved and grateful. My identity was connected and defined by Whiteness as the model and center (DiAngelo, 2016; Horsford, 2014). I could afford to leave work and volunteer at my children's school. I understood that parent teacher conference would not go well without my husband's gender by my side.

From my mother I learned to select my children's teacher in advance. The teacher I observed in the previous year appeared to understand racial literacy and may have been moving closer to racial realism (Horsford, 2014). This teacher appeared to understand racism and was working towards understanding racism and utilizing a CRT lens (Guinier, Heriot & Moran, 2007; Horsford, 2014). In third grade the twins had the same teacher at the Midwestern grade school. The teacher noticed that my name was different from the boys and asked if they were born while I was in high school. I was confused. The same stereotypes that existed about me when they entered school. I looked young and fell into the jezebel category of stereotypes (Harris-Perry, 2013).

I did not understand the question or why it was important. Not only was I caught off guard, but I was also confused by the question and context on the question. I

understand that I looked young, however, she then went on to lecture me that my educational attainment would determine the level of education my children would obtain. I was speechless and waiting for my husband to arrive. It was clear that her patterns of White supremacy and were showing (DiAngelo, 2016). The education system is steeped with racism (Guinier, Heriot & Moran, 2007). Both comments with racist and an attack on my Black motherhood. Her need to know and obtain proof of my reproduction and human rights were evident in her questions, I was being interviewed and interrogated (Browne, 2015).

My husband walked into the room, and we sat down in the tiny chairs with the little table in front of us. I did not have time to inform him of the previous conversation, prior to his arrival. She informed us that the boys were making Cs and some Bs. We were shocked, our faces showed the shock. She picked back up on the previous conversation about my identity, now in front of my husband. He was not only confused he was mad. He slid his chair away from the table, I touched his knee to pause him from standing up. I leaned forward and spoke in a whispered voice to the teacher to prevent me from yelling or crying, “we are both colleges educated. We expect these children to go to college.”

The need to assert and prove our middle-class status was required, to gain respect (Martin, 2010). I explained, “The twins will be the fifth generation to attend college and Bs and Cs may be average, but they are not acceptable in our house.” She explained her assumptions about my age and had not heard that we were college educated. The need to understand my education and age of conception is part of the violence that Black mothers experience within schools (Ladson-Billings, 2011).

Racism is part of the fabric of desegregated education and her words, affirmed this reality (Bell, 1999; Guinier, Heriot & Moran, 2007). We were both in suits, in the corporate sector for work. It was apparent that she had created a narrative about me in particular and treated my children, with lowered expectations because of her assumptions about my age and education. The stereotype of Black womanhood impacts the status of their children (Harris-Perry, 2013). It was not just hurtful. It was disrespectful, it was tantamount to her spitting on me when I walked into the room with her look of shame and disgust. It was also proof that my status, class, and marital status was not only important but significant in her treatment of me and like peanut butter spread to my children.

I understood in the moment, I could not risk getting mad or angry, I did not want her to hurt my children more than she had already. I had to choke back my tears, hold my shame, swallow my pride, and speak to her with the respect she denied me at the beginning of the evening. We both went home and cried. My husband turned to me and asked me why I had to explain all of that to her and how many times would we have to say this to teachers? The practice of explaining racism in schools to parents and children is practice that Black women perform, for their children and their co-parent (Guinier, Heriot & Moran, 2007; Horsford, 2014). I informed him that every year we will have to state this to each new teacher. I also realized that I should have stated all of this on the first day of school in a note with a gift. My identity was linked to my children's education. Even though I was remarried, I was scared with a divorce. It was not the first time, and it would not be the last time.

The lack of racial literacy or racial realism as part of the teachers that teach in Black spaces, is a reality that Black mothers have to navigate (Horsford, 2014). One of my children's third grade teachers was a young White woman that recently graduated undergraduate school. The lack of teacher preparation for desegregated spaces is a problem for all children and particularly Black children and their parents (Ladson-Billings, 2011). By this time, I was the mother of four children and separated from my husband. I was called to the school because this child was struggling to turn their homework in, and the teacher was threatening to retain them in the third grade. This child was doing their homework, just not turning it in and extremely talkative during class time.

With the looming perception that Black parents are not involved in their children's education (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003), I understood that we would need to show up as a united front of parents to advocate for our child. I arrived first, wearing a navy-blue suit, black pumps, make-up, pearls, and my hair was recently straightened. I looked as close to Claire Huxtable as possible. My husband came straight from work in a suit, shirt and tie and leather bottom dress shoes. When he walked up, she stood up. She did not stand up when I arrived. I tilted my head in awe.

She approached us and she said "Mr. Hunter, you smell so good." I could not believe it; she was flirting with my husband in front of me. I interrupted her fawning over him with an "Excuse me." She looked over and stated that she thought we were no longer together. I corrected her and stated we are still married and that this was unprofessional to say the least. Marital status affords Black parents' privileges for their children (Lacy,

2007; Martin, 2010). The parent teacher meeting continued, and I could not help noticing that she spoke to us and in her stories about her interactions with our child in Black vernacular. I stopped her to ask, if she really told my child “She was gonna git with him, if he kep it up.” She said “Yeah, that’s what I said.”

I asked her to bring the principal in the room. She lacked any formal training on racial literacy (Horsford, 2014) and lack of cultural relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2011). She had attempted to relate to us in Black vernacular even though relating to our child in the same voice had failed. We were insulted. She called down stair on the room phone and a Black woman, the principal came to the door. Fortunately, I met the principal at open house and in the hallway volunteering, but we really did not have much interaction other than in passing. I made some assumptions with our shared identity as “fictive kin” (Stack, 1997). I hoped she would see me extended family, hear my concerns, and empathize with this moment and my child.

I proceeded to share all the events and moments of the meeting that were upsetting including the inappropriate comments that was made to my husband. I explained further that I was confused on the lack of standard American English that was being used in the classroom in talking to my child. This was not cultural acuity; it was cultural acquisition (DiAngelo, 2016). The teacher explained that she preferred Black men and could not help her speech pattern because she attended a predominately Black high school. I explained to her and the principal that I also attended that high school, and I did not speak like that. She was stunned and upset.

I asked her, why she was talking like that to my child at school. She explained that her goal was to sound like the mothers of the children so they would respect her and listen to her, like the listened to their mothers. This is racism within the school (Guinier, Heriot & Moran, 2007). We as parents did not request or require that our White teachers attempt to sound like Black people. The principal asked us if we could end the meeting so she could have a conversation with the teacher. We left and went to our homes. I understand that code switching is a part of my life. The dual identity of living in two worlds and wearing masks to navigate the White spaces (DuBois, 2008).

I also, understand that as a middle-class Black mother, I can ask to speak to the most senior person in any time of crisis or need, and usually, I am given the highest person in charge. Just asking is a middle-class activity. It is a power move, and I knew it and used my class privilege to navigate this situation at the school. It was apparent, my education, class and attire did not override my Black single-parent status. It provided a window for a woman with nothing significant to offer my husband an opportunity to disrespect me and my child. Her belief that her White, newly educated status would be more than enough for him to respect, admire and adore. She carried all of that with her to disrespect me in front of me, him, and her Black woman boss.; I was hyper visible and invisible at the same time (Browne, 2015).

I wish I could say that the disrespect ended in grade school. By the time the twins entered middle school, they were at the top of their class academically. My role of advocate and activist as a mother was still needed (Walker, 2015). I understood the politics of Black identity within the education system (Love, 2019). I was prepared to

politically advocate for my children. I understood the politics of middle school and placing them on the right "team."

A team is a collection of teachers, English, math, and science teachers make up a team. In my school district there was historically, a team that all of the White children would magically get assigned. I attended all of the White parent meetings, went to the middle school to observe each team and teacher and then sent in a typed letter requestion that my children are placed on the XYZ team, the team the White parents were selecting. My mother is the person that taught me how to do this, as a teacher and a Black middle-class mother, her guidance was invaluable. Black mothers are activist for their children within the education system (Walker, 2015). My mother taught me which rights as a mother I was granted and pushed for me to use my voice and power to advocate for my children.

My children were placed on the team and upon arriving to school each teacher asked to see their schedule. They came home from school asking me if there was a mistake in their schedule because three times, they were sent to the principal's office to double check and make sure that their schedule was correct. They were in tears. The roles of White people on the lives of Black bodies are socialized from an immature age and messages to watch, check, and challenge Black people in White spaces is encouraged and supported (Browne, 2015; DiAngelo, 2016). My children were being surveilled (Browne, 2015).

Teachers did not welcome them; they questioned their existence in rooms reserved for White students. Each child explained that the teachers did not want them in

their class and that the math teacher made them take a test none of the other children took. I assured them there was no mistake and that they deserved and earned the right to be in the classroom. I went to the school the next day and asked to speak to the principal. Much to my surprise she was a Black woman. She explained she had been out during the open house and was sorry she did not get to meet the new families. I prayed our quick connection was a move toward fictive kinship (Stack, 1997). I held back my tears and explained to her what happened. She did not seem surprised. She assured me that she would manage it.

As the semester went on, both children complained that their math teacher was embarrassing them in the class, they were in separate classrooms but having the same experience. I arranged a meeting with the teacher. I went alone. She noticed that my last name was different from my children's and made some assumptions, which she shared immediately. Once again, my identity was transferred to my children (Ladson-Billings, 2011). She informed me that my children would struggle because they did not have a supportive two parent household with the resources necessary to succeed in such a challenging class. Affirmation that middle-class and marital status matters to teachers too (Lacy, 2007).

I was furious. I asked her to explain further. She then stated that she noticed our last names were different and then asked if their dad was in their life. I asked what my last name or their dad's involvement had to do with the mistreatment in her classroom. She stated that it mattered a lot. I got up, went to the principals' office and now in tears explained the blatant racist disrespect I received from the teacher. Black mothers are

constantly navigating racism within education (Guinier 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2011). Moreover, it was not true. They were not being raised by an unwed mother; I had been married twice. They were not being raised in a single mother household, I was a married woman, and their stepfather was in their daily lives and their biological father on the weekends. These were loved and adored children. They are positioned to be our fifth generation of college education and her hateful, racist, and biased behavior was undermining their self-esteem. In just a few weeks she was killing the souls of the Black children that were gifted to her. The principal apologized.

I immediately called the private school in our neighborhood and explained what was happening. They asked if the twins would visit for a day and assured me that we could transfer at the semester break. I sent in the twins, transcripts, everything from the open house on curriculum and arranged a day to visit. I understand that the days off of work to meet with the teacher and principal, along with the understanding that I as a parent have rights to navigate and advocate for my children comes with class privilege, I also understand that I have the financial means to support me leaving my public school district and placing them in a private school is an economic privilege.

I had a network of other Black middle-class families that had successfully navigated the education of their children through Jack and Jill (Barnes, 1979). I also understand that my corporate job, lawyer husband and European names all allowed for a quick and swift transition. My mother's status as teacher gave me the school vernacular and lingo to advocate for my children. My mother's and my own Catholic school education assisted me in understanding where I was sending my children next and what

obstacles we would have to face once we arrived. It was not a better choice of education it was a different choice. Racism within the Catholic church were as real and as present as public school (Nilson, 2010). The pre-Brown v. Board of education desegregation was a wave that Black Catholics were talking and experiencing racism. I informed the principal that we would not be returning to the middle school, she supported our decision to leave. Our children attended the new school and were met with success and obstacles of a different kind.

Losing Their Black Identity

"Assimilation Blues" are the pain point for Black children in White spaces (Tatum, 1997). The transition from home, Black space to school White space is fraught with needed tools to navigate the terrain (Martin, 2010). Our children found success within the oppressive rule bound structure of catholic education, they instead lost their racial identity. They all at one point or another stated that they did not want to be Black. The cost of desegregation is the constant need to define and redefine Blackness (Tatum, 1997). Like all of the other children in their school and within their curriculum and within their neighborhood they could see that everything good came with Whiteness. They could clearly see the benefits of White identity at school and in the world around them (DiAngelo, 2016). Whiteness became not only normalized it became centered as the dominant and preferred identity (DiAngelo, 2016). Whiteness is at the top of the racial caste system in the United States, and that includes within the system of education (Steel, 1997; Wilkerson, 2020).

As a middle-class Black mother this was often spoken about with other mothers. I joined Jack and Jill as a mother when the boys were three. I joined the same chapter in which I was raised. In fact, my mother's friends that continued to have children were still in but on their way back. My children were welcomed in the chapter like family. Jack and Jill also served as a borrowing and supportive escort community (Barnes, 1979). So many of us wanted our children to marry into families like the ones in Jack and Jill. So many of our children attended predominately White schools. We understood that if one of children needed a date or escort to homecoming the mothers would talk and the organize and arrange for that occur. The children were friends and there was a clear understanding that nothing romantic or sexual was appropriate. It was also an attempt to affirm that there are other Black people like you in the world and it is possible to marry within your race. This is part of navigating school and motherhood for Black Children.

One of our children informed us that they no longer wanted to be Black in kindergarten. My husband blamed the school. He pointed to the lack of racial literacy (Horsford, 2014) and culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2011). I understood what was happening and began new rituals. I call it "homeschooling." After the "I want to be White" statement was made, mornings, dinners, and vacations changed. In the morning I played "Say it loud, I'm Black and I'm proud." Initially, they hated it and me. However, in time, they loved it and looked forward to it.

Dinner time was spent with new cards a White friend game me with Black facts and people on the underside. Each night there was a new card placed at the table on the

seat of each family member and we took turns reading our cards aloud and educating each other. I sang to my children, usually a song in Italian, Latin, or German. I studied classical voice in college, and I wanted them to hear other languages sang in their home. I switched my song to the Black National Anthem and gospel songs, and I sang the heck out of the songs. I had already filled the house with Black art and artists and their bookshelves were filled with Black books and writers since birth. All of these tasks were attempts to provide a counternarrative (Bell, 1987).

I understood that what I was doing before was no longer enough armor to win the battle against White supremacy. For the next 10 years all of our summer vacations were trips to historical landmarks and museums. Jack and Jill served as a community to increase positive identity and increase cultural knowledge (Barnes, 1979). We went to Memphis for three summers in a row, then to Selma for the 50th anniversary. We researched famous people and places in the Midwest and on the weekends went to find and experience the Black historic sites, or events and the History Museum.

This is a recall of my mother's mothering and the ability to travel with children in the car and on the plane for education. Most of the exploring was local or near home, withing 5 hours. I was at time traveling with four children. This anti Blackness or internalized racism reoccurred for me and my children. It happens to Black children that are submersed in White identity, and often it is temporary (Tatum, 1997). It is easy to be lulled into the temporary love from White people. This love is often "hidden racism" (Tatum, 1997). All people want to be loved Unfortunately, I knew as a mother it would

only be a matter of time before one of the White children said or did something to my child, crushing their spirit and soul and more importantly breaking their heart.

One of my children while still in grade school had a crush on a White child. When their parents found out the informed me that my child was no longer welcomed in their home. I asked if something happened and they informed me that my child like their child, they were seven. This is an example of the hidden racism of the parents (Tatum, 1997). What did they think would happen at seven.? My child was heartbroken and so was theirs. Later my child asked if it was because they are Black and the other child is White, I said probably. Racial social identity is something all of my children at some point in their lives struggled with, it happens to Black middle-class children (Lacy, 2007).

It is hard when the images of success in the mainstream are White and most of the images they see on TV and in the media of Black people is negative, entertaining, and hopeless. They struggled in school to find their footing, voice, and place. I collaborated with them to define, discover, and establish their right to education and Blackness at the same time. Time after time teachers needed to hear that we were *respectable*. The politics of respectability follow Black women in every institution (Cooper, 2005). Each year I worked to prove my children were worthy of the education they were paid to provide and year after year they questioned their intelligence and worth.

One of the byproducts of middle-class Black people living in Whites spaces is the questioning of identity (Lacy, 2007). There comes a point in their lives where they feel like both worlds are places to visit but not stay (Lacy, 2007). One of the ways to keep them grounded is by forming a community of people that have similar experiences

(Barnes, 1979). The twins attended public high school after attending catholic school for middle school. They had stated that they were afraid of Black people especially the ones that attended the high school. They informed me that they, the Black kids in high school were thugs, criminals, and gang members. I needed to explain that the grade school they attended was in one of the affluent neighborhoods because I used my mother's address when I registered them in school. There was a movement to criminalize mothers that wanted quality education for their children (Roberts, 1997).

The narrative that Black mothers do not care about their children, or the education is a false narrative, they were willing to navigate the system to provide them with access to a good education (Cooper, 2005; Fine, 1993). I lived in the same city, so technically I was not breaking the law; however, I also understood that even within the same district the schools were differently resourced. They attended the same grade school I attended, even though I could not afford to live in the neighborhood. One of the White parents informed me that they too were in another part of the city and that there was a loophole that states, if your childcare is closer to school you could petition to have your child attend the school closer to their grandparents. Here the navigating the rules were ok as part of interest convergence, they too were gaining from the loophole (Bell, 1980). Technically, if you wrote a letter to the superintendent and the principal of your home school they can also approve of the switch. I did both and all four children started at the grade school.

Their grade school was directly across the street from the high school. The front doors were almost facing each other. The catholic school they attended was six houses

away from their grade school. My children left grade school not afraid of Black people but my middle school they were terrified. They were begging me to let them attend Catholic high school and save them from being bullied in the public school. This is the impact of three years with no racial literacy or culturally relevant pedagogy in the classroom (Horsford, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 2011).

My situation had changed. By this time, my husband left me to parent four children by myself. My sweet and supportive mother died at the age of 55 from her fifth heart attack. I was alone, financially devastated and without any support emotionally or financially. I could not afford to send the twins to private school. Moreover, I was upset they were afraid of people that looked like them, and assumed the Black children were in gangs. I went to visit the high school to see if any of this was true, it was not. I was honest with the children and informed that they everyone would have to attend public school. I realized then that my role would shift to one of "mothering" (Nash, 2018). I would act as an advisor to my children and any children within the school that needed reminders of their inherent brilliance and goodness. The twins were heartbroken, scared, and disappointed. I was sorry. I felt like I had failed them, first in picking the wrong husband to marry and parent with, it was the second most important thing I had to do with my life, and I had failed them, shamed my family and financially I was a wreck. This was another layer of shame on top of the shame that already existed (Harris-Perry, 2013).

However, I was still in corporate America and had to look like everything was fine when in reality I was falling apart. Black motherhood as political, and this was a time

to navigate the education system for my children (Nash, 2018). No one had prepared me for this part, I did not have a blueprint for single parenting, and I was the first divorced person in my family. No one could tell me how to do this, I did not have a role model for being the mother and the father, only the mother and wife. I had not ever heard of a man leaving his wife and four children, four children. I could not just remarry; I had four children.

The narratives as Black mothers as deficit and uneducated, and hostile transferred with me as they switched schools (Diamond & Gomez, 2004; Larea & Horvat, 1999). I could no longer rely on my marital status to buffer the intersections of my Black and female identity (Crenshaw, 1989). I did not date for years to protect my children as I doubted that there was a nice man out there that was looking for a woman and four children to add to his responsibility. I knew this part I would have to do alone. I understood the stigma now placed on me from teachers that would question my children and my parenting and my ability to make good choices going forward. The questioning and surveillance would continue at school for me and my children (Browne, 2015).

I fell into a deep depression after my husband left. Maybe because he left three weeks after my mother died. My first attempt to take my life was soon after all of this happened. This is an unusual act for Black middle-class and single mothers (Fernquist, 2004). Usually, Black single mothers have a network of people and faith community that supports them from the isolation and attempts (Durkheim, 1897; Fernquist, 2004; Spates & Slatton, 2017). I planned, writing out all the tasks needed to make my transition smooth and moved forward. I had written a letter to every child for every year of their life

until they were 18 and then on for graduation from college and marriage. Each child had a box of letters. I approached this task like a school assignment.

The last thing on my list was buying their funeral clothing, I thought this might be hard for my family and I did not want to burden them with the intricate details. The ideology of burdening my family and my obligation to them was still present even while planning (Spates & Slatton, 2017). I practiced with the gun my husband left in the closet and decided I would shoot myself in the head in the bathroom. That meant they could rinse the blood down and clean up the mess quickly.

There is so little talk in the Black middle-class community about mental health, failed marriages or children that do not follow the right path. Single motherhood was not familiar to me, as it may be to other women raised by a single mother, therefore the support systems that align with this status also did not align with mine (Fernquist, 2004). Thus, making the title, culture, and coping mechanism foreign to me as a middle-class mother.

So much of my acculturation was within White spaces. Suicide in White spaces was much more familiar (Spates & Slatton, 2017). Unfortunately, the class intersectional identity was a clash from my religious and racial identity. Black women, Black single mothers and Catholic women are all less likely to commit suicide (Durkheim, 1897; Fernquist, 2004; Spates & Slatton, 2017). Unfortunately, in my depressed state my mind had become irrational, and it seemed like the right thing to do to save my family. In my mind I had failed them on so many levels and now I was losing my mind. I felt like I

would relieve them of a mentally ill mother and provide an opportunity for my husband and his family to set a better example.

I spoke to my best friend the day before the final day, and I said something to her that triggered her, and she came over to my house immediately. This moment falls in line with Fernquist' s (2004) finding that Black single mothers create a circle of friends to support them. She called my husband who unbeknownst to me was on his way to visit his girlfriend and new baby. He took me to the emergency room annoyed. The doctor came in and asked me a few questions. He asked him what he did for a living, and they laughed and joked about what a wonderful career he had. The doctor, a man told him I was probably just being emotional and told him to take me home so I could get some rest. The dismissal of my voice and healthcare needs as a Black woman where not new or unfamiliar (Roberts, 1997).

He did not tell the doctor he was leaving me, instead my actions were taken as a Black woman seeking attention. He did not ask for a psychiatric evaluation; he took my husband's version of the incident and directed us to go home. Black women's mental health and physical healthcare needs are often ignored (Roberts, 1997). Even in my attempt to take my life, the value of my life was so little they my needs were ignored. The doctor prescribed me some drugs and home I went. I went home, got my children to school and then went to Home Depot to by a rope. The gun was removed from my home and no longer an option. In my suicide research, guns had the highest success rate; hanging was number two. For me, like my White counterpart's, suicide was an option,

the layered shame of losing my husband and status seemed unbearable (Harris-Perry, 2013).

Part of being middle-class as a child is the access to clubs and sports. I was a girls scout well into high school and used my knowledge of making a knot to make a hang knot. I went to the basement. My husband was in a training that day, right around the corner from our home. He shared with me that he felt a huge urge like a nudge to leave training and check on me. He came home unannounced, and I was already in position in the basement standing on the chair. I jumped off the chair as he caught me in the air. I was admitted to the hospital in the psychiatric wing for fifteen days. There I regained my footing and sense of obligation to my children as many Black women do during depressive times (Spates & Slatton, 2017).

The hospital was a horrible experience for a number of reasons. It was a loss of freedom; I was disappointed I had not been successful for almost a week. I was medicated, initially so I would not harm myself and then later regulated for my mood. I was constantly asked if I thought about my children. It was an odd question, of course I thought about my children, I thought they would be better off. I learned a lot about myself during this year and changed my routine, diet, and life completely. It was not my fault I was mentally ill, my brain just snapped, and my irrational brain took over. I needed help. Help was something I was trained to believe only poor people could ask for. Unlike other Black single mothers, being single was not something I had prepared myself for and I did not have the support group many Black women have established (Fernquist, 2004).

I had been raised to believe that mental health was for important things like rape of substance abuse. I had not put loss or divorce in the “okay to ask for help” bucket. I was so worried about how this would look to other people and how my single Black mother status would affect my children in school that ending my life seemed like the best option. Even though, I was not raised in a house that went to church faithful, I did attend often and received religious and spiritual guidance outside of church (Harris-Perry, 2013). I am thankful to God for my psychiatrist, a Black man who did not meet me when I was well but fought for me to have a good life and regulated my medications as needed and my family and friends that I couldn’t see were there the entire time fighting for me to get out of an unhealthy marriage and live a bigger life than I could have imagined.

I still had my children, which were told that I was on a business trip for work and would return soon. They had no idea what was happening and were happy to see me when I returned. I began to build the community needed to navigate and gain support for the future years, it is an act of resistance at the intersection of race, gender, and class (Spates & Slatton, 2017). Black motherhood is a political identity in need of activism for the preservation of self and activism of motherhood.

I returned home in time to get the twins registered for public high school. This should have been an easy task. My dueling identities of being Black and coming from a private school, which signaled middle-class status and as a single parent were reference the entire time, I worked to get them registered. Identity at the intersection of schooling were in full swing as a I navigated the politics and violence of Black motherhood (Crenshaw, 1994). Once they were admitted they attended freshman orientation and went

to get their course schedules. When they came home, I looked at their schedules and quickly noticed they were in average to low classes. Neither child had taken any placement exams to attempt to justify the placement. They were experiencing the stereotyping of Black students in the education system (Perry et al., 2003). I was confused, disappointed, and upset. How were the expectations for success being established for Black students at predominately Black school, and would this have happened if they had been White?

This was a moment to be an advocate for my children within the unequitable school system and caste categorization (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Perry et al., 2003). I called up to the school and questioned their schedules. They informed me that all transfer students were placed in the middle track so the school could get an idea of where they should be placed in their sophomore year. NOPE. This was not okay. Moreover, what kind of policy is this? I went up to the school with the twins to correct their schedule. I understood that Black middle-class assimilation was the tool to use in a predominantly Black school (Lacy, 2007).

I wore a navy suit with pearls, a crisp white shirt, and black pumps. The goal was to look as affluent as possible. I was modeling for the twins how to dress to navigate the system, educating them on the look of Black middle-classness (Lacy, 2007) was like smog breathers (Tatum, 1997). I was also trying to cover up the fact I was a single mother. I wore a gold band on my wedding finger to avoid any questioning of my marital status. We met with their counselor; he was a tall White man seemingly nice. He looked impressed to see a parent at the school for scheduling. I quickly informed him that we

were transferring back and that they were coming from a private school down the street. I also informed him that were more than capable of taking the honors classes at the high school. The need to advocate for my children that were placed by the school in the bottom of the U.S. caste system (Perry et al., 2003).

He looked them over; they were dressed in khaki pants and polo shirts. He looked down at their schedules and asked which one of the classes did I want to change. I told him, all of them. I wanted them in all honors courses. He looked at me over the top of his glasses and asked me if, I was sure. Of course, I was sure. These were my children; I knew what they were capable of accomplishing. I watch these children sleep; I know them better than in the world. Racism in the system of education places the expectation and the resources at the bottom for Black children (Ladson-Billings, 1998). I realized that I could not respond in an emotional way. I understood all of the stereotypes of Black women and I had to keep my emotions and outrage in check (Harris-Perry, 2013). I took a deep breath, smiled, and said, "yes I understand that" they come from a lengthy line of educators, and we want to make sure they are prepared for college.

My attempt to position class with education as an entry ticket to education (Lacy, 2007). He pushed back again, framing this decision as aggressive and reminding me that high school is a time to make friends and have a wonderful time. I immediately responded that they could do all those things in college. I spoke in plural, "*We* want them to have a great foundation for their college education." I understood that saying we, would add a man into a paternalistic conversation about my children with a man that had not met them. With the addition or perception of a man, and the twins coming from a

two-parent household there was a shift in his response (Lacy, 2007). I then told him that their father wanted to be here, but he was in court today. None of that was true but I understood that if I told him they have a dad that is important and a professional, it would carry more weight than the professional woman sitting in front of him.

I was caught in the intersection of Black motherhood, both my race and gender mattered in this interaction, my role as an activist mother determined the access to resources for my children and the only privilege, I had in this interaction was class (Lacy, 2007). I actually made more money than my husband but, in this moment, that did not matter at all. All that mattered was I was middle-class, Black and seemingly married (Lacy, 2007). It mattered that my family members were part of the teacher club and that I was not going to leave until their schedules were changed. He changed both their schedules and both children cried. They were scared I would not be able to get them into the classes and they were scared I would back down, they were tears of relief and triumph. I have not ever met a White parent that struggled to get their children in honors classes. Navigating, advocacy and activism was not just needed for all of my children in high school was required.

The art of pretending to be fine all of the time is popular in Black spaces. It is necessary in a "crooked room" (Harris-Perry, 2013). I dare say practiced in Black spaces, even when we are not fine. The navigation and double consciousness and code switching that is required can be exhausting (DuBois, 2008). I wish I could tell you as a mother that this was only my act and practice my children noticed it and practiced it too at school. The divorce and single parent status was not just mine; it was spread thinly on the

children as well. They too carried this loss and shame of identity to school with them. At an early age, layering the shame of the intersectional identities can be inherited (Harris-Perry, 2013).

Therapy was not unusual for me or my children. We had great insurance that covered all of our mental health needs. After my husband I physically separated I put the children in therapy, some group therapy, and some individual therapy. Access to resources like mental health without anyone in my family or community knowing was possible and relatively simple and a symbol and act of middle-class identity (Lacy, 2007). However, I was torn to talk and inform their teachers on the shift in family status. The politics of school and identity were at risk in an already lower caste level (Wilkerson, 2020). I understood that the loss of their grandparent and their father may show up in the school experience. I met with each teacher separately and asked them to keep the information close. I also knew that teachers gossip, and I was hoping by asking them to keep my matters private they would be empathic and supportive of my children and discreet with my personal business. I was hoping that letting them into the secret they may feel closer to me and then to my children. Telling the teacher was a political action, it was an ask for access to education and for humanity, grace, and liberation for my children (Love, 2019).

We want our children to thrive not just exist, to be excited and successful and that requires an understanding and relationship between ourselves and the education system (Love, 2019). For some teachers, increasing the education and information about the situation worked in the extension of kindness and support. One of my children started a

support group for kids of divorced parents to cope and provide support for other children during this tumultuous time. They were in the second grade. My 7-year-old was assisting other children in crying during recess to process the pain and loss of the other parent. Their teacher thought it was remarkable and asked if I would be okay with them continuing in a room during recess, instead of in public on the playground.

The teacher's ability to see my child and the other children, provide the space without taking over is an act of advocacy, maybe even an act of an abolitionist (Love, 2019). I said of course I would support their need to heal and help others. In this case, informing the teacher of what was happening at home worked. I understand that advocacy is not always negative or defensive, it is an act towards the liberation that can happen and exist (Love, 2019). Identity as political (Collins, 1998; Crenshaw, 1998) allows the opportunity to acknowledge the false narratives and to create a new narrative for Black mothers and children. I could clearly see that my children were hurting and trying their best to process the events unfolding in their lives. This was the first death in their lives, my father died at age 50, only meeting the twins for a year.

Black children grieve loss too. In my house crying was encouraged, supported, and expected. My home was a safe place to be Black, emotional, and human. I explained to my children that tears help us heal, and they are a beneficial use of the tear ducts we were given. I also explained that in this world other people may not get the practice of feeling and may not understand out outward expression and that was okay too, as long as we remembered there was nothing wrong with crying. My children previously had friends from two parents. It was apparent in the insular, Black middle-class world I had

created for them that they too were navigating a new label placed upon them (Lacy, 2007). They may not have understood class or intersectional identity, but they were feeling it and responding to it in their actions. After my husband and I physically separated, the kids gravitated towards other children being raised by their mothers. I asked them why; they stated teachers and other children saw them differently. They were looking for a friend group that could relate to their loss.

Black racial identity is complicated at school (Tatum, 1997). One of my children was attending a private high school after attending private grade school and public middle school. This child too was lost. Their racial identity was warped, and all they wanted was to be accepted by White students and teachers. The system of education struggles with assisting children in their development of racial identity (Tatum, 1997). As a mother, I understood what was happening and none the less it was painful to watch. There were a number of messages that children see about who they are and where they belong, how they are to behave and even the type of music and attire that are acceptable (Lacy, 2007).

Internalized oppression is part of the Black experience, because racism is part of the Black experience (Walker, 2015). Self-loathing of our natural hair, hue of skin and Black identity overall is presented in the media, school, and institutions in a normalized and afro pessimistic manner (Wilderson, 2003). Black middle-class people often receive messages about assimilation in schools and some want nothing to do with the other Black students at their school or speech patterns that deviate from standard American English (Martin, 2010). Black middle-class children often attempt to blend in with their White

peers, however, this blend is not possible with the prevalence of racism, at best it is temporary and inconsistent (Lacy, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Tatum, 1997).

As a Black middle-class mother, I was preparing for the rejection they would ultimately face. My role is to make their childhood as wonderful and at the same time prepare them for their future (Nash, 2018). I invited all of the Black students to my home for a party. I learned as a grade school parent that one of the ways to gain popularity for your child, an act of advocacy, was to have a party. Parties are expensive, and often have a theme. It was also an indication of class; I invited the entire class to the party sometimes spending $200-$800 for a party. Preparation for the navigation with the intersectional lens of class include belonging to social organizations and receiving training for navigation within systems (Graham, 1999).

My middle-class motherhood training prepared me for throwing wonderful parties, with invitations and gifts for each attendee. The socialization of women includes the ability to entertain (Lacy, 2007). Thankfully, there were only a handful of students in high school that identified as Black. The party worked and the student bonded with my child. I realize that having a network of people that look like you are helpful throughout life. The collective bonding that happens in schools is necessary for positive and reflective Black identity and growth (Tatum, 1997). My children and their peers talked to me about the messages they were receiving at their school. The oppression of voice and the lack of acknowledgement of Blackness and womanist as valid and powerful impacts their ability to resist the deficit models of Blackness presented to them and images of their mothers (Collins, 1989). This included being directed and discouraged from talking

to each other; sometimes teachers would inform them that they were not like (fill in the name Black student), they were special, Black but not really Black.

This attempt to separate them from each other and in many ways from their own identity requires an activist spirit (Collins, 1989). Middle-class Black children receive a lot of messages from teachers that they are not like the other Black students (Horsford, 2014). It is a racist and false narrative that even I received in school. I understood this moment because this moment also happened to me. I was in eighth grade, and I was talking to my mother. I was explaining how all of my honors courses were White and that I was Black but not really Black I was special. My mother stopped what she was doing and asked how I was special. I told her that I was not really Black because really Black students are in the lower classes because they do not try hard and they are not smart like me, I repeated, "I am special." My mother told me I was not special, all Black children are smart, and she was not sure why there were not more Black children in my classroom, but it could be that the school was wrong and missed the other smart Black children.

My mother's response offered me a challenge to the racist messages I had received, a count argument and narrative to the reality I was living (Bell, 1999). Her posture was political because her identity, my identity and the identity of my children were all political (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Moreover, the inheritance of the marginalized identity of less than, lower ranked and less worthy of education proved that the need for advocacy and activism were inherited as well (Nash, 2018). Then she asked me if I thought it was strange at a majority Black school that all the White kids and a few Black kids were in the honors classes? I had not considered the system was wrong, I had

believed that I was not really Black and that I was special, a special Black. The mixed messages of Black identity and middle-class are generational (Lacy, 2007).

The racism and internalization of the racism had altered my thinking and lens of who I was, who they were and how I did not see the connection between myself and other Black students. My mother made the announcement that I would not be attending the public high school because I was clearly confused about who I was and how racism happens. She announced that she knew where racism was clear, blatant, alive, and well, the Catholic school system. Racism in the Catholic church was something she knew and could depend on (Nilson, 2010).

Everyone that wanted to apply to a Catholic school was required to take a test to determine eligibility. The score had to be above 80% to be considered for admission. Unless you were legacy, your parent or grandparent had attended the school, then the test was more of a formality. I was required to test into the only Catholic girls' school I could imagine attending because, my mother's school had closed in the 70s. The system was unfair and stacked to privilege catholic families (Nilson, 2010). It was still a surprise to me I got in; my test score was in the ninety-four percentiles. My mother was correct, racism was alive and well there. It was clear that racial privilege existed and felt every day I attended. This is a privilege of Black middle-class status; we have a choice to show and experience different educational environments without harming the access to education.

Although Black middle-class families, may have choice in schools they cannot avoid racism in schools (Lacy, 2007). After my high school principal made a statement

about Black girls showing White girls' fashion but White girls teaching Black girls how to think, I protested, wrote letters, and eventually was asked not to return. My parents were proud of me, and that year changed my life, exposed racism within the educational system and ignited my fire as an activist. I understood my body as political and my intersectional identity as both targeted and powerful (Hill Collins, 1989; Roberts, 1997). The education system felt rigged for boys and White students, it was even more apparent to me after attending an all-girls school. Black feminist thinking and action were required to attempt to make education, especially the honors classes more attainable for Black students (Hill Collins, 1989).

At my public high school, I was known for showing students how to get into the honors classes and forging parents' names on the paper needed to take the most challenging classes. I also arranged peer to peer tutoring as an act of resistance the racist system of education. Everything about school was political with and attempt to leave Black people behind (Browne, 2015). Getting students in that were reserved for White students was a political act of resistance from a young Black, middle-class student. I graduated from high school at 17, I could have graduated a semester earlier, but my parents encouraged me to stay to experience prom, bonfires, dances, and graduation. I am so grateful for their Love, and support throughout my education. I learned my parenting and advocacy from them and other great parents. They provided the Black context to uplift and radical transformation like Anna Julia Cooper, (Harris-Perry, 2013).

Ferguson, Missouri

The uprising of Ferguson, Missouri changed my life. As a Black mother, it inspired me to work for social justice beyond my household and neighborhood. It provided an opportunity for me to imagine a world without racial violence with law enforcement and in every institution. Just the thought of living in a world where I no longer had to be afraid to send my children to school, go to the hospital or be shot and killed by the police, brings tears to my eyes. It is the reality for some, and one day it will be the reality for all of us. Plessy v. Ferguson established that separate but equal was not indeed equal, and yet we are still separate and unequal in housing and schools (Gaynor et al., 2021). This physical separation is evident and so is the inequality within the educational system.

Moreover, the violence within education of racism is visible in resources, curriculum, and teacher preparation (Ladson-Billings, 1998). With this inequity, Black mothers enter the space of inequity and violence with their children (Love, 2019). Two of my children were in college and the other two were in high school when Michael Brown was killed in Ferguson. This moment in Ferguson, resonates with the violence and inequities of the Plessy v. Ferguson case in many ways (Gaynor et al., 2021).

I saw the young man lying in the street on my Facebook page, over and over again. I called my son in town to see where he was. He was safe. A child laying in the street could be anyone of our children. State sanctioned violence against Black people is an everyday lived experience of Black people living in lower income neighborhoods

(Gaynor et al., 2021). As a Black mother, I understood that this easily could have been my child, and Black motherhood includes fear and grief (Nash, 2018).

I went to the vigil after hearing about the gathering on the radio and could not get down the street, it was filled with people. That evening the Kwik Trip was burned down and the protests made national news. I was ashamed watching it unfold, first scouring at the protesters and then I heard myself say, why are they doing this? This will never change. It is within the social constructs of Blackness, the intersectional identity of womanhood that lulled me into a belief that racism and sexism are fixed (Hill Collins, 1989). The internalization of this reality as a Black mother, even with my middle-class status, this state and institutional sanctioned violence is unavoidable (Gaynor et al., 2021). I realized I was prepared to bury my own child.

I had fallen complacent to the notion that police killed unarmed people all the time and at best, not being killed made us lucky. The reality that desegregation of spaces may have appeared to occur, but the integration of spaces has yet to occur, leaving my experience as temporary and tourist or expatriate status at best (Gaynor et al., 2021). As far as a Black mother I have just been lucky not smarter or safer, not stronger, or more educated just lucky. I am a Black mother I was sad for the mother of Michael Brown; she looked like me. As a political identity and as an activist I wanted to help (Gaynor et al., 2021; Roberts, 1997).

I went the next day to the protest in front of the police station. I had to park several blocks away because the police blocked off the path to the police station. I was in heels and a full suit and mad, I had to walk so far to get to the protest. The politics of

Black respectability were essential (Cooper, 2017). I wanted to show up for another mother and I wanted White people to see Black women dressed up, respectable to take this young child's life seriously. It dawned on me that this was a protest against the police. They had all the power, legally they could block off streets, arrest people and point weapons at people.

I went for selfish reasons, as a mother of four I did not want a turn being the mother interviewed on TV. Although I was educated, I understood my class status would not protect my children or this fate. Activism is a role all Black mothers must play (Nash, 2018). Michael Brown was in the suburbs; it was a suburban police officer that killed him. It was the suburbs that White families, use to occupy, years prior; now it was Black space (Rothstein, 2015). It was state sanctioned space for violence against Black bodies, and it was normalized until Michael Brown (Rothstein, 2015). In so many ways state sanctioned violence of the police; mimics the violence of racism and the impact on the souls in classrooms (Gaynor et al., 2021).

I believe and still believe that Michael Brown, could mimic the seminal change that the Brown v. Board of Education encouraged. My activism in the protests was the hopefulness of a mother for all institutional change, in schools, healthcare and law enforcement. I was hoping this Brown would be like the Brown vs the Board of Education, it would be a seminal moment in U.S. history, and I would help get us there. I was excited and ready for the change, my children were still alive, and I understood the risks for me and other people and like during their birth, I was willing to die for my children's freedom.

The use of my body in the streets protesting was a political, race, gender and class statement made daily (Roberts, 1997). Although, this appeared to be about policing, for mothers including Michael Brown's mother it was about more than that. While he was lying in the street she talked about school and how hard it was to get him through school. Getting through school and navigating the system is so similar to getting through life for Black mothers and their children. Michael Brown's mother was still fighting for his humanity, even in his death, her act as a mother, Black woman entered the room, every time she entered the room (Collins, 1998; Crenshaw, 1998).

On the third night of the protest, after being tear gassed on the second night I was asked to speak in a church in Ferguson. The ask was to talk about what it was like to be a Black mother. In the program it said my name and "mother." I was terrified I would lose my job because of the protest and speaking out against the police publicly. Activism and Black motherhood are so intertwined, it felt like an opportunity, obligation, and gift at the same time (Nash, 2018). I looked for a sign to tell a story I had not shared for almost 10 years. I stopped telling the story of what happened to my son because every time I told the story I started to cry.

One of my sons wanted to hang out with his friends in a main part of our suburban city, I live in a college town. There is a strip of shops and restaurants where all kinds of people spend time together. My son got there, and his friends were drinking so he decided to walk home. We live about a mile away from where I dropped him off. It was a lovely day he decided to walk. He did not have a cell phone, back then kids did not have cell phones. So, he walked home. On his way home he saw a police car circling him

and he knew he would be stopped. The police car pulled up and then another one arrived and asked him to assume the position. My son was 12 years old. At 12 he knew what those words meant, and they patted him down and told him he fit the description of a man carrying a machete. A man, he was a boy maybe five feet tall, he had no facial hair, he was just a kid. How did they miss he was just a kid? State sanctioned violence is a normalized part of Black parenting, we intimately understand the possibilities for our children (Gaynor et al., 2021). Black parents have to prepare our children for this violence with law enforcement and at school. When the boys were about five my husband and I had a conversation with them we gave them *The Talk*. The Talk is the conversation that parents have with their children about how to interact with the police.

I gave this speech that night, three days after the murder of Michael Brown and it opened a national conversation about Black families and law enforcement. It was not just law enforcement, it was going to the mall, going to school, going over to White people's houses, it was frequent and similar each time. It was the talk about how to survive and navigate the world in Black skin. The need to prepare our children for segregated spaces is essential (Gaynor et al., 2021). My son came home and admitted that he was so scared he started to run home to me because he knew I was home. I cannot help but compare this to the tragic death of Tyre Nichols and his attempt to get home to his mother, his screaming for her before his death. I choked back the tears to tell my son "Whatever you do don't run." I was ashamed I had not told him not to run, of course he wanted to run, he was scared, he was a kid and he wanted to get to the safety of his mother.

He explained what happened and admitted he did not remember their names or badge numbers. I did not care, all I cared about is that he made it home to me safe and alive. I called my husband at work. I stated that one of the children was stopped by the police, he paused to compose himself and then asked if he was hurt. He too understood that an encounter with the police could mean death, the death of his child. I said yes, he is okay. My child continued to ask, e questions about why he was stopped and what he could have done better to avoid the encounter; he at 12 years old was trying to figure out what he did wrong, to deserve the humiliation, harassment and fear placed upon him my police officers.

He asked if it was because he was Black, I said maybe but I did not know. He was 12, so he asked in his boy voice, “Mommy I just want to know how long this will last.” He was trying so hard not to cry. I looked at my sweet 12-year-old son and told him with tears rolling down my face. “For the rest of your life,” I replied. I told this story three days after Michael Brown was killed, because I did not think the world understood why we were protesting or what we hoped would change because of the protest. It was clear watching the news that White America had no clue what it is like navigating school, healthcare, or the police for Black and Brown people. White identity was individualized, not a collective experience most of the time (DiAngelo, 2016).

This was a conversation happening in segregated, Black spaces and families (Gaynor et al., 2021). The institutionalized experience of racial profiling and surveillance only happened to dark bodies (Browne, 2015). It was not added information to Black people, it was added information for the majority of White America, which made it

newsworthy. The conversation went across the news wire and The Talk is now a known framing for interactions with authority, namely the police. These are the moments, which have influenced and has impacted the world. I was offered the opportunity to trademark the talk, and I declined, I could not imagine making monetizing Black pain. I sometimes regret that, but I sleep well none the less. The Talk applies to school too. I understand this is hard for some educators to hear, that their White identity within the education system mimics police officers in the street (Browne, 2015). The act of surveillance of Black people is taught to White children at an incredibly early age and framed as social responsibility (Browne, 2015).

It is normalized as good behavior to watch, correct, mistrust and police Black people (Browne, 2015). It is applied like peanut butter in every interaction with Black people, therefore, it does not matter the profession of the White person, the message, behavior, and treatment have already been socialized and rewarded. It is then appropriate for Black respectability to be acted upon as an act of social justice, not compliance or agreement with the oppressive system (Cooper, 2017). I was taught to navigate the systems for my children for their survival and our collective liberation (Nash, 2018). I was coached on insider information and how to access educational power, from my mother, a teacher and insider.

It was not lost on me that the sound of a middle-class voice would not be enough to save my children from violence or the threat of violence in schools. As a Black mother I could not over educate, out earn, or protect my children from institutional violence in schools or with law enforcement, it connected all of us Black mothers. Even with all of

the volunteering and parental involvement, I intimately understood that class would not save my children (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003). Police officers did not care about the educational intergenerational accomplishments, they would only see their Black bodies. They are trained and paid within the legal system to maintain property values while surveilling Black movement in segregated spaces (Browne, 2015; Gaynor et al., 2021).

I knew my son could not out dress this moment in his life; his khaki pants and polo designer shirt would not save his life or prevent him from being racially profiled. Class was not safety for Black children and the mother's shedding tears were not White. White woman tears evoke sadness in America, they are weaponized against Black people often (DiAngelo, 2016). Black mother pain is discounted and ignored like their right to have children and control their bodies (Roberts, 1997).

The truth is my children have been profiled their entire lives, I was sheltering and navigating as much as I could as a Black mother (Nash, 2018). As a Black mother the educational institution profiled me first and then my children. We were used to being watched, questioned, and challenged; we learned it in school (Browne, 2015). My sixth-grade twins walked into a room full of White students and the teacher questioned whether they belonged by asking to see their schedules. The questions about belonging in a classroom is the surveillance we see in schools (Browne, 2015).

What was happening in Ferguson was familiar, it was school. Darren Wilson was acting like a schoolteacher that felt disrespected, his bullets are like teachers' suspensions and expulsions. Michael Browns mother was not new to this reality, and neither was I, all of this was connected and familiar. Black motherhood includes fear and grief as part of

the experience (Nash, 2018). The young people inspired me to go to the protest and work to change the system. I was active in the protests nightly, I was tear gassed more times than I can count, pepper sprayed three or four times and held at gun point by a police officer twice.

The entire time I feared for my life, I worried there would be a mass shooting of the police and I would be caught in the gun fire. I thought about my fear and thought about staying home, I could use my children as an excuse, and everyone would understand. Motherhood is honorable and Black motherhood is complicated (Nash, 2018). My identity is political all the time, the choice sounded easier and maybe safer (Roberts, 1997). I then realized I would rather sacrifice my life for theirs rather than to view their bodies in a casket, it was that real for me and so many other people. Black mothers will fight for their children, our yelling and cussing is an outward expression of our fear for our children all the time (, Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003).

I shared the emotional parts of my life because often Black women are portrayed as unhuman or superhuman people (Harris-Perry, 2013). We are just people; we do not Love grit or being called resilient or magic. Racism, sexism and often classism is what we are fighting and the intersectionality of all of those identities in the face of motherhood (Collins, 1993; Crenshaw, 1991; Love, 2019). My activism during Ferguson impacted how the school saw me and my children. Both children were punished for my actions at their schools.

The System as a Sisterhood

Part of the preparation of navigating the system of education for my Black children is understanding the system. Black parents may be critiqued on invisible measurement like school involvement (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003Lawerence-Lightfoot, 2003). The truth is that Black parents are as involved if not more involved than their White counterparts (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003Lawerence-Lightfoot, 2003). However, the negative stereotypes and images of Black mothers creates a narrative that Black mothers are always working to disprove (Cooper, 2017; Harris-Perry, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 1998).

It is helpful to see the system in the U.S. caste system withing education as Wilkerson, describes the racial inequities within systems as a hierarchy (Wilkerson, 2020). With this clarity, the role of the advantaged or superior race, White people is noticed and acted upon with Black children, the lowest of the caste system. It may also then be helpful to see these people in power as family, sisters, since most of the people in power in a school are White women. This was a helpful framing and reminder for me as I prepared my children for school, “The Talk” which I referenced in a speech given after the death of Michael Brown is needed to navigate “the sisters” too.

To be clear, they are not operating in a fictive kinship manner, where they see each other as kin on sisters that are not biologically related (Stack, 1997). They are tools within the system of White supremacy that are also being manipulated and used to keep racism, patriarchy, and classism in line with the order of oppression. White women are given messages of oppression and tools to oppress at the same time (DiAngelo, 2016). It

is by design within the educational system that only a few children will receive a quality, healthy, loving, and full experience. For example, the resource at an independent school far outweighs the resources at a rural or urban school.

The concept of equity within the educational system would require serious reform (Horsford, 2014). The resources, exposure even the structure of the educational system is designed to create a success educational outcome for typically wealthy and White students. Therefore, it is important to understand identity, White identity, and the U.S. caste system as it relates to education (DiAngelo, 2016; Steele, 1997; Wilkerson, 2020). White women as sisters within the system or racism and oppression is a helpful framework to see how the systems work collaboratively in the oppression of Black people. There is an implication of family systematized oppressive traditions, rules, roles, and practices applied even in a collectivist community (DiAngelo, 2016).

The role of the women, the sisters, impacted my life as a Black mother. The sisters include teachers, school nurses, the woman at the front desk, and social workers. The impact of the system of foster care as punishment, an act of violence or the threat of violence against Black mothers (Clifford & Silver-Greenburg, 2017). The use of social workers as the orchestrators in policing Black mothers and their care for their children. Social workers with the social scripting of surveillance of the lower caste (Browne, 2015).

With this knowledge, I gave instructions to my children not to share what was happening within our home to their teachers or anyone else at school. There is a judgement that Black mothers are not capable of taking loving care of their children to

begin with (Clifford & Sliver-Greenburg, 2017). I informed my children that what happens here in the house stays here in the house. I understood the negative stereotypes of Black mothers and I did not want to invite the judgement, critique, or criticism of a teacher into my home. (Ladson-Billings, 1999). However, during a time of my martial separation, one of my children was reprimanded by their father for not completing their homework neatly.

This separation was working against the benefits of belonging to a two-parent family as school (Johnson & Loscocco, 2015). The father asked the child to rewrite it in a more legible manner. The child initially rejected the direction and was picked up, sat on the kitchen table, and thumped on the head. Later that same day, the child went to school and got in trouble for talking. When the teacher told the child she was going to call his dad, the child begged her not to. “My dad will beat me,” my child said, and the teacher took his words literally. It is a moment to understand that language and culture are also a part of the student’s experience, and the teachers understand of the student, the teacher’s own identity and the cultural lens the teacher was applying to the student, the students’ words, and her own cultural interpretation (Ladson-Billings, 1999). It is the reason it is important to not only understand bias, or racism in education; but the application of bias and racism within the system of education (Ladson-Billings, 1999). It is not illegal in my state to spank or physically discipline your child in their home. In fact, in my state corporal punishment is still legal in public schools, although not applied often.

The teacher hearing this statement, reacted as if I were not the room parent, often in the school, and a phone call or email away. Her response was not a parent/teacher

response, her response was institutional. She called another person that looked like her within the school. She did not pick up the phone and talk to me about it, or my husband. Instead, the teacher, we will call her sister 1 immediately called the principal, Sister 2 and they together called the third sister the social worker. My family had been hot lined. My motherhood and my child were under suspicion and surveillance by the school (Browne, 2015). This is the intersection of racism as a social construct within the system of education (Ladson-Billings, 1999, 2011).

By the end of the day, I received a call from the principal informing me of what happened. She stated she could not share who initiated the call and then talked to me about the next steps in the process. It was easy for the teacher to image me with all of the stereotypical images of Black womanhood (Harris-Perry, 2013). I was upset. I called my husband, we talked about how to approach the conversation with the children. We understood the power of a united front and technically we were still married, that would serve us in the politics of respectability within the educational system or so we hoped (Cooper, 2017). My status as a single mother would only work against me in this moment in navigation. We did not want to chastise the child; we both understood an 8-year-old will do whatever they can to get out of trouble, which also includes being grounded for talking in class. Although, we perceive that when teachers call home to report on the behavior of our child they are hoping for corporal punishment, Black parents love their children too (Love, 2019).

We also realized that an 8-year-old could not understand the weight of their words and how this could affect the entire family. We had a family meeting. Family meetings

were frequently held in my home for important topics and moments. They were held for serious conversations and good news. This was a serious conversation, and our faces showed our worry and our fear. We both knew of situations where parents lost custody of their children and we were terrified. We understood that the burden of proof that we were loving, kind and good parents would fall on us, the assumptions made prior to the allegation was already there. We also understood that cultural language was being misinterpreted and we would have to fix that with the social worker (Ladson-Billings, 1999).

The fate of our family unit rested in the hands of three White women that were all younger than us. The teacher and the social worker were not parents yet and were coming to the conversation from, what they read about being a parent, what they remembered from their own childhoods and what they read or heard about us. Each one was using their White identity scripting to make decisions about our family (DiAngelo, 2016). We prepared for the social worker to arrive at my home.

Even the preparation was humiliating. We were preparing for an uninvited guest, socialized with the U.S. caste system (Wilkerson, 2020) as a framework to enter our home, our sacred space where we keep our children safe from racism and fill them with joyful experiences and knowledge about being Black. Our home where their father had assured them, he would keep them safe from all the harm in the world to enter and here was an unwelcomed invitation to enter, judge, inspect, berate, and negate all of our efforts to love and educate our children. It felt historically familiar, like a country that

makes arbitrary rules to tear families apart (Love, 2019). I was terrified. This is why I do not support teachers coming for home visits.

There are patterns of oppression in the United States and White people entering Black spaces uninvited, causing harm, and removing Black children from their homes and parents is a known, understood and practiced tradition. Home is Black space, and for many Black people Black space translates into safe space (Gaynor et al., 2021). We understood, our fancy college educations and suburban zip code may not be enough to save us from losing our child, and not just this one, all of them.

The social worker came to my home. She was everything I had imagined, she was young, White, she looked scared and nervously smiled at me. I gave her a half smile back. My house was immaculately clean, my refrigerator was stocked with food, since we had heard that another family had the social worker over and she opened their refrigerator and because mother had no food, the social worker then opened her pantry and determined that she could not provide food for her children and removed the kids, that day. We understood that this visit was subjective and that she had the power to systemically remove our children (Clifford & Silver-Greenburg, 2017).

We were middle-class, the lack of food would not be the reason for the removal, we made sure we looked like a model Jack and Jill Family (Barnes, 1979). She asked us some questions about our parenting style and communication with our kids, our children were present for most of the questions. I am guessing she was looking at them to see if we were lying. We had already explained to the children that this woman was not our friend, and the consequences of their words and to be honest. We were worried that she

had not taken in cultural consciousness courses or Black studies classes for racial acumen or cultural agility (Ladson-Billings, 1999).

We had nothing to hide, we were good parents with great children. At some point the social worker asked my husband to leave, the room. His demeaner was serious the entire time, he was not trying to be warm or friendly, he was not trying to look like he was covering anything up, he was trying to choke back his tear of shame, rage, humiliation, and fear. This was another layer of shame to add to the failed marriage and single parenting (Harris-Perry, 2013).

We love our children; this was a fear like having the police interact with your child. I was alone with her, and she started to ask me questions about my safety and if my husband was hitting or abusing me. I was surprised, insulted, and appalled. The answer to all of the questions were "Yes, I feel safe," "No, I am not afraid of him." In the back of my mind I was thinking, *I am afraid of you; even if I were being abused, I would not tell you, you are here to take my child away, we are not on the same team*. When in U.S. history have White women and Black women been on the same team? You are in my home, judging me and my husband with 1 or 2 years of work experience. We are not friends. This was a pattern, teaching, and socialization for her, and for me, as a Black woman, swallowing all of my pride, taking all of White women's critiques of me, and fearing the power of their pen, words, or tears is part of the navigation. This was a false relationship and reality across racial identities (DiAngelo, 2016).

I understood deeply what the result of the meeting could lead to, and I asked him, my husband to shrink, swallow his pride, bow his head, and take it too for the sake of not

losing his children. As a mother, wife, and Black middle-class woman, I remembered that my intersectional identity had prepared me to survive the racism, sexism and educational inequities, this hoop was just one of many (Crenshaw, 1991). It was not my first humiliating moment, and it would not be my last. We retained a lawyer just in case things did not go our way, which is how afraid we were.

To be clear, my son did not have a mark, cut, or bruise on his body, nor had he ever. This was all in motion because of teacher failed to look through a CRT lens and use it and the child's words in context (Ladson-Billings, 1999). Our lawyer's advice was to host the home visit, including making fresh baked cookies to create a homey smell and positive memory for the social worker. We were trying to establish class and respectability for the social worker's visit (Lacy, 2007). The social worker left and shortly thereafter we were informed that the case was closed and that no abuse or negligence had been determined.

Afterwards, I met with the teacher and the principal. I wanted to understand why this had been taken so far so fast. I wanted to hear from them why this was "mandated." Honestly, I wanted them to apologize for almost ruining my family. I also wanted them to understand the weight of their actions. I wanted them to stop doing this to Black families. I wanted them to recognize the danger and oppression their actions as surveillance (Browne, 2015; DiAngelo, 2016). I spent time explaining words, beat could also mean spanking. The request to call his dad if my child was not acting appropriately in the classroom was our request to the teacher. It was an attempt to partner with the teacher for the best educational outcome for my child (-Lightfoot, 2003). It was understood that this

child, cared deeply about not disappointing their father and a threat of a phone call to dad should confirm our alignment for a positive outcome and calm the problem at school too.

Instead, a phone call threat turned into a hot line call. I also assured them that every phone call does not result in a physical punishment, sometimes they are grounded, or something is taken away. What was clear in the meeting was that we, the teacher, and I were not working together for the best interest of my child and what was even more clear, is that I could not depend on her to partner with me to educate my child, this was not a team, this was a flex of power. Me and my child were under watch not partnership (Browne, 2015). The politics of identity required me to have a meeting with them to assert, not to trifle with me or my child to assert that I am not a weak parent, nor am I without resources, I can remove my child from this school at any time and place them in a private school. The need to establish my identity as an advocate and also as an activist mother (Nash, 2018). I was not signing up to be fearful or beholden to them, I was present, aware, hurt, and prepared to act in the best interest of my child.

As a Black middle-class mother, it is a privilege to assert my parental rights, I knew what there were and feared if I did not assert them now, I would have a year of being bullied by my child's teacher and the principal. This moment of parental chess is frequent. As a Black mother I was constantly trying to hedge and figure out the next move of the teacher (Nash, 2018). I spent time learning what the curriculum and expectations were for each grade. I then spent time informing the teacher that I was on stop of the state standards and using the language of teachers, to signal I was in the club

or at least had an informant or counsel to advise me on what to say to teachers and administrators.

Fear

Becoming a mother includes fear of racism on the lives of children. That fear is recognized in schools as dark suffering (Love, 2019). Fear shaped how I navigated the education system for my children. The requirement and need of that navigation were immediate and assumed upon their arrival (Nash, 2018). It was also clear that the world had a perception of who I was, my right to become a mother and my rights as a Black mother in service of my children (Roberts, 1997). I was actively involved in ways my White peers did not have to be to ensure the safety of their children, in lieu of the rhetoric that Black parents are not active in their children's educational journey (-Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003).

Fear of losing my child to the hostility of the education system, not just losing their way, losing their minds, or losing their life I was afraid school would take their soul, their very essence. It is a fear that requires the use of a CRT lens to question, combat and respond to the act of racism within the educational system (Bell, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Love, 2019; Nash, 2018). I was afraid that teachers would dim their light and as a Black mother I would not be able to reignite that light. I was concerned that their assessment of me and surveillance of their bodies would not allow the light of education in (Browne, 2015). I witnessed beautiful Black children enter schools and come out completely different, gone. I belonged to the social club, made sure they had

extracurricular activities even when I could not afford it, worked three jobs to put them in private school and college, all because I was afraid for them.

These enclaves of Black middle-class communities served as counternarratives than the flawed and distorted or missing images at school (Barnes, 1979). Admittedly I was afraid for myself too. Afraid, I would lose a child, coping with the stress of racism to a gang, drugs, sex, or suicide. Being a Black mother is a vigilant walk, with faith and fear intertwined (Harris-Perry, 2013). I have few regrets about my parenting four brilliant Black children, few. I do not regret being afraid, my fear motivated my actions.

My fear allowed me to speak up for them and from my heart. I did not beat up or curse any of the teachers or administrators out, not because I did not think it or want to but because I was afraid, they would hurt my child even more. Fear encouraged me to attend every PTO, Open House, and Parent Teacher Conference, to be the opposite of who they thought I was when I entered the building (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003). Fear allowed me to correct teachers' misjudgment about who I am and who my children were becoming. Fear allowed me to be a parent activist (Walker, 2015). Fear allowed my intersectional identities to switch in and out, off and on and prominent when needed (Crenshaw, 1991).

I understood that I would need to be their biggest champion and advocate. I also understood that my race, gender, and class were factors in their experience and my experience as a mother (Nash, 2018). Fear motivated me to define what winning is and was for my children and me as a mother. We are winning. Three out of four of my children have completed college, the fourth to graduate next year. For a Black middle-

class mother, I wish I did not have to be afraid. I wish my fears for my children had nothing to do with race or gender. I wish that all the tears that were shed during my mothering were teachers of joy, not tears of fear or distress. Joy is my favorite word, followed by love. It has been a joy to mother these children and navigate their education experience, no matter how afraid I was I pushed past the fear to experience the joy.

Nothing could have prepared me for motherhood. The impact and influence of race, gender, and class in the system of education are real, felt and require navigation (Ladson-Billings, 1998). The intersections of my identity (Crenshaw, 1991) impacted the way I was perceived, my need to advocate for children and other children. Although, I was not planning on being a mother, it has been my greatest accomplishment. Even with the death of my parents, the loss of two marriages and financial hardships, we made it. Yes, I think class had a huge part of the navigation and it is possible for all mothers to navigate the education system for their children with my same success.

The unexpected surprise in the navigation, was the need to advocate for my children constantly and consistently. I imagine school as a place where children can thrive and find themselves. My experience was more like helping them through a hazing or pledging process to get through the years or formal education. Black mothers as activist for themselves and their children is part of the job of motherhood, in an unjust and unequitable system (Lacy, 2007; Roberts, 1997). Even with the financial means to make different choices for my children's education, I could not avoid, racism or sexism. Each day was an interview. I have four beautiful Black young adults, success is possible.

Chapter Five: Conclusions

Black Mothers are Good

There are not enough positive images of Black mothers in America. There are not enough images that counter the poor and neglectful mother that the Moynihan Report filled American heads with (Harris-Perry, 2013). Images of Black women are distorted and crooked in comparison to their White counterparts, which impacts how others see them and how they see themselves (Harris-Perry, 2013). Autoethnographic research is needed and success stories as counter narratives to negative images of Black womanhood and motherhood are needed in researched space. That is why I thought it was important and necessary to write an autoethnography. The power of an insider's view of the lived experiences of intertwined and intersectional identities, offers more information and more authentic realism to experiences and systemized oppression for the complex identities (Ellis et al., 2011).

This research highlights the intersection of race, gender, and middle-class identities, which are further connected and expanded to understand racism, sexism, and classism within the context of motherhood. It is unconceivable that Black mothers' racial and gendered identity can be separated or teased a part (Cooper, 1892; Crenshaw, 1991; Giddings, 1984). Moreover, Black women carry the weight of their community, and at the same time hold the hope of the future with their community (Crenshaw, 1991). The movement for liberation for Black mother's does not only free them, but it also provides a path towards liberation for their children. The impact of racism, and the ability to navigate the education system is an understanding of oppression and a call for activism.

As a Black middle-class mother, I could not escape the experiences of racism and sexism and at best with some access to financial and social resources learned to navigate the system for the success of my children. Black mothers must act as activist within the U.S. caste system with and understanding that liberation is possible within the system of education (Love, 2019; Wilkerson, 2020). It is with this hope and understanding that research, proof through narratives is researched, shared, and told in authentic, real, and defining lens. It is with a CRT lens that the experiences are shared, mapped out and analyzed.

CRT and Black Motherhood

Counternarratives are a significant part of CRT (Bell, 1992; Delgado, 1989). Writing an autoethnography of Black middle-class motherhood, is a counternarrative to the stereotypical narratives of Black mothers and their experience within the education system. The newness of autoethnographic research challenges the reader and the writer to present narratives with the scholarly framework of qualitative research (Ellis, 2004; Ellis & Adams, 2011; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). None the less the need to produce more scholarship may be helpful in expanding what people know, how they know the information and more importantly the lens or context of the researcher in providing the information.

This autoethnographic research is based with an intersectional lens of race, gender, and middle-class status (Crenshaw, 1991; Nash, 2008). Crenshaw's brilliance in coining a term to capture her lived experience as a Black woman is significant in how this research was framed. The addition of class, middle-class status specifically provides

additional information and inclusion of the lived experiences of a Black mother, the impact of sexism and racism regardless of middle-class status (Nash, 2008). It also provides real examples of inescapable experiences and the navigation of those experiences for a Black mother and her children. With the inclusion of intersectional identity also provides the complexity of that identity. Some of the experiences had by this Black mother may not be unique to other Black mother's experiences. However, there are additional resources, the access to resources and the privileges of class that explain, the experiences, the power of choice and privilege of class and the obligation to speak up for all children and fight for equity within the education system.

The identity of the mother is part of the experience and identity of her children. The collectivist culture of Black people includes the behaviors of mothering (Nash, 2018). With the added responsibility to the community of middle-class status and fictive kinship if the additional family and weight of the community to mother other children and see the success and failures of Black children as wins and losses. No, I did not lose my children within the system of education, but I almost lost them over and over again. I do not lay the heavy burden of the success of Black children on mothers, fathers, or schools; I lay it on all of us, collectively as a society (Love, 2019). When we understand that we live in a caste system in the United States, which is inclusive of systemic racism in schools (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Steele, 1997; Wilkerson, 2020) we are obligated to resist the marginalization of children and their mothers.

My Grandmother was a Politician

I only remember my maternal grandmother having one job and that was as a politician. It sent the message to me at an early age that Black mothers are mothers, activist, and career women; and that Blackness and the need to fight for Black people is our life's work. The politics of identity and our understanding of our identity as political, allows us to uncover the negotiated and political navigation of school and education (Cooper, 2015). The intersection of Black mother's identity in a nice place like education, may unveil an experience fraught with the systemic realities of racism, sexism, and classism (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Tate, 1997). The system of education is a system that participates in systemic oppression. Ladson-Billings' (2009) work invites scholars to ask not if racism exists within the education system but to understand where and how racism exists within the education system. It further invites scholars to examine their role within the system, interrupt the system, challenge, and change the system.

It is understood that afro pessimism, the lack of being able to see Black people as human (Wilderson, 2003) Impacts the experience of Black mothers, who are not yet humanized and their children who also lack the inheritance of the entitlement of humanity. The system of education may then be faced with the challenge and opportunity of seeing Black mothers and their children as human, brilliant, capable and scholars. The politics of identity include the property rights of Whiteness, which includes the acceptance that Whiteness is an identity with privilege, citizenships, and seen and unseen rights (Harris, 1993). As a mother, we understand that rights are either denied or inherited or inherited and denied. The inheritance of identity of race, rights, and citizenship for

Black children is dependent on their mother's identity and the benefits or denial of those benefits. The experience for Black mothers and their ability to navigate the surveillance of their identity and their children's educational experience is vital to the survival of the child (Browne, 2015).

This research uncovers the complexity of identity the need for Black mothers to act as advocates and more importantly as activist working for change and equity (Love, 2019). The politics of gender identity in schools is noticeable when dads drop off, pick up or volunteer. My husband almost received a party, ceremony, or celebration at the entrance to the school building. Instead, every year I was questioned on my qualifications to mother and raise my children. I wrote an autoethnography to counter all of the articles and research on Black mothers that began with deficit model about who they are and centered in poverty. This research challenges the narrative that all Black mothers are bad or deficient and that all Black mothers are poor. This research uncovers class, largely rooted in education status and middle-class communities.

Jack and Jill

The explanation and identity as middle-class is relevant in the research to understand the positionality of the Black mother, and the power and choice that class may afford marginalized groups. It also allows the collectivist understanding of building and belonging to a community of people; Black people similarly situated and also navigating their education of their children in public, private and elite schools. It includes the status of being a married Black mother as middle-class identity (Johnson & Loscocco, 2015). My story may look similar to other stories and not as an outlier but a similar motherhood

story. It includes the class identities of generational education, social and political status and identifying social groups as identity markers of middle-class status like Jack and Jill of America (Barnes, 1979). It is relevant in understanding that with a legacy of college education, a respectable career, salary and standing, I was still relegated to second class status and marginalized identity. It is the clear understanding that class, provides more choices and information, it cannot deflect racism or sexism for Black mothers or their children.

I was raised within the organization of Jack and Jill. I have mostly positive memories of this time as a child. As a mother, I made the same decision to raise my children in an organization that has a classist and elitist reputation (Graham, 1999). I understood the reputation, my own lived experience, and the risk of joining or not joining. My decision to join was based upon my experience and my desire to normalize Black middle-class, Black success, and a culture of service to Black people for my children (Barnes, 1979). For me, the members of the Black and educated community were friends of my parents, “aunts and uncles” in a fictive kinship way (Stack, 1997). The Black community is a collectivist culture, and identity of Blackness and the trauma of racism is a collective experience regardless of class (DeGruy, 2005).

The experience of Black middle-class community cannot insulate Black children from racism, at best it provides lived counternarrative of who Black people are and what is possible within the education system and beyond. It is proof that education and a network of educated people helps navigate the terrain of racism. As a Black mother, it explains why I had to be active in the Ferguson uprising, Michael Brown could have been

my son. The sobering reality that he was murdered less than ten miles from my home. This research allows me as a Black middle-class mother to notice the duality of my identity within the context the education system. While discovering the complexity of intersectional identities; race, gender and class as a child groomed for motherhood, middle-class, and the navigation of education for my children.

The benefit as a mother of belonging to Jack and Jill it that it provided me with a community or other Black mothers. Being a member also negated the wondering and feeling of rejection for my children. It is clear being in the organization that is filled with all kinds of people, not all rich, or even successful, there are just people who more than likely went to college, mostly teachers who may have married well (Barnes, 1979.) Moreover, Jack and Jill as an organization recognizes race, class, and Blackness as an identity is also inherited and even with a Black middle-class identity. I nor my children were able to escape the impact of race, gender, the U.S. caste system, and the systemic problems with the education system for her or her children (Steele, 1997; Wilkerson, 2020). This research is necessary and may be missing from the current scholarship of race, class, and gender in the education system.

Everything is Everything

The framing of intersectional identity along with the deeply rooted theory of CRT, allows for the researcher to notice in the suburban Midwest community, that class cannot and will not protect Black mothers from, racism or sexism. It affirms that tenant of CRT that racism is fixed and permanent (Bell, 1999). Moreover, that racism is in the system of education (Delgado & Stefancic, 1993; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). The

need to hear the experience of Black mothers as the counter narrative within the school system is the qualitative methodology to better understand the experience untold and the strategies necessary to navigate a system structure that was not build or engineered to support Black mothers or Black children. For this reason, this research was necessary to provide framing, narratives, and proof that class, education, and zip codes status cannot prevent racialized harm from Black children.

The politics of respectability in Black motherhood were palatable in the descriptive narratives of the mother was wearing to meet with a teacher or volunteer at the school (Cooper, 2005). As a Black mother, I should not have to worry about my attire to talk to a teacher. The violence or threat of racial harm or violence on my children included the duality of the politics of respectability (Cooper, 2005). The reality, my reality is that I could only navigate the system of education for my children, I could not protect them from the racism or sexism they encountered. I understood the trauma of racism within the system of education and attempted to guide and heal them from the ongoing experience of education (DeGruy, 2005).

The framing of the United States as a caste system allows the research to unfold the lived experience, not the interpretation of the lived experience to be discovered (Wilkerson, 2020). This framing with the blended understanding of CRT, allows the Black mothers to create a blueprint or road map for education. The knowledge informs Black mothers what is real, what is possible and what is important to remain whole, while navigating education for their children. My experience is not the experience of all Black mothers, even middle-class mothers, it is solely my own. This research provided me with

opportunity to tell the truth, that Black mothers love their children, I love my children and still school was a place I had to manage and teach them how to navigate the unwritten rules of education. Loving my children does not mean I was not scared for them or worried that I would not be successful in navigating the system for them. I was constantly worried, constantly thinking of ways to assist, instruct and guide my children through the system. Black motherhood is the role of an activist for her children while understanding the impact of trauma in systems (DeGruy, 2005). The navigation of education is a strategy for liberation within the space of education (Freire, 2000). Liberation is not just for me and my children it is for everyone. Black motherhood and liberation are intertwined with the end of oppression for all people.

Implications

The implication of this research is the presence of racism within the system of education experienced by a Black middle-class mother. The use of autoethnographic research is the use of narratives that explore, explain, and provide useful information that supports the lived experience of the researcher. The research also uncovers that the researcher's advanced college education and the advance degree of the father did not prevent racism, or sexism in the experience of the mother. Moreover, the class of the mother, even with support from a larger Black community could not provide cover from moments of systemic racism, shaming and humiliation from teachers and administrators or protection for her children in the education system.

As a mother of four children none of the researchers' children were able to escape racism within the system of education. Furthermore, the use of the autoethnographic

research from Black mother's allows the research to have an authentic voice from the insider's perspective. It is also a model for researchers to increase the number of voices, experiences and perspectives, Black mothers are not a monolithic group, and each experience holds value in better understanding the cultural capital (Yosso, 2005) that mothers and children bring to the classroom and the system of education. It is also possible that with more voices and counternarratives strategies for liberation, tools to navigate the education system and a design for an inclusive and more equitable system may be created.

Future Research

There is a need for more research and insider information and study in this area, the voices and experiences of Black mothers and their children. There is additional research needed to understand and compare the experiences of Black children mothered by White women, grandmothers, or other family. There is additional research needed from other Black middle-class mothers and working-class mothers to understand the connected experiences as Black women. There is additional research needed in understanding the role of the teacher and the relationship between the teacher and the mother in service of Black children.

More research is needed on the U.S. caste system and its role within the education system, as plantation modeled schooling, would allow for an effort and lens to end the oppression of Black children in schools (Jones, 2005). Additional research on specific grade levels of Black children and the experience of their mothers as children enter the education system. Additional research on Black motherhood and unplanned or

unexpected births, and their ability to parent and advocate for their child at school. Additional research on the marital status and the experience of Black mothers who are married and then divorced or separated while their children are in school. Additional research on Black mothers that are born outside of the United States and their ability to navigate the education system for their children.

This research did not include White, Hispanic/Latino mothers of Black children, further research on mothering Black children would be helpful to contextualize the experiences of Black children, their mother's racial status and socioeconomic standing. Although our lived experiences may differ as women, as mothers of Black children there may also be some similarities.

This research did not focus on Black father's experience within the education system. Although sometimes referenced as a witness in this research, it does not cover the experience or perceptions of Black fathers. There was not a malicious intent to exclude the father's experience rather an intent to capture the mother's experience as an insider and researcher.

Conclusion

This autoethnographic study allowed me to link the patterns and parts of my identity that led to my experiences. This includes the modeling of motherhood from my mother and her mother, along with the strategic navigation of schools for my children. It was a painful and important research project. It allowed me to pay homage and recognize the efforts and preparation of Black motherhood for me, and the generations to follow. It afforded me the opportunity to see the constructs of class, race, and gender as assigned

and important in the navigation of schools for my children. It allowed me to see to the calculated and sometimes successful strategies created for the survival and success of my children. It allowed me to see the delineation of my middle-class up bringing and status as a tool, rearing and practice within the system of education all while being a Black mother. It also allowed for me to see the layers of shame caught in the intersections of my identity as a Black middle-class mother (Harris-Perry, 2013).

The supporting scholarship utilized was affirmation of the systemic and institutionalized nature of racism, classism and sexism and affirmed my experiences as oppressive practices inflicted upon Black women (Roberts, 1997). It provided me with the scholarship and context of Black motherhood and the pressure to perform in White spaces for the resources within the education system. It reminded me of the grief, pain, worry and stress of being a Black mother in America. It allowed me to see the property rights of Whiteness within the entire system of education (Harris, 1993). It was a sobering reminder of the fallacy of power and control over the fate of my children and sometimes over my life. Yet, I remain hopeful.

I am hopeful that this research, stories, and examples shared will provide a context for other mothers, teachers, and children to see the truth of my love for my children, my wiliness to sacrifice and tenacity to navigate a system that was not designed for their success. I am hopeful, that like me other mothers will be successful and that the narratives provide, tips, tricks, and tools for navigating a hostile and biased education system. Personally, I was nervous to admit, write and include parts of this research. I believe that the truth cannot be seen if parts of the story are left out because of fear or

shame. I believe that liberation is possible, and it is only possible if Black mothers as activist are also truth tellers. It is in the sharing and telling of our truth that the power of oppression is lifted I am not defined by the events in my life as a woman or a mother, I am altered, impacted, and shaped by them. I am the sum of my experiences, and not the byproduct of them. I am not interested in responses of strong Black motherhood or magical connotations to surviving and thriving in spite of adversity. I am thankful for God's grace, my friends and family, none of my journey could be told without it. I am hopeful, that one day my children will read this and use it as a blueprint for their children. I am hopeful that schools will not be a place where Black mothers have to navigate, but a place where we gather, celebrate, and prepare our children for the big and bold and beautiful lives. Our children can be celebrated and not surveilled (Browne, 2015). I can honestly imagine Black mothers greeting teachers and Black children excited to go to school because it is a place of liberation.

References

Allen, D. S. (2014). *Our Declaration: A reading of the Declaration of Independence in defense of equality* (First edition.). Liveright Publishing Corporation, a division of W.W. Norton & Company.

Allen, Q., & White-Smith, K. (2017). "That's why I say stay in school": Black mothers' parental involvement, cultural wealth, and exclusion in their son's schooling. Urban Education, 0042085917714516.

Barnes, A. S. (1979). An Urban Black Voluntary Association. *Phylon (1960-)*, *40*(3), 264–269. https://doi.org/10.2307/274568

Bell, D. A. (1980). Brown v. Board of Education and the Interest-Convergence Dilemma. *Harvard Law Review*, *93*(3), 518–533. https://doi.org/10.2307/1340546

Bell, D. (1987). And we will not be saved: The elusive quest for racial justice. New York: Basic Books.

Bell, D. (1992). Faces at the bottom of the well: The permanence of racism. New York: Basic Books.

Bell, D. A. (1995). "Who's Afraid of Critical Race Theory?" *University of Illinois Law Review* 4: 893-910.

Bell, D. (1999). Beyond Property Rights, Journal of Law, and Policy New York University Law School.

Bernal, D. D. (2002). Critical Race Theory, Latino Critical Theory, and Critical Raced-Gendered Epistemologies: Recognizing Students of Color as Holders and Creators of Knowledge. *Qualitative Inquiry, 8*, 105 - 126.

Boylorn, R. M., & Orbe, M. P. (Eds.). (2020). Critical Autoethnography: Intersecting Cultural Identities in Everyday Life (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Browne, S. (2015). *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness*. Duke University Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv11cw89

Calmore, J. O. (1995). Racialized Space and the Culture of Segregation: "Hewing a Stone of Hope from a Mountain of Despair." University of Pennsylvania Law Review, 143(5), 1233–1273. https://doi.org/10.2307/3312475

Clifford, S., & Silver-Greenburg, J. (2017, July 21). Foster Care as Punishment: The New Reality of 'Jane Crow'. The New York Times.

Collins, P. H. (1993). Toward a New Vision: Race, Class, and Gender as Categories of Analysis and Connection. *Race, Sex & Class*, *1*(1), 25–45. http://www.jstor.org/stable/41680038

Collins, P. H. (1998). It's All in the Family: Intersections of Gender, Race, and Nation. *Hypatia*, *13*(3), 62–82. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3810699

Collins, P. H. (2015). Intersectionality's Definitional Dilemmas. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *41*, 1–20. http://www.jstor.org/stable/24807587

Collins, P. H., & Bilge, S. (2020). *Intersectionality* (2nd ed.). Polity Press.

Compton-Lilly, C., Ellison, T. L., & Rogers, R. (2019). The Promise of Family Literacy: Possibilities and Practices for Educators. *Language Arts*, *97*(1), 25–35. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26787637

Cooper, A. J. (1988). *A voice from the South. New York: Oxford University Press*

Cooper, B.C. (2015). 'Intersectionality', in L. Disch & M. Hawkesworth (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of feminist theory*, Oxford Handbooks, Oxford Academic, 6 Jan. 2015

Cooper, B. C. (2017). Beyond respectability: The intellectual thought of race women. University of Illinois Press.

Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory, and antiracist politics. University of Chicago Legal Forum, 1989, 139-167.

Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color. *Stanford Law Review*, *43*(6), 1241–1299. https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039

Crenshaw, K. (1995). Mapping the margins. *Critical race theory: The key writings that formed the movement*, 357-383.

Crenshaw, K. (1998). Playing race cards: Constructing a proactive defense of affirmative action. *Nat'l Black LJ*, 16 196.

Crenshaw, K., Neil G., Gary P., & Kendall T. (Eds.). (1995). *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement.* New York: The New Pres.

Crenshaw, K. W. (1994), "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color." In: Martha Albertson Fineman, Rixanne Mykitiuk, Eds. The Public Nature of Private Violence. New York: Routledge, p. 93-118.

Crenshaw, K. W. (2002). The First Decade: Critical Reflections, or “A Foot in the Closing Door.” In F. Valdes, J. M. Culp, & A. P. Harris (Eds.), *Crossroads, Directions and A New Critical Race Theory* (pp. 9–31). Temple University Press. http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt14bt00p.5

Davenport, S. T. (2019). "Constructing Black Mothers as Educational Leaders: A Source of Knowledge and Theory" (2019). Electronic Theses and Dissertations. 2509. https://digitalcommons.memphis.edu/etd/2509

DeGruy, J. A. (2005). Post traumatic slave syndrome: America’s legacy of enduring injury and healing. Milwaukie, Oregon: Uptone Press

Delgado, R. (1984). The imperial scholar: Reflections on a review of civil rights literature. University of Pennsylvania Law Review, 132, 561-578.

Delgado, R. (1989). Storytelling for oppositionists and others: A plea for narrative. Michigan Law Review, 87, 2411-2441.

Delgado, R. (1992). The imperial scholar revisited: How to marginalize outsider writing, ten years later. University of Pennsylvania Law Review, 140, 1349-1372.

Delgado, R. (Ed.). (1995). Critical race theory: The cutting edge. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (1993). Critical race theory: An annotated bibliography. Virginia Law Review, 79, 461-516.

DiAngelo, R. (2016). HOW RACE SHAPES THE LIVES OF WHITE PEOPLE. *Counterpoints*, *497*, 157–192. http://www.jstor.org/stable/45157303

Diamond, J. B., & Gomez, K. (2004). African American parents' educational orientations: The importance of social class and parents' perceptions of schools. *Education and Urban society*, *36*(4), 383-427.

Du Bois, W. E. B. (1968). The Autobiography of W. E. B. Du Bois: A Soliloquy on Viewing My Life from the Last Decade of Its First Century. New York, NY: International Publishers Co.

DuBois, W. E. B. (2008). The souls of Black folk: Essays and sketches (B. H. Edwards, Ed.). Oxford University Press.

Durkheim, E. (1897). On suicide. Translated by Robin Buss, with an introduction by Richard Sennett and notes by Alexander Riley. London: Penguin

Ellis, C., & Bochner, A. (2000). Autoethnography, personal narrative, reflexivity: Researcher as subject.

Ellis, C. (2004). *The ethnographic I: A methodological novel about autoethnography* (Vol. 13). Rowman Altamira. Ellis, C., Adams, T. E., & Bochner, A. P. (2011). Autoethnography: An Overview. *Historical Social Research / Historische Sozialforschung*, *36*(4 (138)), 273–290. http://www.jstor.org/stable/23032294

Ellis, C., & Adams, T. E. (2014). The purposes, practices, and principles of autoethnographic research.

Ender, T. (2019). Counter-narratives as resistance: Creating critical social studies. spaces with communities, The Journal of Social Studies Research, Volume 43, Issue 2, Pages 133-143, ISSN 0885-985X, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jssr.2018.11.002

Evans-Winters, V. (2019). Black feminism in qualitative Inquiry: A mosaic for writing our daughter's body. London: Routledge

Fine, G. A. (1993). Ten lies of ethnography: Moral dilemmas of field research. *Journal of contemporary ethnography*, *22*(3), 267-294.

Fernquist, R. M. (2004). "Does Single Motherhood Protect against Black Female Suicide?" Archives of Suicide Research 8(2):163–71

Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of freedom*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Fryer, R. G., & Levitt, S. D. (2004). The Causes and Consequences of Distinctively Black Names. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, *119*(3), 767–805. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25098702

Garcia Coll, C. T., Meyer, E. C., & Brillon, L. (1995). Ethnic and minority parenting.

Gaynor, T. S., Kang, S. C., & Williams, B. N. (2021). Segregated Spaces and Separated Races: The Relationship Between State-Sanctioned Violence, Place, and Black Identity. *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences*, *7*(1), 50–66. https://doi.org/10.7758/rsf.2021.7.1.04

Gibbs, W. E. (1984). James Weldon Johnson: A Black Perspective on "Big Stick" Diplomacy. *Diplomatic History*, *8*(4), 329–347. http://www.jstor.org/stable/44363810

Giddings, P. (1984). *When and where I enter: The impact of Black women on race and sex in America*. W. Morrow.

Giddings, P. (2009). *Ida: A Sword Among Lions* ([edition unavailable]). HarperCollins. Retrieved from https://www.perlego.com/book/586899/ida-a-sword-among-lions-pdf (Original work published 2009)

Graham, L. O. (1999, December 22). Our Kind of People. In *Inside America's Black Upper Class*. Harper Perennial. https://doi.org/10.1604/9780060984380

Guinier, L. (1991). The triumph of tokenism: The Voting Rights Act and the theory of Black electoral success. Michigan Law Review, 89, 1077

Guinier, L. (1994). The Tyranny of the majority: Fundamental Fairness in representative democracy. New York: The Free Press

Gunier, L., Heriot, G., & Moran, R. (2007). Panel Two: The Future of Affirmative Action in Higher Education.

Hannon, P. (1995). *Literacy, home and school: Research and practice in teaching literacy with parents*. London, England: Falmer Press

Harris, C. (1993). Whiteness as property. Harvard Law Review, 106 (8), 1707-1791.

Harris, A., & Leonardo, Z. (2018). Intersectionality, Race-Gender Subordination, and Education. *Review of Research in Education*, *42*, 1–27. http://www.jstor.org/stable/44668711

Harris-Perry, M. V. (2013). *Sister citizen: Shame, stereotypes, and Black women in America.* New Haven, Yale University Press.

Higginbotham, E. B. (1994). Righteous Discontent ([edition unavailable]). Harvard University Press. Retrieved from https://www.perlego.com/book/1812604/righteous-discontent-the-womens-

movement-in-the-black-baptist-church-18801920-pdf (Original work published 1994)

Hellawell, D. (2006). “Inside-out: Analysis of the insider-outsider concept as a heuristic device to develop reflexivity in students doing qualitative research.” *Teaching in Higher Education*, 11(4): 483-494.

Hooks, B. (1984). *Feminist Theory: From the Margins to the Center*. Boston: South End Press, 1984.

Horsford, S. D. (2014). When Race Enters the Room: Improving Leadership and Learning Through Racial Literacy. *Theory Into Practice*, *53*(2), 123–130. http://www.jstor.org/stable/43893922

Johnson, K. R., & Loscocco, K. (2015). Black Marriage Through the Prism of Gender, Race, and Class. *Journal of Black Studies*, *46*(2), 142–171. http://www.jstor.org/stable/24572942

Jones, B. A. (2005). Forces for Failure and Genocide: The Plantation Model of Urban Educational Policy Making in St. Louis, Educational Studies, 37:1,6-24, https://doi.org/10.1207/s1532699es37001.3

Kendi, I. (2016). Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America. New York: Nations Book.

Kipling, R. (1899). “The White Man’s Burden: The United States & The Philippine Islands, 1899.” *Rudyard Kipling’s Verse: Definitive Edition* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1929).

Kunjufu, J. (2006). *An African Centered Response to Ruby Payne*. African Amer Images.

Lacy, K. R. (2004). Black spaces, Black places: Strategic assimilation and identity construction in middle-class suburbia. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *27*(6), 908-930.

Lacy, K. R. (2007). Race- and class-based identities: Strategic assimilation in middle-class suburbia. In *Blue-chip Black: Race, class, and status in the new Black middle class* (1st ed., pp. 150–184). University of California Press. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1pp727.11

Lareau, A., & Horvat, E. M. (1999). Moments of social inclusion and exclusion: Race, class and cultural capital in family-school relationships. *Sociology of Education, 72*(1), 37–53.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1998). Just what is critical race theory and what's it doing in a nice field like education? *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 11*(1), 7-24. https://doi.org/10.1080/095183998236863

Ladson-Billings, G. J. (1999). Preparing teachers for diverse student populations: A critical race theory perspective. *Review of Research in Education, 24*, 211–247. https://doi.org/10.2307/1167271

Ladson-Billings, G. (2009). 'Who you callin' nappy-headed?' A critical race theory look at the construction of Black women. *Race Ethnicity and Education, 12*(1), 87-99. https://doi.org/10.1080/13613320802651012

Ladson-Billings, G. (2011). Asking the right questions. *Studying diversity in teacher education*, 385-398.

Ladson-Billings, G., & Tate, W. F. (1995). Toward a critical race theory of education. *Teachers College Record, 97*(1), 47-68.

Lawrence-Lightfoot, S. (2003). *The essential conversation: What parents and teachers can learn about each other*. Random House.

Love, B. L. (2019). *We want to do more than survive abolitionist teaching and the pursuit of educational freedom.* Beacon Press.

Nash, J. (2008). Re-thinking intersectionality. *Feminist Review, 89*(1), 1-15. https://doi.org/10.1057/fr.2008.4

Nash, J. (2021). Black maternal aesthetics: The making of a noncrisis style. In *Birthing Black mothers* (pp. 103-133). Duke University Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9781478021728-005

Martin, L. L. (2010). Strategic Assimilation or Creation of Symbolic Blackness: Middle-Blacks in Suburban Contexts. *Journal of African American Studies*, *14*(2), 234–246. http://www.jstor.org/stable/41819248

Matsuda, M. J. (1991). Beside My Sister, Facing the Enemy: Legal Theory out of Coalition. *Stanford Law Review*, *43*(6), 1183–1192. https://doi.org/10.2307/1229035

McDavid, J. W., & Harari, H. (1966). Stereotyping of Names and Popularity in Grade-School Children. *Child Development*, *37*(2), 453–459. https://doi.org/10.2307/1126818

Mea, M. (2017, December 7). *Black Mothers Are the Worst?* HuffPost. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/black-mothers-are-the-wor_b_4820530

Morris, J. (2008). Research, ideology, and the Brown decision: counter-narratives to the historical and contemporary representation of Black schooling. *Teachers College Record*, *110*(4), 713–732.

Murtadha, K., & Watts, D. M. (2005). Linking the Struggle for Education and Social Justice: Historical Perspectives of African American Leadership in Schools. Educational Administration Quarterly, 41(4), 591–608. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X04274271

Myrdal, G. (1944). An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy New York: Harper & Brothers.

Nash, J. C. (2018). The political life of Black motherhood. *Feminist Studies*, *44*(3), 699-712. https://doi.org/10.15767/feministstudies.44.3.0699

Nilson, J. (2010). Towards the "Beloved Community": The Church's Role in the Struggle Against Racism. *U.S. Catholic Historian*, *28*(1), 83–91. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40731256

Norwood, K. J. (2013). *Color matters: Skin tone bias and the myth of a postracial America*. Taylor & Francis.

Perry, R. P. (2003). Perceived (Academic) Control and Causal Thinking in Achievement Settings. *Canadian Psychology / Psychologie canadienne*, *44*(4), 312–331. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0086956

Pierce, C. (1970). Offensive mechanisms. *The Black seventies*, 265-282.

Roberts, D. (1997). *Killing the Black body: Race, reproduction, and the meaning of liberty*. Pantheon Books.

Rothstein, R. (2015). The making of Ferguson. *Journal of Affordable Housing & Community Development Law*, *24*(2), 165–204. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26408162

Russell, D. R. (1997). Rethinking Genre in School and Society: An Activity Theory Analysis. Written Communication, 14(4), 504–554. https://doi.org/10.1177/0741088397014004004

Solórzano, D. G. (1997). Images and words that wound: Critical race theory, racial. stereotyping, and teacher education. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, *24*, 5-19.

Solórzano, D. G., & Villalpando, O. (1998). Critical race theory, marginality, and the experience of minority students in higher education. In C. Torres & T. Mitchell (Eds.), *Emerging issues in the sociology of education: Comparative perspectives* (pp. 211-224). State University of New York Press.

Solórzano, D. G., & Yosso, T. J. (2002). Critical Race Methodology: Counter-Storytelling as an Analytical Framework for Education Research. Qualitative Inquiry, 8(1), 23–44. https://doi.org/10.1177/107780040200800103

Stack, C. B. (1993). Writing Ethnography: Feminist Critical Practice. *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, *13*(3), 77–89. https://doi.org/10.2307/3346744

Stack, C. B. (1997). *All our kin: Strategies for survival in a black community*. Basic Books

Steele, C. M. (1997). A threat in the air: How stereotypes shape intellectual identity and performance. *American Psychologist*, *52*(6), 613–629. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.52.6.613Stewart, J.-A. L., & Segalowitz,

S. J. (1991). Differences in the Given Names of Good and Poor Readers. *Canadian Journal of Education / Revue Canadienne de l'éducation*, *16*(1), 103–105. https://doi.org/10.2307/1495221

Tate, W. F. (1997). Critical Race Theory and Education: History, Theory, and Implications. *Review of Research in Education, 22*, 195–247. https://doi.org/10.2307/1167376

Tatum, B. (1997). Why are all the Black kids sitting together in the cafeteria? And other conversation about race. New York: Basic Books.

Tyler, D. (2017). Jim Crow's Disabilities: Racial Injury, Immobility, and the "Terrible Handicap" in the Literature of James Weldon Johnson. *African American Review*, *50*(2), 185–201. http://www.jstor.org/stable/26444068

Utter, E. (2021, November 8). A critique of CRT, American Thinker A critique of Critical Race Theory - American Thinker

Valencia, R. (Ed.). (1997). The evolution of deficit thinking in educational thought and practice. New York: Falmer.

Valencia, R., & Solórzano, D. (1997). Contemporary deficit thinking. In R. Valencia (Ed.), The evolution of deficit thinking in educational thought and practice (pp. 160-210). New York: Falmer.

Walker, V. S. (2015). The 2014 Charles H. Thompson Lecture-Colloquium Presentation. School "Outer-gration" and "Tokenism": Segregated Black Educators Critique the Promise of Education Reform in the Civil Rights Act of 1964. *The Journal of*

Negro Education, *84*(2), 111–124. https://doi.org/10.7709/jnegroeducation.84.2.0111

West, C., Crenshaw, K., Gotanda, N., Peller, G., & Thomas, K. (1995). *Critical race theory: The key writings that formed the movement*. The New Press.

Wilderson, F. B. (2003). The Prison Slave as Hegemony's (Silent) Scandal. *Social Justice*, *30*(2 (92), 18–27. http://www.jstor.org/stable/29768181

Wilkerson, I. (2020). Caste. Allen Lane

Woodard, J., & Mastin, T. (2005). Black womanhood: essence and its treatment of stereotypical images of Black women. *Journal of Black Studies*, *36*(2), 264–281.

Woodson, C. G. (1933). *The mis-education of the Negro*. ReadaClassic.com.

Yosso, T. J. (2005) Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth, Race Ethnicity and Education, 8:1, 69-91. https://doi.org/10.1080/1361332052000341006