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# Determined To Make A Difference: A Critical Autobiography Of An African American Male Principal In The Deep South

## Abstract

### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this critical autobiography study was to examine how my educational experiences have made me into the man and educational leader I am today. As an African American Male, raised and educated in rural East Texas, this research study allowed me to examine my life experiences as an African American youth, teacher-coach, principal, husband, father, and scholar-practitioner. In the autobiographical narrative, I speak in my native dialect of African American Vernacular English, using my voice to share my lived experiences with the reader.

I utilized Critical Race Theory (CRT) as the lens to guide my methodology. Using CRT, the constructs of race, power, and the marginalized stereotype of the African American Male are interwoven and underscore my stories of overcoming barriers and achieving success as a husband, father, public school principal and preacher. Racism is systemic in today's U.S. culture. Racism is embedded into social institutions, including schools, and racism continues to oppress marginalized people. However, through my stories of perseverance, I hope to overshadow racism, erase the deficit mindset toward African American males, and give all marginalized people hope.

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **Introduction**

#### **Background**

School and Education did not start out being my main priority when I started school. To be quite honest when I started kindergarten I really did not have any major interest. I started kindergarten at Trout Elementary School in Lufkin, Texas. And I really was not excited at or upset about starting school. I was just told that it was mandated that I start school, because I had just turned five years of age. When I started school in the early eighties there was no Pre-K class at that time, which I feel now would have been beneficial for a student like me coming from a low-income family.

At this time in my life I stayed with my Aunt in Lufkin, Texas. And I stayed with my Aunt, because my Uncle and Aunt had all girls at this time in their marriage. They both wanted to have a boy. However, at that point and time in their marriage they were not successful in having a boy.

My Uncle and Aunt had four girls at that particular time. And it seems like every time my Aunt had a baby it was going to be a girl. So, that is how I ended up staying with my aunt and ended up going to school with my four other cousins. I really enjoyed

staying with my Uncle and Aunt at this time in my life. As a matter of fact, my Uncle and Aunt were more like parents to me, than just my Uncle and Aunt.

But as I started Kindergarten I realized how important education was to my Uncle and Aunt. They really pushed education with their girls that they were raising. And if I was going to be staying with them, and once again be treated like their own. Education was going to become a priority with me.

Narrative inquiry is a practice in Social Science that may seem practically new to researchers. However, individuals and humans have been telling their stories and experiences for years. These lived and told stories and talk about those stories are ways we create meaning in our lives as well as ways we enlist each other's help in building our lives and communities (Clandinin, 2006). But the emphasis and the urgency of narrative methodologies in social science and research has created a trend that is strong today in educational research settings.

Earlier, Connelly and Clandinin (1990) commented on this narrative revolution and wrote that, "although the idea of narrative inquiry as research methodology is new to the social sciences, it has intellectual roots in the humanities and other fields under the broad heading of narratology" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 10). As narrative inquirers, we look back on the rich meanings of the term 'narrative' and 'narrative inquiry' (Clandinin, 2006). These two relationships are intertwining stories in certain ways that narrative research is emerging in social science. In order, for humans to tell their experiences is an astonishing privilege. Especially, if the experiences can have a great impact on a person's life. As Connelly and Clandinin (1990) pointed out:

It is equally correct to say, “inquiry into narrative” as it is “narrative inquiry”. By this we mean that narrative is both phenomenon and method. Narrative names the structured quality of experience to be studied, and it names the pattern of inquiry for it study... Thus, we say that people by nature lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives, whereas narrative researchers describe such lives, collect and tell stories of them, and write narratives of experience. (p. 2)

The concept of experience as a way of thinking is becoming increasingly apparent in narrative methodologies in research. Kohler Riessman and Speedy (2006) hinted that:

Beginning in the late 1960’s and continuing at a hectic pace, the idea of narrative has penetrated almost every discipline and school. No longer the sole province of literary scholarship, narrative study is now cross-disciplinary, not fitting within the boundaries of any single scholarly field. (pp. 426-427)

Further they noted that while “narrative inquiry in the human sciences is a 20<sup>th</sup> century development, the field has ‘realist’, ‘modernist’, ‘postmodern’ and constructionist strands, and scholars disagree on origins and precise definition” (Kohler Riessman & Speedy, 2006, p. 428).

There is no doubt that human beings need the freedom to tell stories, so they can bring about liberation within the selves. Connelly and Clandinin (1990, 2006) observed that arguments for the development and use of narrative inquiry are inspired by a view of human experience in which humans, individually and socially, lead storied lives.

People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal

through which a person enters the world and by which their experiences of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. Narrative inquiry as methodology entails a view of the phenomenon. To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular view of experience as phenomenon under study. (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 479)

Autobiographical stories are more than personal narratives (Walker, 2017).

Author Thomas King wrote in his book *The Truth About Stories*:

Once a story is told, it cannot be called back. Once told, it is loose in the world. So, you have to be careful with the stories that you tell. And you have to watch out for the stories that you are told (King, 2003, p. 10).

However, DeGloma (2010) stated that when viewed as a source of data, autobiographical narratives situate reflexivity with contexts of cultural setting. Anthony Walker (2017) in an article entitled “Critical Autobiography as Research” argued that autobiography is a viable methodology of research. Anthony Walker (2017) further emphasized this argument by emphasizing that narrative inquiry and the paradigm of critical research offer important contributions to research.

There is no doubt that over the years there have been questions about the creditability of autobiographical research in scholarship. Also, there have been questions from many scholars about critical autobiography as research. Nevertheless, the use of research and theoretical frameworks, combined with the reflective analyses, provide the

platform to implemented data-informed decision making into practice for the purpose of improving personal practice and impacting change (Walker, 2017).

The experiences and the stories that are told in research need to be told with dependability and steadfastness. As researchers we are not just obligated to fill out forms for research boards. We are equally obligated to tell the truth to initiate change for individuals. Anthony Walker (2017) stated that critical autobiography carries the burden of much concern and debate regarding its ethical use as a research methodology. King brought home reality when it comes down to narrative inquiry and autobiographies and ethics by stating:

Perhaps we shouldn't be displeased with the 'environmental ethics' we have or the "business ethics' or the 'political ethics' or any of the myriad of other codes of conduct suggested by our actions. After all, we created them. We've created the stories that allow them to exist and flourish....Want a different ethic? Tell a different story. (King, 2003, pp. 164-165)

Using critical inquiry to analyze the narrative data allows researchers to communicate findings through illustrations of events and key moments rather than merely telling (Creswell, 2007; Ellingson, 2009). Clandinin & Connelly, (2000) further stated the point that in the narrative paradigm of research, data includes both personal and social contexts; connections to the past, present and future; and situations linking various places, physical and non-physical represented in the storyteller's space. Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2009), defined narrative inquiry as "the study of how different humans

experience the world around them, and ... allows people to tell the stories of their storied lives” (p.384).

Narrative, represented through any form of written or spoken discourse (Polkinghorne, 1988) is diverse in design; however, even with its flexibility, narrative research shares links to six core elements: (1) storytelling, (2) process and movement, (3) interrelations within contexts, (4) engagement and decision making from participant (s), (5) cohesiveness in a central them, and (6) chronology of events represents in narratives (Neuman, 2006). However, even with these six elements in narrative research, there are still questions and skeptics about Critical Autobiographies and reliable research.

Bias is an inherent attribute present in all thought and perceptions (Peshkin, 2001). Walker stated (2017) that analyses of reflective memories and narrative are also biased. In turn, as Godfrey (2003) indicated, autobiographies must acknowledge that one’s thoughts and writings are never free from influence but are, at all times, explanatory in nature. Similar to other methodological approaches, critical autobiographical research, while reflective of a single researcher’s thoughts and perspectives are not free from bias (Walker, 2017). Also, given the role of researcher as participant, autobiographical research can be subject to bias due to various influences and the researcher’s philosophy. (Anderson, 2001). When it comes down to research there has to be some level of trust in the researcher. So, subjectivity needs and demand importance in narratives. And as a methodology, Mercer (2007) cautioned that autobiographical research is void of an established standard of safeguards that assist in assuring that ethical practices are followed.



The issue of credibility has long been a concern in narrative inquiry. It is impossible that an autobiographical narrative of lived experiences is free from bias and subjectivity in research (Usher, 1996). Qualitative researchers address issues of trustworthiness by tending to issues of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of their studies and findings” (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009, p. 375).

### **Statement of the Problem**

According to Black Lives Matter, a 50-state report on the public education of African American Males, African-American Male students “were at the bottom of four-year high school graduation rates in 35 of the 48 states and the District of Columbia” (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2015, p. 2; Walley, 2018).

Furthermore, less than half of African-American male students graduate on time, and they are three times more likely to be expelled or suspended from school than their Caucasian peers (2025 Campaign for Black Men and Boys, 2010; Walley, 2018).

African American students have fallen behind their counterparts when it comes to academics.

Studies have shown a drastic drop in the performance of African American Male students. In a head-to-head comparison of data between African-American students and Caucasian students for the Smarter Balanced Mathematics assessment (Walley, 2018), Walley stated Caucasian students scored over 30 % higher than African-American students in all tested grades except for grade eleven where the gap was still over 20%.

However, not only have African Americans struggled with maintaining the same academic success as the Caucasian counterpart, African American Males have lacked

success in maintaining the same success as the Caucasian Male in career advancements. especially in the field of education. African American males have had to face many barriers and tasks in receiving jobs in the field of education. The job of administrator has been a sought-after job for men of color. However, it has been a job hard to obtain.

African American males are underrepresented in K-12 Education (Johnson, 2018). Some African American males have the ability to overcome adversity, discrimination, and racism (Johnson, 2018). Reviewing a large body of research, Johnson (2018) showed that while research more often focuses on the failure of many African American males in Administration, there is data that demonstrates how some African American males have overcome the adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or significant sources of stress, to become great leaders. African Americans can show determination to over all the obstacles. But it takes resilience and determination. This study offers an opportunity to examine my life experiences as an African American male along with the obstacles stereotypes that I faced to become an Assistant Principal, Associate Principal, and Principal in rural East Texas.

### **Purpose of Statement**

Ever since I had been in high school I knew what I wanted to be. I knew that I wanted to be a school principal. One of my principals had a great influence on me when I was in school. My principal, Mr. Burley was the first African American man that I saw who wore a suit every day. Mr. Burley was the male that I wanted to be like in high school. Mr. Burley played college football and professional football in Canada. Mr. Brown was also very easy to talk to. He always carried himself very well and

professionally. He was just a great role model for me in high school. You could talk to him about all aspects of life. And he would take time and talk with you. To be frank, a lot of our conversations took place in the weight room after school. Mr. Burley, although retired from professional football, was a constant stay in the weight room. So, when he came to the weight room I would spot him while he lifted weights and vice versa. He was also married and had three sons at the time. They were all elementary students in Lufkin at that time.

However, just seeing how positive he was about school and education really lit a fire under me that was already starting to burn. And I made up my mind I wanted to be just like Mr. Burley who was my principal at that time. I wanted to come back to Lufkin, Texas, once I got my degree and be a principal right here at my alma mater. I wanted to make a difference in a student's life just like Mr. Burley made in my life. He really encouraged me to get my education because professional football is not a guarantee for every athlete. He told me that his parents always talked education in their home. As a matter of fact, his mom had been a longtime school board member on the school board in Lufkin, Texas.

I knew that the task of being an African American principal in East Texas was a major accomplishment for Mr. Burley. Because I just did not see that many African American teachers in my school district at all at that time, nor did I have one African American principal. But I said if Mr. Burley touched my life, I would like to do the same for students, in my hometown. I would like to come back someday and be a principal right there in my hometown. But I noticed that Mr. Burley was only dealing with student

discipline and attendance. I would often ask him did he have any aspirations of being a head principal. And he told me yes. Actually told me his aspiration was to be a school superintendent. So, I really was impressed with Mr. Burley wanting to be a school superintendent. However, he told me that he was going to have to continue his education he felt to get to that level. Mr. Burley told me was going to go back to school to get his Doctoral degree. That was the first time I ever heard of an African American male going back to get their Ph.D. or Ed.D.

Like Mr. Burley, I would like to be an inspiration to African American males to get into education, to teach, and to become an administrator in Texas. Society needs more African American males in education who will be role models for children of color. I hope that my experiences and by sharing my story, I will influence other men of color to seek to become administrators in public schools. The dream has not been easy; however, the impact of touching African American male student lives has been powerful. And I am hoping my story will influence African American male counterparts to become public school administrators, where they can touch many lives every day.

### **Research Questions**

I have decided to focus my critical autobiographical research on two questions in my research. These particular questions are very important to me because of past and present experiences in my life. These experiences have helped me become the administrator that I am today.

1. How have my experiences growing up in deep East Texas contributed to the leader that I am today?

2. How have my experiences in deep East Texas made me into the person I am today?

My years growing up and going to grammar school in East Texas really influenced me as an administrator and a person. Having to overcome obstacles and trials throughout my journey has shaped and molded me into the person and the administrator that I am today. I have definitely learned a lot by being in the doctoral program today. The doctoral program has definitely gotten me to the point of thinking outside the box. However, my experiences from elementary school through high school were the reason that ignited me to want to be a school principal at a very early age. The impact that my elementary principal had in my life along with my high school principal and a great teacher, Ms. Powers, really changed the course of my life.

In a time during my life as an elementary student when nobody else wanted to teach me due to bad choices, Ms. Powers stated, “put Derrick James in my class and I will teach him.” The discipline and the love that Mrs. Powers showed me in the classroom was a vital part to my turnaround as student. Mr. Burley, my principal, was also great role model for me. In this critical autobiographical study, I have described and deeply examined selected events that shaped and molded me into the leader that I am today through a lens of Critical Race Theory. Consistent with Critical Race Theory, I speak in my native dialect (African American Vernacular English) in the autobiographical narrative. I use my voice to share my lived experiences with the reader.

## Definitions

Here are several conceptual definitions that are presented in the study. An understanding of the conceptual definitions is integral in understanding this critical autobiographical study.

**Oppression.** Oppression is a multidimensional imbalance of social, political, and institutional power that spans history and is taken for granted by most people in the society, particularly by those whom the oppression benefits (DiAngelo, 2016 p. 62).

**Colorblind Racism.** Pretending that we don't notice race or that race has no meaning. This pretense denies racism and this holds it in place (DiAngelo, 2016 p. 130)

**Critical Race Theory (CRT).** Critical race theory (CRT) is a theoretical framework in the social sciences that uses *critical theory* to examine society and culture as they relate to categorizations of *race*, law, and power (Lynn and Dixson, 2013).

**Minority Group.** Minority or subordinate group is a sociological group that does not constitute a politically dominant plurality of the total population of a given society. A sociological minority is not necessarily a numerical minority – it may include any group that is disadvantaged with respect to a dominant group in terms of social status, education, employment, wealth and political power (DiAngelo, 2016, p.61).

**Race.** The false concept that superficial adaptations to geography (skin tone, eye shape) are genetic and biological determinants result in significant differences among groups of human beings (DiAngelo, 2016 p. 102).

**Racism.** Racism is a historical, social, cultural, political, and institutional relationship between white people and people of color. This relationship is built into the

very fabric of society. No one who resides in society is outside this relationship (DiAngelo, 2016, p. 191).

**Stereotype.** Stereotypes are beliefs about the characteristics, attributes, and behaviors of members of certain groups that result in the creation of theories about how and why certain attributes go together (Hilton & von Hippel, 1996).

### **Significance of the Research**

The large gap in the perception of the achievement of African American males and males in other ethnic groups exists before they start school and continues throughout their lifespan (Policy Evaluation and Research Center, 2011). The nation's leaders are failing young African American boys across the country more than any other ethnic group (Policy Evaluation and Research Center, 2011). Schools have become holding tanks for young African American boys, who walk the school hallways similar to walking the hallways of jails (Jackson, 2018, p. 10). The differences in African American boys and other males in other ethnic groups stand out drastically. Especially when it comes to looking at the academic gains of African American boys with other ethnicities or by gender.

The writing of this autobiography and my experiences will allow other young African American boys and men to see that they can achieve academically in a democratic society. By writing my experiences in my own voice, I hope to give African American males will hope and insight to overcome their circumstances, however unfortunate. The narratives collectively offer insight into elements of my childhood, as guided by Prager (2011): (a) family, (b) early childhood environment, (c) poverty, (d)

parents' education, (e) single family life, (f) parenting style, (g) home environment, (h) nutrition, (i) health (j) neighborhood, (k) violence, and (l) social interaction (s) (p. 10).

Narrative was the vehicle used to relay my educational experiences to expose any discriminatory and marginalizing practices (Solorzano & Yosso, 2009). A narrative is defined "... as spoken or written text giving an account of an event/action or series of event/actions, chronologically connected..." (Creswell, 2007, p. 54). Emphasized by Maynes, Pierce, and Laslett (2008), it is important to recognize that autobiographical stories are more than personal testimonies from the narrator, they are attestations of rules, principles, and norms that govern learning and logic (p.3).

Also, utilizing data constructed from autobiographical memory, in this study, I used narratives to tell my story and experiences with an emphasis on Critical Race Theory (CRT). I utilized CRT to examine structures of power, race, and marginalization as elements within critical autobiographical study.

The experiences and findings gained from this study can be used to provide hope to African American males that there is hope for a better future. The findings may also be used to encourage along with the duty to be mentors and role models for African American males come after them. This critical autobiographical narrative study, with a CRT lens, offers a counter narrative and looks into educational practices in hopes of disrupting policy and practices that continue to hinder the academic success of students of color (Martin, 2015, p. 18). Kafele (2012) theorized for Black males to excel in school, they need role models and dreams. So, it is my hope that this critical autobiography will



provide evidence that African American males can overcome societal structures that are embedded to dehumanize the African American male.

### **Organization of the Study**

Chapter I of the study provided an overview of the study as a critical autobiography in which I retell and examine my life experiences as an African American male with a critical race emphasis. In Chapter I, I examined the background of the problem, that is, the lack of positive representation of African American males in United States of America. I further explained that the emphasis of conducting autobiographical research is to tell those stories and narratives, which can have tremendous influence on society. Chapter II presents a discussion and illustration of Critical Race Theory (CRT) that will serve as a lens through which I narrate my life experiences and stories. Critical race theory is introduced in this chapter in relation to other relevant literature on educational leadership, racism in schools, and stereotypes and myths of African American males in America.

Chapter III presents the methodology of this study. Data collection and analysis are discussed as related to conducting a critical autobiographical study. Chapter IV contains the autobiographical narrative, in which I, as the researcher, portray and explore the experiences that shaped my life. In Chapter V, I further explore the lessons in an analysis of narratives grounded in CRT. In the final chapter, Chapter VI, I offer a summary of the study with conclusions, implications, and recommendations for practice and future research.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **Review of Literature**

#### **Introduction**

This information in this chapter offers an overview of the research and literature engraved in this scholastic study. I utilize Critical Race Theory, fathered by Derrick Bell, to give understanding to this study. In this chapter, I review key elements of critical race theory and education and the use of critical autobiographies for educational research. I also review the work of Paulo Freire in critical pedagogy. I examine historical and persistent stereotypes and myths about the African American male in the US, the evolution of the school principal and equality in leadership against the constructs of new racism, oppression, and the recruitment of African American males as administrators in schools today. The particular study as told by the researcher is to give hope to African American Males who want to become principals and give hope to marginalized individuals who want to become administrators, particularly in the Deep South.

#### **Critical Theory**

“Another world is possible.” This slogan expresses a conviction that motivated the project of a “critical theory of society” as developed by the members of the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research, founded in Frankfurt, Germany, in the early decades of the

twentieth century (Wellmer, 2014). Max Horkheimer, a German philosopher and sociologist, became famous for his work with Critical Theory (Wellmer, 2014). Critical Theory emerged through collaboration among philosophers, economists, and psychoanalysts whose goal was to “transform” this critique into a critical theory of society that would be adequate for the social and historical constellation that existed after the cold war (Wellmer, 2014).

At the Frankfurt School, Horkheimer initiated the study of Marxism. His work is credited as transforming the Frankfurt School into one of the best schools for Critical Social Research during his time at the institution. Horkheimer founded Critical Theory by looking at his own wealth while witnessing poverty during his life. He tried to revamp Critical Theory to better deal with poverty in society. Critical Theory, in Max Horkheimer’s mind, should be used establish truth, freedom and justification in society and life (Wellmer, 2014.)

Critical theory, in philosophy, has been widely used to focus human attention to issues of power and its impacts on society (Walker, 2013). Critical theory has been associated with changing society as a whole and examining society to bring about change and social reform. Kincheloe (2007) discussed, that critical theory is concerned with how domination takes place, in workplace, schools and everyday life.

Critical theory, as a philosophy, supports eliminating societal dominance and increasing social reforms in society. Critical theory has been used by philosophers to address social issues in society. Within this narrow frame of philosophy, critical theory designates many philosophers and social theorists. It has not only been linked to Max

Horkheimer, but to Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Leo Lowenthal, and social theorist Erich Fromm. Also, Pierre Bourdieu, Louis Althusser, Micheal Foucault, Bryan Reynolds, and many other feminist theorists (Wellmer, 2014.)

In the broad sense, critical theory has been known to philosophers and scholar practitioners as having more than one meaning in research. For some, critical theory is focused on liberation for all social groups in society (Freire, 1970). In activism and advocacy, research that is guided by critical theory “seeks to contest acts that allow for the maintenance of systemic oppression while working to initiate transformational, revolutionary change” (Walker, 2013, p. 40). Essentially, critical theory is used by philosophers, doctoral students, researchers, and scholar practitioners to bring about an equal playing field for people of all social classes, genders, and even taking effect in education of students in society (Delgado, 1995).

Critical theory has two original meanings: the first one is related to political philosophy and sociology and the second, focuses upon literary studies and literary theory. When using critical theory in research, the ethical issues that the researcher has to be concerned with include making sure that they have the permission to write the research along with using the information with integrity and not revealing who the participants are. The researcher also has the freedom in conducting research with critical theory to use a qualitative, quantitative, or mixed method when conducting research using the critical lens or critical theory research. The researcher may gather and analyze the data, achieving triangulation through interviewing, recording, and videoing and using a critical lens as the researcher. When it comes down to critical theory applied to

educational research, the questions that may be asked involve questions about power relationships, conflict and tension, inequality, and social relations.

**What critical theory describes.** In the world of sociology and political philosophy, critical theory describes Neo-Marxist thought, which originated from the Frankfurt School of Germany. One of critical theory's enduring concerns is to understand how power operates at both a macro and micro level (Brookfield, 2014). Neo Marxism comes under a larger framework in describing social inequality, status and power in society. Marx and Engels initially framed this as the study of how the dominant class exercised its power to universalize its own ideology so that it became the "common sense" of the day (Brookfield, 2014). In Neo-Marxism, the whole purpose of power is that the oppressor is willing to oppress to stay in the dominate position for capitalism.

**Critical theory in today's society.** In today's 21<sup>st</sup> century society, critical theory is used to address a variety of topics and interest in society today. Critical theory is part of schooling, politics, economy, culture, society, and education for all people. Historically, critical theory was about establishing and building a liberal society built on a foundation of equal justice for all social groups in the world. However, in a country supposed to be grounded in democracy and built upon the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, oppression is still alive and well in the United States (DiAngelo, 2016).

For example, every person working in Human Resource development sooner or later comes up against an organizational abuse of power exercised to stop difficult but necessary questions being asked (Brookfield, 2014). Everyone has found themselves in counterfeit meetings, and everyone has probably seen, experienced, and / or perpetrated,

macroaggressions (Brookfield, 2014). Brookfield (2014) elaborated upon critical theory and the ways it provides a highly utilitarian set of analytical tools to help us make sense of what is going on and to convince us that we are not going crazy.

**Critical Race Theory (CRT).** Contemporary critical race theory scholar's position is that racism is embedded in the fibers of American society and is therefore a normal fact of daily life (Anderson, 2009). Critical race theory (CRT) is based upon assumptions about people's appearance and biases concerning their race (Anderson, 2009). Also, critical race theory is grounded in achieving social justice and equality in society for people of color. The history and roots of critical race theory is often found in early writings of inequality. The first meeting occurred in the summer of 1989 in Madison, Wisconsin (Lynn & Dixson, 2013). Twenty-three legal scholars of color met for a weeklong workshop (Lynn & Dixson, 2013). All of the law professors who met at the original CRT workshop taught in predominately white law schools and most them were among the first persons of color hired to teach at their respective institutions (Lynn & Dixson, 2013).

As with any intellectual movement, CRT was born out of the confluence of historical development of the time and the need to respond to those developments (Lynn & Dixson, 2013). With the development of human beings who were being marginalized, CRT moved to the forefront in America. CRT starts with the premise of racism being present in every aspect of US American culture (Martin, 2015). Anderson (2009) stated that racism is rooted in the American psyche that continues to be duplicated in society. The overarching goal of CRT is to illuminate the role of racism in creating injustices to

eradicate it with a system (Lynn & Dixson, 2013). Finally, another aspect of CRT is to reveal that “the conceptions of racism and racial subordination as understood by traditional legal discourse are neither neutral nor sufficient to overcome the effects of centuries of racial oppression on people of color” (Lynn & Dixson, 2013, p. 42).

### **Critical Race Theory and Education**

The term “social justice” is rarely defined in the field of education (Lynn & Dixson, 2013) Most published readings do not have a clear definition on social justice in readings. Perhaps because there are multiple components of social justice, scholars shy away from a full articulation of its meaning (Lynn & Dixson, 2013). Lynn and Dixson (2013) stated that many scholars use John Rawls’s (1972) articulation of social justice to bind the terminology to issues of access and equity. Its use by Lynn and Dixson (2013) is to eradicate injustice based on systemic inequalities.

Since Donald Trump became president, once again race has risen to the forefront in education. Concepts such as systemic racism and implicit bias previously restricted to academic discourse now are featured in public discourse, like in the Presidential campaign of 2016 (Warren, 2017). The presence of public conversations on race provides new opportunities for racial equity initiatives in education and beyond (Warren, 2017).

Derrick Bell, considered the father of CRT, was definitely concerned for this type of reaction in society. Bell developed the concept of interest convergence as part of a larger critical race theory that sought to expose the systemic nature of oppression faced

by African Americans in the United States and offer a framework to advance to the fight of racial justice (Warren, 2017).

Bell emphasized that the civil rights movement did little to advance people of color. Critical Race scholars, like Bell, also expressed major concerns with educational policies (Lynn & Dixson, 2013). Derrick Bell emphasized interest convergence for examining social justice in education policy. Richard Milner (2008) further added that Derrick Bell's concept of interest convergence can be used to analyze, explain, and conceptualize policies and practice in education.

Edward Taylor (1998) summarized the concept of interest convergence as follows, "The interests of blacks in achieving racial equality have been accommodated only when they have converged with the interests of powerful white" (p. 123). Interest convergence points to the politics involved in social change and- most importantly-the concept highlights the uncertain nature of even the most impressive-looking victories (Lynn & Dixson, 2013).

Critical race theory begins with the notion that racism is normal in American society (Ladson-Billing, 1989). It departs from mainstream legal scholarship by sometimes employing storytelling (Ladson-Billing, 1989). Also, critical theory critiques liberalism and examines how white benefit from civil rights legislation (Ladson-Billing, 1989). Thus, CRT provides a critical lens for provide an understanding of education inequality and oppression in the classroom.



In education when most people think of “policy,” they probably have in mind some explicit statement of government intent, such as a landmark political speech or a formal piece of legislation (Lynn & Dixson, 2013). Lynn and Dixson (2013), stated:

John Ball’s observation are especially pertinent in the field of race and education, where policies are constantly contested and the passing of legislation is neither the start nor the end of the process by which policy influences the everyday experiences and life chances of racially marginalized students and their families. (p. 130)

CRT is not viewed as a mechanism that delivers progressively greater degrees of equity but as a process that is shaped by the interest of the dominant white population, a situation where genuine progress is won through political protest and where apparent gains are quickly cut back (Lynn & Dixson, 2013).

Also, Lynn and Dixson (2013) warned

when calls for change become so great as to threaten the stability of the system, then (temporarily at least) the interests of White majority are seen to converge with those of the protesting minority group and certain concessions may be granted. However, once the apparent contradiction between rhetoric and reality has been addressed, then the real-world impacts of the changes are reined in or removed completely. (p. 158)

### **Paulo Freire and the Classroom (Critical Pedagogy)**

Paulo worked for liberation in education to establish a learning culture where dialogue was involved amongst the teacher and the student. Both could enjoy the

freedom of learning together and from one another. However, when it comes down to this democratic approach, society and teachers are still having trouble with this liberation approach. Freire (2000) explained, “In the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing” (p. 72).

The student in the process of the banking system is oppressed like the slave in a justification of treating the individual or student like they are ignorant. However, unlike an individual or a slave that is oppressed students never have opportunity to discover the educated teacher. “The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world” (Freire, 2000, p. 73).

### **Critical Autobiographies in Research**

One of the most fundamental approaches to data gathering in organizational research involves listening to the stories people tell about their lives (Pentland, 1999; Soin & Scheytt, 2006). Autobiographies are great in displaying experiences of the lives of the researcher. Through them, individuals can convey a wide range of information to others, including notions of who they are, how they see the world, why they made decisions, and what actions they believe led to their success (Mathias & Smith, 2016).

When autobiographies are used in research, they provide information into how researchers perceive the world through their own experiences. Autobiographies reveal intimate details from an individual’s life and offer scholars unique opportunities simply not available from another single source to examine another person’s perspective (Smith

& Watson, 2010). Recently, there is greater encouragement in the world of social science research to use autobiographies to narrate experiences in a world that has not established what equality looks like in a democratic society. The world of research is yearning for autobiographies to flourish in a world that continues to strive to become democratic in the classroom, and in the world that has still has not established and implemented democracy like the forefathers wanted when they established the constitution.

### **Race and Education**

Education has always played a role in the African American family. To the African-American, there has traditionally been a belief that education is the release to oppression in society. Alridge and Franklin (2009) stated the history of African-descended people is one aggressively pursuing quality education and schooling to improve their social, economic, and political conditions in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles. Prior to Emancipation and at the end of the Civil War, African Americans sought to improve their status by gaining an education and by starting their own schools, even when it was illegal or dangerous to do so (Alridge & Franklin, 2009). African Americans sought to control, develop, and operate all educational organizations throughout 20<sup>th</sup> century.

From the 1930s to the 1950's, Horace Mann Bond was a prominent historian of African American education who also believed that the study of history was key to understanding contemporary educational issues facing African Americans (Alridge, and Franklin, 2009). In the 1970s and 1980s, education for African Americans continued to flourish during this time. For example, in the late 1970s, in the aftermath of the Civil

Rights Movement, V.P. Franklin and James D. Anderson (1978) explored the issue of self-determination and agency in Black education (Alridge and Franklin, 2009). Their article presented a new perspective on Black Educational programs and enlightened the world that African Americans needed educational organizations in the post-Civil Rights Era.

Also, during this time, questions were starting to emerge about the education being used for African Americans and about curriculum changes during this era. Most of the curriculum in schools that was taught, during this time period, was related to vocational and industrial curriculum. Today, in schools there are education reforms in the form of Response to Intervention (RTI). This type of reform requires teachers to teach and to have great interventions in place to check and reteach in case any student is falling behind academically and who lacks understanding.

### **A Brief History of Race Discrimination in U. S. Education**

**Plessy v Ferguson.** When it came to education in the 1800's, *Separate but Equal* came to the forefront in American history. Although, Plessy v. Ferguson did not directly address educational rights for African Americans, the court case was pivotal in establishing 58-year precedent, which sanctioned inequity (Collins, 2013). Collins (2013) stated that although Plessy appeared to be phenotypically White, in actuality he was  $\frac{1}{8}$  African American. When it came down to clarifying Plessy v. Ferguson, the rule was about really two issues. One issue was racial segregation and separate-but-equal to the 14th amendment. Accordingly, Plessy argued that Whiteness had monetary value and the refusal to seat him in the White portion of the train dispossessed him of material goods

and subjected him to second-class citizenship of which he should receive recompense (Collins, 2013). Due to a 7-to-1 vote, *Separate but Equal* became legal and a reality.

Later, Thurgood Marshall's decision to challenge segregation as part of the roll back of *Plessy v Ferguson* (1896) came to fruition in the 1950's (Carter-Oliver, 2014) with the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) ruling that school facilities at this time would never be equal. *Brown v. Board of Education* is a landmark in the history of US education and society; today, it is also widely considered to be a landmark in the history of the U.S. judiciary (Hartung, 2004). The importance of this decision may be seen as the decisive step toward the use of social science results in litigation (Hartung, 2004).

Thurgood Marshall, an African American male, played a significant role in the case *Brown v Board of education*. Thurgood Marshall today is known as Mr. Civil Rights due to his great impact in this landmark case in US court history. African-American educators, like Marshall, have held highly effective roles in advancing the education of marginalized students.

The black community has always had respect for the African American male school principal, also. Notable similarities among the principal's leadership role in the pre-Brown and post-Brown eras include relentless efforts of improving resources and the quality of Black schools (Carter-Oliver, 2014). The education of black students as a priority, interpersonal caring, and resistance were dominant themes in the research on principals in the post-Brown era (Tillman, 2002). Also, black male principals were considered experts when it comes down to educating the African American student unlike today where there seems to be a lack of trust, honesty, and respect that has been lost

between the school and home of African American students. Further, there has been a greater disconnect amongst all ethnicities when it comes down to trust in between school and home. Black principals and administrators of color have somewhat always had their own norms when looking at providing leadership in African American schools. Once again, due to the respect and trust between home and school in the African American community, black parents have always respected and valued a solid education for their student or child.

In the 1950's black principals served students with the mentality of being a servant in schools. Displaying this particular mentality went over well with African American parents, and the communities in which they lived in. Also, with the servitude mentality, the black male administrator worked hard and relentless for black students. Parents really respected this servitude mentality. Booker T. Washington is noted as one of the earliest known Black principals where he implemented a curriculum to include reading, writing, and computation rather than sewing, cooking, and cleaning (Carter-Oliver, 2014).

When interviewed about educating black students, Carter –Oliver (2014) found common themes emerged amongst black school administrators. These are:

- Black principals worked to provide education to Black children in hostile conditions (Carter-Oliver, 2014).
- Black principals exerted passive and direct resistance to overt hostility including working around discriminatory legislation (Carter-Oliver, 2014).
- Black principals led significant change (Carter-Oliver, 2014).

- Black principals worked to improve teacher quality (Carter-Oliver, 2014).

The *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954 created a significant impact in the African American community and the education of the African American student. The tradition of excellence in African American school leadership was dramatically changed by desegregation especially in the South (Horsford, 2011; Ladson-Billing, 2000; Tillman, 2002). Also, the status and the credibility of the African American Male principal changed. The request for money and funding was drastic and hard for African American schools. For that reason, there was also a significant drop in the instruction that was taken place in the classroom. The lack of funding, and reduction in the funding according to what the Caucasian schools were getting made a crushing blow to the education of the African American child. This really had a bad impact on the African American schools getting support for their schools like they were getting prior to *Brown v. Board of education*. So, African male principals saw their efforts to educate the African American students get extremely hard.

Generally speaking, the “separate but unequal” doctrine of a dual school system established in *Plessy v. Ferguson* sends a daily reminder today to African Americans that they were, and still are, second class citizens in the United States (Collins, 2013). Collins (2013) stated that segregation is primarily depicted as a Southern blight by popular opinion, but segregation also ruled in the North both by common practice and the law.

African American principals, once they became principals were placed in schools that were low SES and struggled to get funding to adequately instruct the African

American student. As stated earlier, this led to students of color not getting the highly effective instruction that their Caucasian counterparts were getting in school.

Oddly, however, the Jim Crow laws ,which plagued the African American community also provided unexpected opportunities for them as well (Collins, 2013). Collins (2013) elaborated on how racism of the time allowed and pushed African Americans to build solidarity around key issues such as equality and the need to educate the community's children. This led to African Americans males becoming leaders as school principals and they prevailed in the role as principal in 20th century schools.

### **African American males and Underachievement**

The continuous effects of racism, negative stereotypes, and the repressive nature of school leadership has negatively affected the psyche of African Americans, specifically African American males (Anderson, 2002; Johnson, 2005). Travis (1991) as cited in Johnson (2005) stated that “for centuries, the United States engaged in overt and covert actions that systematically disenfranchised the African American and specifically the African American male” (p. 27). The continuation of not educating the African American male and just passing the African American male to the next grade without adequate reading skills continues to be a detriment to society. In addition, the prison to pipeline mentality is a serious offense against citizens of the United States of America. There is something definitely wrong with society when more money goes into the prison system than in your education system. Johnson (2005) asserted that under-education and underrepresentation continue to feed a perception of incompetence in the workplace most directed against African American males.



## **Stereotypes and Myths**

African American men are the recipients of continual assaults on their humanness by mainstream America (Johnson, 2005). These men are manipulated by the stories and myths used as propaganda against subordinates by the dominant culture (Johnson, 2005). Even media portrayals of African Americans continue to be a commentary to the discrimination and exploitation suffered by Blacks at the discretion of a White dominant society (Johnson, 2005). Mainstream and social media affect the way society enhances negative stereotypes of African American males. Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat, influence the way society continues to build negative stereotypes of African American males.

Traditionally, the percentages of African Americans that occupy coveted positions within organizations are usually very small (Johnson, 2005). Most of time, these particular people of individuals are hired to meet a quota in organizations. As a result, many are subjected to debilitating effects, self-degradation, and negative stereotype attitudes that impede performance (Johnson, 2005; Thompson & Sekequaptewa, 2002). Depicting the truth and dropping the stereotypes about African Americans and especially African American men would be a step forward in making America a living democracy (Travis, 1991; Johnson, 2005).

Bell (1991) asserted that African Americans have yet to achieve full equality in the United States (Johnson, 2005). Garrett-Jones (2002), Johnson (2005), and Williams (2002) argue that African American principals are needed as educational leaders to be difference-makers in the lives of children. Equality starts with administrators taking the

lead in creating cultural equity in their school organizations that all students should have equal opportunities for success. Also, leaders should strive to create high expectations for all who partakers in the organization (Johnson, 2005). Johnson (2005) emphasized that there is less stress for an individual leader if the leader would avoid catering to the demands of the privileged and continue to fight for the needs of the neglected.

### **Evolution of the School Principal**

One of the earliest mentions of the role of the school principal originated from the Horace Mann's 1841 reference to the Massachusetts School Board. However, the principal evolved as schools grew from the one-room schoolhouse to larger entities with grade-leveled classes (Goodwin, Cunningham, & Eagle, 2005; Hill, 2013; Kafka, 2009). In the one room schoolhouse, one teacher was responsible for providing instructions to students. In addition to teaching and educating the students, the teacher was also responsible for the maintenance and the janitorial services of the school. These early principals and educators were predominantly men in the education profession, whose primary role was not an administrative role, but teaching and instruction was the role of the principal in the early American Schoolhouse.

The principal during the 1800's was known as the principal teacher in the classroom. The principal teacher had individuals that helped him with teaching; these were called teacher assistants. Later, in the 1800's, the principal teacher's role began to change as the principal began to take on an administrator role. Today, the role of the principal has definitely evolved, changed into the role of transformational leader. The

principal continues to evolve in the 21st century. Principals today must be willing to be leaders in a society that is driven by technology.

### **African American Males as School Administrators**

Despite the fact that slavery that was operating, there are recordings that African Americans were principals as early as 1860 (Pollard, 1997; Tillman, 2009). During this time of oppression, African American principals had to take on the role of principal and civil rights activist for their neighbors doing these oppressed times for the people of color. Leaders of color were known as change agents in the African American community.

As stated earlier, education was highly recommended in African American families at this time in their lives. It was a way that the African American parents felt that their children could overcome oppression during this time in society. Or a way that their students could become the person they wanted to be. Collins (2013) talked about early African American principals, such as Booker T. Washington and Jeremiah Burke Sanderson, who were successful in founding their own schools and served as educators, spiritual guides, as well as activists for the newly freed African American community of which they were a part.

Today, to recruit and retain African American Males in education is a hard thing to do. When you do find an African American male in education, it has often been in the certification of coaching. Identifying, attracting, recruiting, mentoring, selecting, and socializing aspiring school administrators is an important part of leadership preparation (Normore, 2004). However, due to African American males having trouble advancing

from the classroom and the coaching ranks, it is hard to keep African American males in education.

When an African American male does try to advance in the field of education, often they have to go through all kind of barriers to seek to advance in the field of education. Richards (2014) explained public school districts, college/university teacher education programs, and other various programs have made efforts to trying to attract African American males into the teaching field by using creative solutions. Some urban school districts have really tried to obtain and recruit men of color, by offering signing bonuses, loan forgiveness, and tuition reimbursement. The development of prospective administrative candidates begins with African American male teachers and assistant principals who have the passion to do greater good for children as principals (Richards, 2014).

Many of the techniques Jorgenson (2001) deems as effective for implementing creative recruitment are listed as follows

- a. Prioritizing the recruitment of ethnic educators.
- b. Administrators should direct their recruitment efforts towards colleges with high numbers of ethnic students.
- c. Human resources directors can approach the many underutilized, nontraditional networks for ethnic teacher recruitment: sororities, and fraternities, campus organizations, the armed forces, community groups, and churches.
- d. Consider nontraditional sources of teacher and administrative recruitment.

- e. Local junior and community colleges are largely untapped resources for prospective teachers and administrators.
- f. School boards may consider collaborative scholarship programs with four-years state colleges to pull promising junior college students into university teaching programs and mentoring the aspiring administrator into principal certification programs.
- g. Develop a teacher to administrator program.
- h. Many ethnic employees are already working in school systems in such positions as secretaries and classroom aids.
- i. Understand how ethnically diverse employees perceive the district.
- j. Districts should engage in dialogue with their teachers and administration of color to determine what these individuals perceive to be the advantages and disadvantages for ethnic staff in the district.
- k. Create a support network for African American educators, teachers, and administrators.

It is crucial that districts create a support network for its educators of color that will improve the retention rates of ethnic teachers and underscore the district's commitments to a diversified workforce (Jorgenson, 2001, pp. 64-67). In order to overcome barriers of recruiting and maintaining African American male teachers, along with advancement into leadership positions, school districts really need to look at some more creative ways of recruiting and maintain male teachers, with the focus that they can grow into leadership positions in the future. Also, district must look at implementing

effective principal training programs within the districts to promote leadership, and develop productive leaders within their districts. While there are have been programs that promote African American males on how to become winning and productive coaches in school districts, school districts must do a better job of promoting African American males where they are needed and where they can really make an impact that is in the classroom. Schools in our nation are full of students of color with no role models, or teachers who look like them, or who can understand the struggles that they face each and every morning just trying to get a meal, get a way to school, and overcome oppression in the classroom.

### **New Racism**

Since America has finally had its first African American president, many Americans have made the claim that we are in a post-racial time in the United States. This term relates to the belief that racism no longer exists in America. This is a common dominant-group narrative (DiAngelo, 2016). However, when it comes to critical race theory, the hierarchy of one dominant group in society over another still exists today. In other words, putting a band aid over a problem does not mean that you have overcome a problem.

During the Civil Rights era, America made some great steps forward. But there still needs to be some acknowledgement that the problem never went away in the first place. DiAngelo (2016) established the fact that oppression is rooted in society. It can and does adapt to challenges. “In many ways, these milestones enable society to obscure

and deny oppression, as individuals from minorities groups who publically succeed are held up as testimony that the system is open” (p. 126).

In the world today, and not just in the United States, there is a lot of data to show that racism still exists. Those who rely on the racism-as-prejudice view (the majority of social scientists) have to contend with the systematic decline in Whites’ old-fashioned prejudice (Schuman, 1997). If prejudice is declining, Bonilla-Silva (2015) ask how can we explain the contemporary level of racial inequality and the Black–White attitudinal divide on so many race-related matters.

Many researchers confirm that racism is a systemic problem. DiAngelo, (2016) stated the “New Racism is the ways in which racism has adapted over time so that modern norms, policies, and practices result in similar racial outcomes as those in the past, while not appearing to be explicitly racist” (p. 127). DiAngelo (2016) also stated that in “conversations of racism, when White people say that they work in a diverse environment or that they have people of color in their family, they believe they are giving evidence that they are not racist” (p. 127). Making statements to exemplify that one is not racist because of the way one lives or works is a statement made to satisfy one’s consciousness. If you really dig deep beneath those claims that society has about people of color, racism still exists in those individuals; it never left. In other words, someone who tells me that they were taught to treat everyone the same is simply telling me that they don’t understand socialization (DiAngelo, 2016).

### **Colorblind Racism**

Along with the term New Racism, the new term Colorblind Racism has transcended in the 21st century. This term is when society acts like racism doesn't exist in society. The ideology comes out of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's and is addressed in Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech (DiAngelo, 2016). When King hit a moral chord with the public when he stated, "The content of his character and not the color of his skin" (DiAngelo, 2016, p.129 ). Seizing on this part of King's speech, dominant culture began promoting the idea of "colorblindness" as a remedy for racism (DiAngelo, 2016).

Further, King did not mean that whites should deny that race mattered, but that they should actively work toward creating a society in which it actually didn't matter (DiAngelo, 2016 p. 129). But once the Civil Rights Movement became more mainstream and civil rights legislation was passed, there was a significant change in dominant culture; it was no longer as acceptable for white people to admit to racial prejudice (DiAngelo, 2016 p. 130).

### **Oppression**

"America, the home of the free and the brave" has been the United States motto ever since I can remember in my life. However, due to certain social groups still being enslaved for the oppressor to gain political power and money, this motto by many social groups does not exist in American society today. Thus in this context, racism is white racial and cultural prejudice and discrimination supported intentionally or unintentionally by institutional power and authority and used to the advantage of whites and the



disadvantage of people of color (Hilliard, 1992; DiAngelo, 2016). The term “oppression” indicates that one group is in a position to enforce their prejudice and discrimination against another group throughout the society with long-term and far-reaching impacts.

### **Transformational Leaders**

The term “transform” implies major changes in the form, nature, function, and potential of some phenomenon; when applied to leadership, it specifies general ends to be pursued, although it is largely mute with respect to means (Leithwood & Prestine, 2002). Leaders are viewed as transformative when they are able to directly influence their followers in terms of the goals and expectations they have for themselves (Black, 2012). An understanding of transformational leadership was advanced by a study of world-renowned leaders, but Bass (1981) and others have argued that transformational or extraordinary leadership can be found in ordinary places (Kirby, Paradise, & King, 1992). For example, managers, military officers, and teachers can be transformational leaders.

More importantly, transformational leadership can be taught (Kirby, Paradise, & King, 1992). Transformational leaders are believed to have certain behaviors that can be learned by all leaders, no matter what race or gender. In today’s educational settings, it is very important that school leaders learn these behaviors in order to be successful in 21<sup>st</sup> century schools.

In defining a transformational leader, Kirby, Paradise, and King (1992) posited four factors that contribute being a successful leader in education: 1. The leader’s ability to arouse devotion and involvement through charisma, personal dynamics and emotional appeal. 2. Leaders inspire by increasing follower awareness and understanding of

mutually desired goals through symbols and simplified emotional persuasion. 3. Leaders treat and every individual in an organization needs to be treated on a one and one individual consideration. 4. Last but not least, intellectual stimulation is a transformational leader taking on the leadership ability to take risks in an organization.

### **Race Matters in Critical Transformation**

Owning and accepting the fact that race does matter in educating children of color, Howard (2006) stated: “I use this story to illustrate one of the most basic things that transformationist White teachers know; namely, that race is a central factor in our interaction with our students of color” (p. 127). Howard (2006) goes on to explain, “I know that the first thing my students of color notice about me is that I am White” (p. 127). “No matter how I may try to dance around the issue, my Whiteness is real to them” (Howard, 2006, p. 127).

World-renowned professor of Harvard, Cornel West believes that quicker the European teacher realize that race is a factor, the greater the difference it will make in the teacher building a relationship with their students of color (Howard, 2006). “Teachers have to look through the critical lens of critical theory and realize that the change in implementing students of color begins with them the teacher” (Howard, 2006, p. 128). One example Howard gives is of Timothy Bunch, a nationally recognized educator who teaches in a juvenile justice detention center in South Carolina. Bunch who has worked with African American males for over a decade, stated, “I believe I am called, to teach, from a spiritual standpoint as well as a professional standpoint” (Howard, 2006, p. 128).

**Summary**

This chapter provided an overview of critical theory and critical race theory, particularly as they apply to how African American males have been marginalized and stereotyped. The review of literature also examined marginalization and systemic racism in educational settings, historically and today.

Society has tendency to continue to repeat itself due to systems that have been put in place to keep individuals oppressed. That is why critical autobiographies are important; namely, to bring about changes in a society that continues to dehumanize individuals in a world that is supposed to be built on democracy. The next chapter presents an overview of the critical autobiographical method used in this study.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **Methodology**

#### **Introduction**

This study is a critical autobiography examining how my experiences as an African American male, as an African American male educator and minister developed me to be the man that I am. Critical autobiographies are rapidly gaining credibility as a viable research method (Reed, 2015). Critical autobiographies have given people an opportunity to have a voice through qualitative research. Through narrative inquiry and critical autobiographical method, I tell my experiences that have impacted my life as an African American male, to hopefully have impact on society today.

I hope to bring a new perspective to autobiographical research with the hope that more people will use the research method to tell their stories in future research. This research study is focused on social inequalities with a critical lens that looks at the differences among school districts when hiring African American males as administrators. By revealing various occasions that happened in my life, I hope to bring about change for marginalized people in society along with relieving oppression of men of color in society.

In chapter III, I explain an overview of narrative inquiry and its purposes in autobiographical research. I also describe the researcher's role, situating the self, how I collected the data through journal writing and other records, and the method of data analysis. The chapter closes with a section about communicating the findings and a summary.

As a Man of God and a servant in education and in ministry, I feel it is time to let my voice be heard on the way that systems are put in place that prevent men of color from advancing in the field of education. The chosen lens that has been picked to tell this story is a lens that is based on the critical race theory. As the researcher, I faithfully provided as accurate information as possible to ensure the truthfulness of my story.

### **Purpose of Narrative Inquiry**

The purpose of narrative inquiry is to help others understand someone's lived experience through the use of a story. "Most important is the attitude of the inquirer toward participants, an attitude that will foster learning" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 9). The notion of narrative inquiry is to imagine living out a narrative, revising an ongoing narrative, and creating new ones (Clandinin & Connelly, 1986). According to Polkinghorne (1998), "Human science investigations related to narrative can be distinguished according to whether the purpose of the research is (1) to describe the narratives already held by individuals and groups or (2) to explain through narrative why something happened" (Polkinghorne, 1998, p.161).

### **Appropriate Uses of the Narrative Inquiry Method**

According to Polkinghorne, narrative inquiry occurs within a three-dimensional narrative space. This space includes interaction (both personal and social), continuity (which involves the past, present, or future), and situation (place). This is closely associated with Dewey's theory of experience, specifically with his notions of situation, continuity, and interaction (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

With this sense of Dewey's foundational place in our thinking about narrative inquiry, Clandinin & Connelly (2000) defined the terms as *personal* and *social* (interaction); *past, present, future* (continuity); combined with the notion of *place* (situation). This set of terms creates a metaphorical *three-dimensional narrative inquiry space*, with temporality along one dimension, the personal and the social along a second dimension, and a place along a third. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Dewey also identified a notion of interaction in which there were four directions for an inquiry to go—*inward and outward, backward and forward* (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

By inward, we mean toward the internal conditions, such as feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions. By outward, we mean toward the existential conditions, that is, the environment. By backward and forward, we refer to temporality—past, present, and future. We wrote that *to experience an experience*—that is, to do research into an experience—is to experience it simultaneously in these four ways and to ask questions point each way. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50)

### **Autobiographies and Narrative Form**

Like biographies, personal journals and diaries as autobiographies represent a form of narrative, a story of one's experiences (Mathias and Smith, 2016). One of the things about autobiographies is that they are written in first person. Although autobiographies have been around for a long time, for scholars, they are relatively recent to the research world. Autobiographies highlight critical events and social actors in one's life, and although chronological, are written years after many of the described events occurred (Holroyd, 2002).

Still, autobiographical research can have great impact on social science and society, as the narratives are told in writings. Although some narrative accounts provide in-depth, detailed firsthand insights (e.g., diaries, CEO letters to shareholders), other narrative accounts provide breadth by portraying one's entire life (e.g., biographies). Autobiographies stand apart from other narrative forms because they offer both (Mathias and Smith, 2016). Mathias and Smith (2016) stated autobiographies provide (a) an individual's life history, from birth to death (or at least later in one's career), and in so doing, tend to offer greater breadth than other data sources and (b) a firsthand account of the events that have transpired, thus offering considerable depth into one's life.

### **Human Science of Narratives**

Polkinghorne begins *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences* with his "own unsettled feelings about integrating research and practice" (1988, p. ix). 'Narrative' can refer to the process of making a story, to the cognitive scheme of the story, or to the result of the process-also called 'stories', 'tales', or 'historie'" (Polkinghorne, 1998 p. 13).

Narrative inquiry, then, is a form of narrative experience; that experience becomes lived as told (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Polkinghorne, as a clinician, believed that social sciences are not a result of methodology and research findings. Polkinghorne looked to practitioners and asserted that narrative is the basis of their work (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). “They are concerned with people’s stories: they work with case histories and use narrative explanations to understand why the people they work with behave the way they do” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. x). According to Clandinin & Connelly (2000), Polkinghorne turned from practice to theory in an effort to develop a form of narrative research. He understood “the importance of having research strategies that can work with the narratives people use to understand the human world” (p.xi). In the end, he wanted narrative research “... to be considerably more successful and useful” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. xi).

### **Autobiographies Unfold the Life of the Author**

Mathias and Smith (2016) elaborated on how autobiographies lay out a story that explains how life events unfolded over time. Autobiographies provide a timeline of individuals’ lives. This timeline allows the writer to give critical details and elaborate to on the experiences that have influenced the author's life over a time period. This detail in elaboration can be critical and hard for the authors as they recall these experiences. However, the descriptive details can be good for the author and once again for a society that is starving for a positive change in social science.



These stories are not just about bringing up and writing about prior experience of the past. These stories are reliable critical details of the author's life that can show how someone has shaped and molded the author into the person they are. These experiences that the author displays in writing can be painful for the author, to display these powerful reliable details of one's life. Although most longitudinal research provides a separation of time by measuring the independent variable at one time and the dependent variable at a later point in time, autobiographies capture the dynamic nature of variables by describing the critical experiences and relationships that occurred during and between those points in time that impacted the variables of interest (Ployhart & Vandenberg, 2010).

Accordingly, business scholars have leveraged autobiographies to identify common events that served as catalysts to propel individuals into top leadership roles or that pushed their ventures toward success (Gronn & Ribbins, 1996). Therefore, autobiographies represent a particularly valuable resource to address temporally oriented theories and research questions where matters of social context are critical (Mathias & Smith, 2016). In autobiographical research, the recalling of information sometimes can be called into question by readers. The reason is because a lot of the information that can be recalled happened years earlier in the author's life. Fortunately, authors often leverage primary data sources in reconstructing the history of life events, which can help to improve the accuracy of prior events and thus limit the concern of recall bias (Mathias and Smith, 2016).

### **Critical Autobiographies**

Critical autobiographies are necessary to initiate change in status quo (Martin, 2015). Critical autobiographies are important in giving the researcher an opportunity to tell their experiences. Many marginalized people never would have an opportunity to tell their stories if it were not for autobiographies. Through critical autobiographical research, they can be a voice for those who do not have an opportunity to tell their stories and experiences. There is still and always a fighting chance that critical autobiographies can bring about liberation for marginalized people. This is the reason that stories are told about one's experience, to bring about change in society. The addition of critical theory to an autobiography allows the author to highlight personal experiences in hopes of bringing about change (Martin, 2015). As scholar practitioners, critical autobiographies can be a powerful tool to teach tolerance and correct injustices (Martin, 2015).

**Situating the self.** In this autobiographical case study, I placed myself as the learner. I am an African American male who has been an educator in Texas for over twenty-two years. I have been a principal in the state of Texas for at least eighteen years. My experiences in my life were the focus of this critical autobiography ranging from my birth, to my adolescence years, and to my adulthood. This critical autobiography was written from notes and memory with the intent to bring about change in society.

**Self-reflection.** Self-reflection of past experience can be great for growth in an individual's life and can have an impact on other human beings in lives. As the researcher, I looked at every memory of my life through a critical lens in order to bring about change. These particular memories that I am telling in this autobiography I am

hoping can bring about change in the hiring process so more African American males can be hire in principal positions in Texas.

### **Research Questions**

In this critical autobiographical research, I chose two questions to help keep me as the researcher and the instrument focused in this dissertation study. These questions served to guide me, the researcher as the instrument, through my past and present experiences in life. The questions helped me critically examine how I became the man that I am today, along with the administrator that I have become today.

1. How have my experiences growing up in deep East Texas contributed to the leader that I am today?
2. How have my experiences in deep East Texas made me into the person I am today?

### **Participant**

Telling and revealing of your experience in life is not always an easy task. Telling and giving reflection over experience can be painful at times. However, the revealing of self to bring about humanization in a society that continues to dehumanize marginalized people in this world, I feel as an educator is well worth the risk. It is time that society stops living this make-believe idea that color blindness does not exist. Next, if I can give one African American male the inspiration to dream that they can be teachers and principals in a field that is dominated by Caucasian people, and they can make a difference in education when it comes to all children, especially all children who are brown people, I feel it is well worth the risk.

### **The Role of the Researcher**

Descriptive narrative is the accurate explaining of experiences that happen in an individual's life (Polkinghorne (1998). In this study the role of the researcher was to tell the experiences that shaped him as an African American male and educational leader. The role of the researcher is that of a narrator without deviating from the truth of accounts of the experiences. The purpose of the researcher is to get the lived experiences across to the audience or the readers to influence life changes for a better tomorrow. "Most important is the attitude of the inquirer toward participants, an attitude that will foster learning" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 9).

To help recall memories within a three-dimensional inquiry space, I, as the researcher, used several ways to help recall actual facts of my life. I used daily journal writing, photos, paper clippings, football memorabilia, and visitation with prior teachers to help recall actual experiences of my life. To recall autobiographical experience, I maintained a researcher reflective journal to help me tell and retell the events that happened in my life as a person, student, and athlete. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) refer to this as the researcher keeping "notes on themselves as part of the field experience being studied and their notes on themselves experiencing that experience that they reflected upon. Qualitative researchers do not seek findings that offer conclusive generalizable results; instead, qualitative research examines data as situational and case oriented (Best & Kahn, 2006; Walker, 2013).

I used critical race theory as a lens to have a clearer understanding of self in hopes to illuminate the positive experiences and eliminate harmful and unjust practices so

that more just activities are experienced in my life and (Martin, 2015). In revealing my story in this autobiography, I am hoping that the telling and retelling, of my life experience as a person and educator in East Texas, will help other African American males live out their dreams of becoming educators in a society that often stereotypes African American males and Ex-Athletes of color.

### **Data Collection**

To help recall memories within the three-dimensional inquiry spaces, I am going to use several ways to help recall actual facts of my life. I am going to use journal writing, photos, newspaper clippings, football memorabilia, and visitation with prior teachers to help recall actually experiences of my life. During this autobiographical experience, I will use the maintaining of a researched reflective journal to help me tell and retell the events that happen in my life as a person, student, and athlete. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) refer to this as the researchers keeping notes on themselves as part of the field experience being studied and their notes on themselves experiencing that experience that reflected upon. Qualitative researchers do not seek findings that offer conclusive generalizable results; instead, qualitative research examines data as situational and case oriented (Best & Kahn, 2006; Walker, 2013). Qualitative Data in narrative research is used to analyze the stories told (Creswell, 2013; Walker, 2013).

In a critical autobiographical study, I encountered a great opportunity to tell my experiences, examining through a critical lens the events that happened in my life. In using Critical Race Theory as a lens, my hope was to have a clearer understanding of the Self in hopes to illuminate the positive experiences and eliminate harmful and unjust

practices so that more just activities are experienced in my life and the lives of others (Martin, 2015). In revealing my story in this autobiography, I am hoping that the telling and retelling of my life experience as a person and educator in East Texas will help other African American males live out their dreams of becoming educators in a society that often stereotypes African American males and ex-athletes of color.

### **Data Analysis**

Qualitative research does not seek findings that offer conclusive, generalizable results; instead, qualitative research examines data as situational and case oriented (Best, & Kahan, 2006). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) discussed memory as being selective, fashioned, interpreted, and recounted from a continuum of one's experience (p. 142). This gave me, the researcher in the study, an opportunity to have a voice and look at my life experiences through a critical lens, through journal writing, and through reflexive thinking.

Data were in the form of detailed notes taken on a daily basis (Neuman, 2006, p. 51). Following the guidelines for autobiographical research (Walker, 2013), I identified the data as the narratives I developed throughout the course of this dissertation study. I used the opportunity to use a critical lens in examining my life experiences as an African American man growing up in East Texas and as a public-school administrator.

I was encouraged to journal my life experiences every day of my life. Also, I would often analyze thoughts and memories that I wrote about during journaling. And the analyzation process, or narrative analysis, is what led me to the scriptures during each lesson as a means to exemplify the way the Divine Connection played a significant role

in motivation, healing, and determination to continue through life, although there were thoughts of giving up in life. African American males and children of poverty need to know that all things are possible through God.

As both researcher and participant, this required me to really dig deep into my life experience and journal with bias. This opportunity really gave me a chance for healing from wounds that I thought had been healed in my life. However, they were still open. The researching of this critical autobiography was a lengthy and time-consuming process. Pictures and year books were helped to recall facts during this critical autobiography, which were translated into autobiographical narratives, and then analyzed using Polkinghorne's (1988) analysis of narratives.

### **Trustworthiness**

Narrative research itself is not ethically neutral (Walker, 2013). Martin (2015) noted (2015) that narrative research is not ethically neutral and that the enactment of a critical lens, such as Critical Race Theory, raises particular ethical as well as methodological considerations. Merriam (2009) further explained that all research requires certain levels of trust in the research. In writing this critical autobiography, I reflected upon my experience as autobiographer and the opportunity to have an intimate relationship in the research in my role as the narrator and as the instrument. I became devoted to the inquiry.

In social research, researchers use different ways of gathering information to present and explore social phenomena. Polkinghorne (1988) noted that narrative inquiry studies establish trustworthiness through the details associated with the research process

and procedures (Martin, 2015). The most common type is triangulation of measure, meaning that we take multiple measures of the same phenomena (Neuman, 2011). In order to achieve triangulation in this study, I used journal writing, football memorabilia, news clippings, and pictures. Trustworthiness is the idea that looking at something from multiple points of view improves accuracy (Neuman, 2011).

### **Communication of Findings**

The detailed findings in this research are reported in a narrative form. The telling and the retelling of the experiences that I disclose in this research were constructed from journaling, memory, and autobiographical writing of the experiences that have shaped my life. The experiences I was able to recall were remembered from my past. Through critical autobiography I was able to talk about some events in my life that have been painful and hard to swallow, but I am telling these reflections so that they can influence change. I elaborate on my past not to be boastful but to share my experiences in the hope that they will help inspire other African American counterparts to accept their calling, if they have one, in education.

During my upbringing and my life throughout grade school, college, ministry, and doctoral program, I have had many life experiences good and bad. I have learned, and I am constantly learning today, that a person does not have to become the person that the world has called them to be. You can overcome the world's perception of you as a human being. My early experiences in life have taught me and continue to teach me today that with God being in control in your life that all things are possible. My experiences earlier in life made me interested in becoming a pro-ball player, and most importantly, an



educator. My experiences in life have taught me that if God has called you for a particular purpose, that know devil in hell can stop your purpose. You may have to go through the fire (trials and tribulations) but the things you go through are for God to shape into the person that can be servant for his person. So, I am going to keep on pressing forward in life and see how many lives that I can continue to touch in through the process.

### **Summary**

Chapter three provided the reader with the methodology and research design for this critical autobiographical study. Utilizing critical autobiography in this research gave me an opportunity to tell my story through a critical lens. Having an opportunity to tell my stories and experiences can offer insight and hope to other African American males to have assurance that through education they can impact students of color in a positive way. And not only impact student of color, but all students.

This critical autobiographical study offered me an opportunity to share actual experiences that can have a positive impact for liberation in a society established with a democratic educational system in mind. The stories told and revealed through a narrative perspective and examined though a critical lens provide understanding of an African American male's experiences and his determination to make a difference as a leader.

## **Chapter IV**

### **My Autobiography**

#### **Introduction**

One of the central tenets of CRT includes the ‘recognition of the experiential knowledge of people of color’ (Matsuda et al., 1993, p. 6). This recognition is the basis of the theme of ‘voice’ that runs throughout CRT in legal studies. (Dixson and Rousseau, 2005) This, then, is the essence of ‘voice’—the assertion and acknowledgement of the importance of the personal and community experiences of people of colour as sources of knowledge (Dixson and Rousseau, 2005) In this way, CRT scholars argue that we should ‘shift the frame’ (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 8) or ‘look to the bottom’ (Matsuda, 1995, p. 63) and begin to value the knowledge of people of colour (Dixson and Rousseau, 2005). For individuals that have been discriminated against, Critical Theory gives them a platform to tell their experiences and stories.

As the narrator of this autobiography I tell the experiences that I have faced and lived as an African American male in life and as public-school administrator in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I share my life experiences of living as an African American male raised by a single parent. And I share my experiences of trying to obtain and obtaining administrator positions in public education in deep East Texas. Finally, I examine these experiences

that have occurred in my life to answer the research questions that were used to guide this critical autobiography:

1. How have my experiences growing up in rural East Texas contributed to the leader that I am today?
2. How have my experiences growing up in rural East Texas shaped me into the person I am today?

The narratives presented in chapter IV and the findings of the study, presented in chapter V, are told using my native dialect, African American Vernacular English (AAVE), also referred to as Black English or Ebonics.

I hope that my story will help other African American males gain confidence and believe that they can overcome life challenges and trials. Next, through the sharing of these experiences, I aspire to encourage other African American Males to go into education where they can become role models who can make a difference in students' lives. I further hope my life will serve as an inspiration to African American males and others so that they can overcome life trials and tribulations to become successful men and women in society.

### **Lesson 1 Family**

**Mark 10:9 “What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.”**

First, I grew up in North Lufkin, Texas. During most of my childhood, I was raised by a beautiful woman named Lois James. Lois was raised by Eddie James Sr. and Fannie Mae James. Eddie and Fannie were originally from Canton, Mississippi, a small town outside of Jackson, Mississippi. Eddie James Sr. moved the James family to Texas

to be able to provide a better living for the James family. The family came to rural East Texas because Eddie James Sr. took a job at the Lufkin Hardwood Mill in North Lufkin. This booming industry made furniture for homes along with other wood accessories that were in highly demand during this time. Also, the state of Texas provided a better education system for the James children than the state of Mississippi could provide.

The James family consisted of three boys (Hercules, Henry, Eddie Jr.) along with two girls (Ora Lee, Lois). Henry was the baby of the siblings. The family established their home in a little black community in North Lufkin called Kelty, Texas. The James family was doing very fine in Texas, so Eddie James Sr. decided to invest and buy the home that he was living in. Later, after over twenty years of staying in Kelty, Texas Fannie Mae James took ill, and later died of natural causes, and left Eddie James Sr. to raise the family on his own.

Second, after the death of Fannie Mae James, the oldest sister (Ora Lee) nicknamed Sally James, took over as a mother figure for the rest of her siblings. Sally James helped Eddie James Sr. raise all her siblings until she met a young man by the name of L.J. Morrison who was from a little community outside North Lufkin, Texas called Pollok, Texas. Pollok was predominantly a white flight community. Mr. Morrison's dad was European White, while his mother was of African American decent, but she could pass for white. Sally James, whose name was really Ora Lee James, married L.J. Morrison, which changed her name to Ora Lee Morrison.

Finally, after that, Lois James, the younger sister, ended up dating a young man by the name of Emmett Ray Davis. It did not take long for Lois and Emmett to fall in

love, and before Lois was a senior at Dunbar High School, she was pregnant with a child. Eddie James Sr. was not happy about the pregnancy at all, however there was nothing he could do about his baby girl being pregnant. Lois James later started shacking with Emmett Davis despite the disapproval Eddie James. Finally, a little boy by the name of Derrick James was born.

## **Lesson 2 Shacking**

**2 Corinthians “And he said unto me, ‘My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.’ Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”**

I can remember as far as back from the age of four. My parents and I stayed in North Lufkin, Texas on Tatum Street up the road from the Frontier (A gambling shack). The Frontier was a club in North Lufkin, Texas. So, I grew up with my parents in a little small one-bedroom house. The house had a kitchen, bathroom, dining room, and that one bedroom. Me and my parents along with my two-year old brother stayed in this house. It was a house that my parents could afford at this time in their life.

My father was the only one that worked in the household at this time. My father drove a cement truck for Lufkin Transit Company. My mom was a stay at home mom with two little boys at this time that she was raising, along with Emmett Davis. I was a happy little boy because my father drove this big monster truck and would come by sometime in the truck and take me and my brother around the block in the big truck sometimes.

As I got older, I came to realize about the age five that my parents were not married. At first, I always thought my parents were married. However, due to listening to my Aunt (Ora Lee Morrison) talk when I was around or went to go spend a night with my Aunt (Ora Lee Morrison), I came to the realization that my parents were not married like my Aunt (Ora Lee Morrison) and Uncle (L. J. Morrison) were. That really bothered me at first, because I wanted my family to look just like my cousin's family.

I had a problem with my parents just staying together and not being married. I believe this is what led me to want to spend more and more nights at my cousin's house. Because my Uncle (L.J. Morrison) and Aunt (Ora Lee Morrison) were legally married and not just common law married. I really did not know what common law married or shacking really meant in those days. Although I came to realize that it had some concept to do with the way my parents were living. And according to my grandfather it was not a good example for me and my brother.

As time went by and I continued to get a little older, I noticed that there were times that my dad would not even come home. Later, eventually he just moved out and came back when he wanted to. However, my mom was always faithful to my dad. At this time in her life, she really loved my father. I, also, as a little boy, despite how my grandfather (Eddie James) and Aunt (Ora Lee Morrison) felt about my dad loved my father with all my heart.

I do not know why, but all sudden, my father was no longer with us. My mother started to look for another place to live. We moved to Williams street in Lufkin, Texas. This house was an upgrade compared to where we were living in on Tatum Street. My

father had absolutely stopped coming around. My father and mother had decided to call it quits.

In addition, to income we did not have nothing coming in. My Uncle (L. J. Morrison) and Aunt (Ora Lee Morrison) had to help us out for a while. I mean there were times we did not have food in the house. I realized that we had a better house. But we did not have food at times. My Uncle (L. J. Morrison) and Aunt (Ora Lee Morrison) really did show love to us. We did not have a car at all. My mother and I with my brother would walk down to my father's job to try to get money from my father. My father would tell us to come back when he got off work and he would give us some money, so we could buy groceries.

I had another Aunt (Thelma James) by marriage to my mom's brother. We would walk to her house in the hope that my father would still be at work when we returned. My dad would get off work and be gone about the time we walked back to his job. As I got older, this continued all during school. My dad would tell me and my brother lie after lie. Under those circumstances, this really brought tension between me and my dad's relationship. However, I never heard my mom really complain to her children, but she complained to her sister and her girlfriend

### **Lesson 3 Lied to by My Father**

**Proverbs 12:22 "Lying lips are abomination to the LORD: but they that deal truly are his delight."**

In spite, of my mother telling my father that lying to his kids wasn't right and talking to my dad about the lying, the lying continued. My brother and I continued to

believe and love my father. My father was an extremely smooth talker. And when he would show up unexpected, instead of admitting he lied to me and my brother, my father would say that something came up and he had to leave early from work. And that was the reason he would be gone when we came by to see him after work. My mother believed my father time after time because she loved him. Me and my brother believed him because at that time that was our father.

The lying that my father did to me and my brother really made me bitter as a little boy. I mean I was very angry at my father and the world. My mother's sister and sister in-law had to let my mother borrow money, so my mother could feed me and my brother. My father was always telling my brother and I that he loved us. However, the lying and mistreatment of me and my brother showed us different and that he did not. How can you lie to two little cute little boys and you know they are hungry?

My mother was a very quiet and sweet lady. My mother did not complain about a lot of things in life as I can remember. However, my mother had a great love for my father. However, her father (My Grandfather) did not have a lot of love for my father. I really was never told the reason why my grandfather did not have a lot of love for my father. My grandfather was the type of Southerner who was hard on all his kids as I can remember as a little boy. I would wonder why my grandfather was not very excited to see my father. However, I knew that it would not be the right thing to ask my mother nor my grandfather.



### **The Lying Really Brought Resentment Towards my Dad**

Despite my mother telling my father how the lies were hurting her kids, the lies continued coming from my father. My father would even lie to my brother and I when he was even going to work. So, he would not be there by the time my brother and I arrived there to get money that we needed from him; my father would be gone. So, I would try to call him when he was not there, and he would not answer his phone. When he would answer, my father would tell my brother and I he was coming by our house and never would show up. By the same token, I felt it was time for his lying to stop. Despite the talk my mother had with my father, he lied to me again and again. As time went on, I was just crushed and tired of the lying. I could not understand how a man can lie to his son like that over and over.

As a matter of fact, I was telling myself all that time that the lies were happening, if I have a wife and kids, I will never lie to my wife and kids like that. This was the final straw that made me to start to resent my father more and more. I mean if I was a grown man I could have kicked his butt for treating his kids like that. My Aunt and Uncle felt very bad for my family. I could hear my Aunt Ora Lee Morrison really giving her sister advice about loving a “dead-beat man”. That was true. My father had turned into a deadbeat father. He even had started dating other women. And my mother still loved that man for some reason. He was the only man that she had ever dated. And she really loved him. So, in addition, it was hard for her to break away from this man.

#### **Lesson 4 Financial Problems in the Family**

**Philippians 4:19 “But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”**

During this time in my life, my family was having a lot of financial problems at this time. This was a point in my life where my mother and my family had hit rock bottom. So, my mother applied for government assistance or what some people called food stamps. However, we were still needing the assistance of my Aunt and Uncle because there were other bills that needed assistance, too. My mother knew that she had to do something to take care of her family. Doing this time, I was mad at my father, my mother, and my home life. I really hated going home to stay with my mother and brother.

And yes! At this point and time my mother had another child during this time. I could not understand how she loved this man so much! There once again were times we did not even had food in the house. That is how I learned how to eat hamburger helper without the hamburger meat. I had to eat meals like chicken and rice. I mean I was so tired of eating chicken and rice that I do not even eat chicken and rice today due to having to eat it as child. Finally, my family got approved for government assistance. But it was not enough to buy groceries at that time for a family of three. In all honesty, if it wasn't for my grandfather and my mother's sister, I don't think we could have made it during this time in my life.

Once again, I could not understand how a man could just walk out on his family like that. I felt like my father was being very selfish at this time. And I am not bashing

my father. But that is a very harsh way for you to treat the women you love, and the mother of your kids.

### **Child Support**

By this time, due to three boys at this point and time in the family. My Aunt had convinced my mother to apply for child support. So, my mother did as my Aunt had advised and applied for child support. Next, after applying, my mother ended up in court with my father. Court ended up being a rough time for my mother and my siblings. My father told the judge “That we were not none of his kids, or that he did not know if we were his kids.” Wow! Man, that really hurt my mother and me. A man that she really loved told a judge and people he did not know that the children you have in court today are not his children. That really ticked me off as a young boy. I said to myself then I would never do that to a woman I love when I grow up. I will always take responsibility for my kids.

After this event, we all had to take blood tests to see if we were my father’s kids. And guess what? The blood test came back that we were my father’s kids. But the fact that this man had the audacity to put my mother through this embarrassment was very upsetting to me. My Uncle and Aunt along with my relatives could not understand how a man that knew this woman (My Mother) loved him with all her heart could take her through all the pain.

Next, after getting out of court, a few days later here comes my father to my house to tell my mother he was sorry. To this day, my father has never ever apologized to me and my siblings for that. To this day I still have that vow that I will not do that to my

wife and kids that humiliating way. One of the things I always do is tell my kids that I love them and will always take care them until I die. And I tell them that they mean the world to their father.

Also, my siblings were too young to remember what transpired in court. But today, I want to say to my father that I have forgiven him for that. Because until, this point in my life I still had a grudge toward my father for that. However, for me to become a more complete man for my wife and kids, I must forgive my father for that. I have come to realize not to let adult situations and circumstances that I did not have control over dictate my life. If I continue to let them have a stronghold on me, I can never go on to be the man I need to be for my family.

So, once again being a woman of God, my mom let this guy back in her life. We struggled as a family financially, but my mom started getting child support. I remember my mom spending all that child support check on us every two weeks. The child support checks relieved a little financial burden. However, my family still struggled. My Aunt convinced my mom to do a little sitting work, taking care of the elderly. My mother ended up working for one of the richest families in Lufkin, Texas. Mom did such a great job that these people asked her if she would she start cleaning their house, too. I mean this family would drop mom several hundred dollars a week. I mean they were paying mom well enough that I started to see a difference in our eating meals and extra added luxuries. But mom said, “that she did not want to do this whole life”.

### **Helping my Aunt Throw Papers**

My Aunt threw newspapers in Lufkin, Texas for about three years. So, along with rest of my family I started helping my Aunt throw papers to make ends meet. I really did not mind throwing newspapers at all. It was a nice little job to help make extra money to have food and pay bills. I did notice it was hard on my Aunt and Uncle's cars. I used the money I made off throwing papers to help me buy my school shoes for the coming school year.

### **Lesson 5 Public School**

**Proverbs 22:6 “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.”**

I stayed with my Aunt and Uncle, so I started going to school with my cousins at Trout Elementary. I attended school with my cousins for about one year. Everything started out great going to school with my cousins. However, I was not serious about school. I had to learn the importance of going to school from my Aunt (Ora Lee Morrison) and Uncle (L.J. Morrison). My parents at this point and time did not push education in home. But my Aunt (Ora Lee Morrison) and Uncle (L. J. Morrison) told me if I was going to stay with them and go to school, I really needed to take school seriously. My Aunt and Uncle sat me down and gave me the school talk. I was very much into the conversation and learned a lot about the importance of education. I was absorbing the information like a sponge.

## **The Color of Skin**

Finally, after having explained to me the importance of education. Not only did I like learning, I started to really enjoy everything about school. I remember one day I was given a partner in school who became my partner for development centers. This little girl was a blonde with blue eyes. The girl was just as cute as a button. I started liking the girl, Michelle, and I wanted to show her how much I liked her. Michelle and I played together out on the playground and even sat by each other at lunch. Finally, a special day was approaching. This special day was called Valentine's Day. That special holiday was a day I really wanted Michelle to know that I had a crush on her.

Staying with my Aunt and Uncle, I got an allowance for doing your chores. So, I saved up my money. I saved up a couple of dollars from my allowance. So, I went to the bubble gum machine and put my quarters in until I got a ring for Michelle. Also, I got one of my cousin's rings and took and gave it to Michelle. Michelle wore the rings with pride and joy.

Later, she went home and showed it to her parents (the rings). This really caused a big stink with her parents. My Aunt (Ora Lee Morrison) and Uncle (L.J. Morrison) were called by my teacher, and I was given the rings back by Michelle. Not because I was too young to be a giving little girls' rings, but Michelle told her parents that I was black. And I had to have the talk with my Aunt about people not liking you because the color of your skin. This really hurt me. I mean the parents did not want me having any conversations with Michelle. However, when we went outside, we still talked on the playground. However, I could no longer sit by Michelle at lunch at all. This really hurt Michelle, too.

I mean she told me what her Dad and Mom told her. That he did not want her taking anything from blacks. And that is the clean version of what her dad said. I never knew at this point in my life that people could dislike you because of the color of your skin.

### **Changing Schools**

After my first year of school, my brother was old enough to start kindergarten. I really loved going to Trout School. I was staying with my Aunt (Ora Lee Morrison) and Uncle (L. J. Morrison) and was starting to really understand what learning all was about. My Aunt (Ora Lee Morrison) and Uncle (L. J. Morrison) had a tremendous impact on me taking education seriously. My uncle told me “Son, if you going to make it in this world you must have a solid education. And you are going to have to work hard to obtain your education.” As a matter of fact, my Uncle (L. J. Morrison) told me that education would be my way out of poverty and could open doors for me.

So, my brother started to attend school. Next, the district decided to do an address check and found out that my brother stayed at another address, Finally, this forced me to have to change school, so my brother could go to school. Man! Did I really hate that I had to change elementary schools! I was so mad about having to change schools that I got into a lot of trouble at Slack Elementary School. I was so bad that nobody wanted to teach me at the school. I went to the office every day at that school. As the saying goes, if it wasn't one thing it was another. I even took the paddle from the principal and threatened to hit the principal. I was on my way to being kicked out of elementary school in the first grade.

### **Talk in the Teacher's Lounge**

The teachers were constantly talking negative about me. And the sad thing about it was that I knew it and did not care. Not only was I not responding to the teachers, I was getting into a lot of fights. I was acting out due to several reasons. I was mad at my parents and felt like my parents did not love me. Next, I was mad for having to leave my Aunt and Uncle's house where there was a lot of stability to go home where my mother loved me; however, I did not feel that same love from my father. I just did not like the idea that my father had walked out on and my family and I. Plus, that he denied that we were his children. Finally, I started building a reputation for myself, but it was not a good reputation.

My mother tried everything to try to get me on track. At this time in the schools paddling was a tool that principals could use. Heck! I built a tolerance for paddling, and it wasn't doing me any good. My Uncles were also trying to correct me for during wrong. Everybody in my family was trying to help me do the right thing in school. It just did not work. I continued to get in trouble at Slack Elementary during my second and third grade school year. I had a cousin who went to Slack Elementary with me and my brother. He told me that nobody in the school liked me. And he shared that he heard teachers talking about me in the school, too. He would come home and tell his mother and his mother would tell my mother on the phone.

### **Changes Coming in School**

Well during my third-grade year. I heard a lot of rumors about this fourth-grade teacher named Ms. Powers. Every time she would see me sitting on the bench outside the



principal office, she you would look at me and give me the evil eye. I used to look at her back and say to myself I am not scared of the evil eye. I would tell myself that Ms. Powers can stare at me all she wants, but it will not scare me.

Then Ms. Powers started smiling at me when she saw me one day. I had just gotten into a fight on the bus. A boy had spit in my little brother's mouth. This fight was with a sixth grader, and it was one of the hardest fights I had ever had in school. This boy was twice my size. However, I could not let that happen to my little brother. This boy was known as a bully. And this was the first time I did not get a spanking for fighting from my mother. Ms. Powers asked me what happened on the bus. That was the first time Ms. Powers had a conversation with me.

After that conversation Ms. Powers started talking to me every day. As a matter of fact, I believe this was the beginning of our relationship. I was told that nobody wanted to teach me in the fourth grade. And Ms. Powers said, "I will take him, he has the same name as my birth son." I know many teachers thought she was crazy for being willing to teach me the next year. So, I got promoted to the fourth grade, and I started to get very serious about my grades at this time.

### **My Cousin Married James Patton Who Became like a Father**

My cousin had married a guy that played football and ran track. This guy had done some training to be a professional bodybuilder. I mean he was put together. I read a lot of articles about James Patton playing junior high and high school football. I never was interest in sports, prior to meeting James Patton. James in some many ways reminded me of my father a lot. I mean the guy was put together just like my father. Also, James

and my cousin moved in with my family for a while after getting married. So, James really did take the place of my father as of being that African American male role model that I needed in my life. James Patton talked to me about playing college football. And how important it was to make good grades to get into college.

### **Fourth Grade**

In the meantime, I was going to the fourth grade. And guess who I got for my fourth-grade teacher? I ended up getting Ms. Powers as my teacher. The first time I walked in her room, she smiled at me. And Ms. Powers said, “Derrick James we are going to have a terrific year.” I was like are you serious. But deep inside I felt like things were going to turn around myself. Ms. Powers during the first couple days of school was very positive with me. I remember when I took my first math test in her class. I got mad, because I did not do well on the test. I was huffing and puffing. And this was the first time I saw Ms. Powers evil eye. She told me she appreciates the desire to want to make a good grade but “that is not how we act when things do not go our way.”

Ms. Powers told me she liked the desire that I am showing and how I want to make good grades. And told me that she never heard that I was so serious about making good grades prior to coming to fourth grade. I told her I have changed for the better. Ms. Powers said, “You have”. I said, “Yes, I want to go to college and play college football.” Ms. Powers told me I tell you what. If you are that serious, I will let you take the test again. I was so excited that it was the first time somebody ever gave me an opportunity to do things the right way. I took the test the next day and made a ninety on the test. I was happy, and the most important thing is Ms. Powers was just as happy as I was.

### **Developing Study Habits**

During my fourth-grade year, Ms. Powers just was a tremendous blessing to my life. Ms. Powers had the patience and the love, and that was just what I needed. I never had a teacher that showed that they cared about me like Ms. Powers. Ms. Powers developed a work ethic in me that I cherish to this day. Ms. Powers taught me to never give-up in my academics and desire to pursue your dreams. There were times that I still had my moments in fourth grade. But I was encouraged that I can do anything I put my heart into, if I keep God first. That just motivated me anytime that I came up short in the classroom. Ms. Powers let me know that sometimes life is going to throw you a curve ball. But keep on striving to be the very best you can be. If you fail a test, try and study harder the next time. Nothing can replace hard work. All successful athletes, business owner, and leaders have the work ethic to achieve. This knowledge, besides education, that I earned in the fourth grade will stay with me a life time. I learn not only that hard work pays off. I learned that you will never succeed if you do not fail.

### **5<sup>th</sup> Grade School Year**

After going to Timpson for the summer. I ended back in Lufkin, Texas, for my fifth-grade year. I had grown and put on a lot of muscle. I was in the fifth grade and when came back, I was faster and stronger than everyone else at Slack Elementary campus even the sixth graders. I still had a lot of contact with Ms. Powers. I went back to Ms. Power's room and she was amazed at how my appearance had changed! Ms. Powers and I got to talking about the summer. And I found out that her husband was from Timpson, Texas, and knew the Patton family.

**Pre-AP Class 7<sup>th</sup> Grade**

My 7<sup>th</sup> grade year I was put in Pre-AP classes at Dunbar Intermediate. So, once again my life was flourishing at this time with my Uncle and cousin James Patton, who became father figures to me, along with my favorite teacher of all time, Ms. Powers. My life took off. Ms. Powers wasn't just a teacher to me; She was a mother figure to me. And I love Ms. Powers to this day. But who would ever have thought that Derrick James would be taking Pre-AP classes and making straight A's in intermediate school?

**8<sup>th</sup> grade year**

By the time I was in the eighth grade, I had made a name for myself in Lufkin, Texas. I was known as a great kid and a great athlete. Lufkin, Texas had two junior high schools at that time. I was recruited to go to both schools. Athletics is big in Lufkin, Texas. And the junior high athletic directors wanted me at both junior high schools. All my cousins went to Junior High East. I lived in Junior High West school district at that time; however, I went to Junior High East.

Junior High East was the white flight school in Lufkin, Texas at that time. The rumors floating around Lufkin, Texas were that they had the better teachers, facilities, along with them playing at Abe Martin Stadium for their football games. Junior High West was where the majority of African American students went that stayed in Northwest and Southwest Lufkin, Texas. At this time, I was very serious about my education so I decided to go to Junior High East. Next, I decided to move in with my Grandfather, because he stayed in Junior High East territory. However, Lufkin, Texas, was a 5a school district and people started talking in the district. Finally, the Lufkin Independent School

District got involved because one of the coaches had rode by my mother's house and saw me in the yard. He told the superintendent that I stayed in Junior High West school district.

### **Fine**

The school district was talking about fining my mother for me not going to the correct junior high school although my mother had let me move in with my grandfather. However, my grandfather did not have legal guardianship of me. And he could not show the papers to prove that he was my guardian. But my mother was not going to sit around and not do what is best for her son this time. My mother had started working at this time. And my mother had started looking for a house in the Junior High East school boundaries. At first, it was hard for mother to find a house that we could afford in the district. The school district was putting pressure on my mom to send me to Junior High West. Junior High West had been zone champs the last ten years in Lufkin Independent School District. They were beating all the schools in the district currently. They were loaded with all the great athletes in Lufkin, Texas.

My mother wanted the best for me when it came down to my academics. My mother at this time in my life did not want a setback like I had when I was young, when Lufkin ISD made me change schools because my Aunt and Uncle was not my legal guardians. The coaches at Junior High East were a big help in helping my mother look for a home that we could afford. And look at God work.

We finally bought a home Junior High East district lines. I went to Junior High East and played running back two years at Junior High East. My 8<sup>th</sup> grade year, Junior

High East won their first Super Bowl in ten years. Although we lost to a Tyler Junior High (Boulter) and were not zone champions, Junior High East had done something that all the other Junior High East teams had not done in over ten years. We had won the Super Bowl against our inner-city rival, Junior High West. I had great games in both of those years.

### **Lesson 6 When I Realized I was Good in Sports**

**I Corinthians 9:24 “Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.”**

So, I continued to play sports in elementary. I realized by my sixth-grade year that I was good in basketball too! So, I began to play basketball also. Finally, I started playing all sports and I realize I had just had been blessed with the God given talent to be a good athlete. In Lufkin, Texas we only had one immediate school. And my 7<sup>th</sup> grade year, I realized that I had good speed and was fast. So fast I was moved up to run in 9<sup>th</sup> grade track meets my 7<sup>th</sup> grade year. I was placing 1<sup>st</sup> in the 100 hundredth meters, 200 hundredth meters, and ran both relays (mile relay/sprint relay) in track.

### **Sports in Middle School**

While in Lufkin, Texas, attending Junior High School, I went on to become one of the greatest male athletes to come through Lufkin, Texas. I was averaging 3 to 5 touchdowns a game as a Junior High Athlete. I was doing great in the classroom at Junior High East. Not bad for a student-athlete growing up in North Lufkin, Texas whose father walked out on the family. But thanks to great teachers like Ms. Powers that did not

give up on me. Not only could I run and catch a football, but I was a decent basketball player. However, my love was football and track.

### **Track Athlete**

I was having great years in track. I was undefeated in the 100 and 200 meters in 1987 all the way to 1990. Remember I had been running Junior High Track ever since 1987 when I was in intermediate. All the summers of running those hills in Timpson, Texas, doing push-ups, and wanting to be like my cousin James Patton, paid off. It seemed like every track meet I went to in Texas, I was running amazing times. The 4x100 relay team I was on was undefeated also.

Things were happening for me in sports. I was just so appreciative of all the blessings that God was blessing me with. I was very spiritual and understood that all blessings came from God. I knew at an early age that nothing was happening without the blessings of God. As a matter of fact, before I ran every sprint I would look up towards heaven and point towards God.

### **High School**

It was projected that I was going to be on Varsity as a sophomore at Lufkin High School. I was about 175 pounds. However, I had great speed and strength. I was benching about 300 hundred pounds on the bench press. I ran about a 4.4 forty at that time. So, my ninth-grade year, I was practicing with the varsity football team during spring football. That was not an easy task because you had 16 to 17-year-old boys that were out to hurt me in spring football. They felt like I had not paid my dues to be a varsity football player.

As a matter of fact, I lot of the older athletes got tired of hearing about this junior high super back. I held my own as a young freshman running back.

However, I was extremely sore that spring. My mother was great in taking care of my sore body. Mom would buy a lot of Epsom Salt for me to soak in. Because I had a lot of soreness after running the ball against older football players. I finally got mentally tough that I was not going to let haters discourage me from being a varsity running back. So, I started to really become mentally tough that spring as a freshman. The varsity coaches would bus the freshman over to practice with the high school students, because we were on a different campus.

### **College Recruits**

After practicing with the Varsity team that spring. Many college scouts started to recruit me as a freshman running back. My varsity coach was a great promoter of student-athletes. I was getting letters from all colleges in the Southwest Conference. All the colleges in the South Eastern Conferences. I was invited in to take unofficial visits to colleges like Texas A&M and several of the Southwest Conference colleges. I went to visit those colleges. And my mom would have to work. So, my peewee league coach, Terry Conley, would go with me on the unofficial visits. My peewee league coach was a Caucasian guy who treated me as if I was his son. My mother and family really liked Terry Conley. He had coached all my cousins in peewee league. So, he had a connection with all my family.



### **College Entrance Exam**

My senior year in high school, I was getting recruited by all the major colleges in the United States. However, there was one major problem, I had not taken my SAT nor had I taken the ACT. This was December of my senior year, 1991. Nobody told me about being a qualifying student athlete. Also, during my time in high school, my school did not have coaches that helped give information to student athletes, about being NCAA qualifying athletes. Now, high schools have coaches that work with student athletes to make sure the athlete gets the proper tutoring, along with taking the right class to qualify to play sports in college. And if they are struggling to qualify, they provide them with all kinds of assistance and study materials to qualify.

It was very disappointing that me and some of my friends on the team did not know about qualify as a student athlete to play ball at the division one level. The counselor had told me and some of the other student-athletes that it was up to the Head Coach or Athletic Director to tell the student athletes what it takes to qualify. However, the high school program I was attending always had many African American Males' athletes that did not have the grades to qualify or attend Divisional One schools. Most of the African American Males were going to Junior College. And they would end up quitting after one year. It was a trend happening every year at this high school. The program would have eleven male athletes sign college scholarships. And eight out of eleven would be African American student athletes happening to and go to junior college, and do not qualify by NCAA qualify rules.

I had only one shot at qualifying with the ACT to go to the divisional one college of my choice. I will never forget that Saturday. It was so much stress and pressure on me that I had a headache. I already had some thoughts in my head about not being a great test taker. And with this test being the only shot I had to qualify. Well! I went in there and took the test and missed the qualifying score by one point. I was so mad that I said I was not going to play college ball, especially if I had to attend junior college. As a matter of fact, I said I was going to the Air Force. But my mother and aunt encouraged me not to give up on my dream.

Later, a couple weeks went by and Grambling University came calling offering me to be a Proposition 48 player and a scholarship the next year. I took an official visit to Grambling. My mother had to work that day. However, my mother had talked with coach Eddie Robinson who was a legend amongst the college coaches who had over 300 wins in Division I football. Coach Rob, as the student athletes called him, was one of the best college coaches of all time, besides Bear Bryant. He wanted me to play wing-back in his offense.

So, with mother having to work during my official visit there. My mom talked with Terry Conley to take me to visit Grambling University. My mother asked Terry Conley will he feel comfortable in visiting a college that is a Historically Black College. And Terry Conley took the opportunity and took me to Grambling to visit the University. Terry Conley was willing to do anything to continue to help me play ball in college and get an education.

### **Signing to Play College Football**

I decided to go to Tyler Junior College. Tyler Junior College had won the last two junior college championships. Plus, the college was beautiful. And they offered great opportunities to go on to a four-year college. I went there to play running back. And originally, I was a running back and I was doing well. Then they decided to move to full back. I was only 190 pounds and hated the fullback position with a passion. I had to determine whether I would transfer from Tyler Junior College to Blinn Junior College. However, SWJC had started a new policy that you could not transfer from another SWJC to another. I guess that just caused a lot of problems with the schools and the coaches in the conference.

Well, I had an uncle who stayed in Canton, Mississippi where my mother was from. I had considered whether to transfer to Hinds Community Junior College. I felt that I had too much talent as an athlete to be just a blocker and catch a pass every once and a while. Playing full back at the college level is not easy. There is a lot of blocking involved that I did not like. I wanted to carry the ball like I was doing when I first got to Tyler Junior College. The stingers that I would get in the games and practice would just run all the way down my spine and back just burning. I started to question myself: Is it worth playing college football? I would get stingers from blocking that would make my fingers and arms go numb in games. Once again, I started wondering that this might not be what I want to do my four years of colleges. I learned a lot in junior college. I learned the politics of the game. And that once colleges get you signed as an athlete, they can do anything they want to you and with you. Once you get to the college and start playing,

some college coaches do not keep their word once they have you. I started talking to my mother about the numbness I was getting in my arms, back, and neck. And my mother started getting worried about me playing college football. One morning, I could hardly get out of my bed because of the headaches and numbness. And that really did scare me. So, I decided not to play anymore college ball after I left Tyler Junior College due to my body starting to work against me for all the physical blocking as a fullback.

### **Decision on Football**

I finally decided to give up on football after junior college. I was having numbness in shoulders and down my leg. I later found out that I had some disks messed up in my upper back and neck. I had started having those problems after being changed from running back to full back in college. So, I made the decision that my college football career was over. I had to consider my future and being able to enjoy life after football. I had been playing the games ever since I was eleven years old. This was very hard for me to do. However, I had always been going to school and preparing for life after football. In other words, I had a backup plan if football did not work out in college. I had done well in junior college and I was doing well at Stephen F. Austin in my academics. I felt that after praying that God's purpose for my life was to teach.

### **Stephen F. Austin**

I went to Stephen F. Austin with the intent of playing football for Stephen F. Austin. However, due to health problems and my body starting to fail me after playing fullback in Jr. College, I decided to just concentrate on my academics at Stephen F. Austin. It was hard at first when seeing my friends continue to play football. But I was

being so successful in the classroom it made it easier for me to move on. I had to consider the way I was having numbness in my legs and headaches due to disks messed up in my back and neck; it was the right decision to move on.

So, I was at Stephen F. Austin and decided to major in education. I had decided that I will coach for a couple years. Then I will consider getting into administration. It was my goal to impact and touch many lives like Mr. Burley. Stephen F. Austin is a college for education majors, so it was no doubt that I was in the right place. I just needed to handle my business by studying to prepare myself, so I could have an impact on the lives of all students. And I wanted to work with students of poverty to make a difference in their lives. I just remember the difference and the impact that certain teachers and principals had made in my life. So, I studied and worked hard to prepare myself to be the best educator I can be.

## **Lesson 7 Overcoming other People's Expectations**

### **John 15**

**<sup>16</sup>“Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.”**

Ever since, I decided to major in education, I said I always wanted to come back home and give to my community and school district. However, no matter how hard you work and learn, some people still want to stereotype a person. Just because you are an ex-athlete that does not mean that you can't be intelligent enough think outside the box. Or that does not mean that you cannot have a positive impact on a student's life. This is a

fact that education needs more minorities and people of brown to be in education. But it really does bother me that some people of the Caucasian race feel that men, especially African American men, cannot have an impact on instruction. I was a head principal in my hometown. However, they put me on a campus that was not a STARR campus. This campus was a Primary Campus that fed into a STARR campus.

It is very sad that I had to take a primary campus. And I had to prove that I could even be a leader of a primary campus. There were district leaders that even questioned my ability to be a leader of a primary campus. However, there were district leaders that spoke up for me about my willingness to continue to learn, to become the best educator I can be for all students.

I hate to hear people say that I am a 'Derrick James fan' however, still question your ability as a leader. This has led me to continue my education. Because I want to continue my learning to improve so I can have an impact on students of ethnicities and student achievement. I do not care if you were poor, come from a broken home, on welfare, or no matter what bad hand you have been given. People's perceptions of you do not have to be true. You can prove those people wrong. I am a firm believer that everyone with God blessing can overcome perceptions and stereotypes.

There are minorities leaving the district every day because they feel as a minority you cannot get an opportunity to be a leader due to your color. I originally said I wanted to help the kids where I grew up. But I realized those students are not the only kids that need help in Texas. I am willing to relocate so I can use the God given talents that I have been blessed with. I want to go to a district that appreciates my abilities as a leader and

my ability to impact learning for all students, not for running a football. I don't mind having to prove myself. However, I do question how society will judge people of color on stereotypes, not looking at their work ethic. I have friends before me who have just been stuck in Assistant Principals jobs dealing with discipline because they were not willing to leave Lufkin, Texas. I had one district leader tell me well if you do leave Lufkin, Texas, and be successful superintendent, at least we can say that you are a product of Lufkin, Texas.

I am not the only ex-athlete that had to leave his hometown to prove his capabilities as an instructional leader. Mr. Thompson (pseudonym) told me in the weight room that is why he was going back to get his doctoral degree, to improve his opportunities to get a superintendent job where he can impact many lives. And to this day I have never forgotten that he told me that.

My hometown has changed over the years. The only African American instructional leaders we have in the district now are on the primary level. I am now the Associate Principal of the middle school. My primary campus was changed to Pre-K to 4 campus. So, to pursue my dreams to become a superintendent, I came back up to work with older students.

I have come to the realization that people are going to always try to question your intelligence. Especially, when people know that you are an ex-athlete or a man of color. I have had friends that I have helped get principal jobs and move to other areas of Texas. God has blessed them to get Superintendent jobs. They even tried to question my ability to lead STARR campuses. After I have helped them when they were trying to get

principal jobs themselves. I couldn't believe they tried to question my abilities as an instructional leader when I have done a lot to help them in their careers. I say to myself it is amazing how people forget the hand that has helped them. And I don't understand that if people do question the people they hire and their leadership abilities, they can always non-renew you if you are not working out or you can't do the job. I guess as a person of opportunity, I just believe in giving people a chance.

### **Discrimination Amongst People of Color**

If we think that racism only has to do with people of other races we need to rethink how we look at racism. I am thinking if we are seeking change for all the oppressed, then as an African American race we need to start with the African American race first. There is plenty of racism that exists in the African American race. For instance, lighter skin African Americans a lot time in the African American Culture feel that they are somewhat more privileged than African American of darker skin color. People with the lighter skin tend to try to use this to their advantage to seek better jobs and opportunities over the darker skin African Americans. For example, people of color even go as far as bleaching their skin to get a more European look, along with getting plastic surgery to look more acceptable in America. However, I believe in one race, and that is the human race. And as humans, we should all be happy in the way God has made us as human beings.

People often discriminate amongst the African American race due to power in a capitalist society. People are seeking opportunities to try to keep an upper hand over one another in the African American race. I have seen people get promotions on their jobs



due to that they sound more European than the other African American or due to a lighter skin complexion of the next African American in the company. In the meantime, for discrimination to be changed outside the African American race, we as humans need to address the issue inside the African American race first and admit there is a problem amongst the race.

Another problem I have experienced amongst the African American race is that humans are jealous. Amongst the African American Race, we need to stop the having the crawfish syndrome. We need to stop pulling each other down amongst the African American race. I know when I started in the doctoral program I thought I might get questions from people outside my race about why you are in a doctoral program. But I received a lot of resentment from people of color. Even when I got a job promotion from within my school district, many African American people in the community spoke against me for having that opportunity. And they even were questioning my race, saying that I wasn't black enough. Even questioned my location where I lived. They criticized me for moving and living in a better home. They said that I wanted to live like the European White male; and all I was doing was moving in a better home for my family.

In all honesty, we must get better period amongst all humanity. Treating all people like human beings. We are all made in the image of God. God has not made one person, race, or anybody better than the other. So, until we stop the crawfish syndrome amongst the African American race, and just be happy when God blesses a person. As a race, we cannot point the finger at another race. We really need to look amongst the African American race with a critical lens, if we really want a change in society.

## **Lesson 8 A Servant of God and Educator**

### **I Corinthians 7**

**<sup>21</sup> “Art thou called being a servant? Care not for it: but if thou mayest be made free, use it rather.**

**<sup>22</sup> For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant.**

**<sup>23</sup> Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men.”**

Growing up and struggling financially brought a determination for me not to live like that when I became grown. I was determined to not let my future family have the same struggles that I was experiencing. I knew as a person and a human being that my circumstances growing up were something that I could overcome when I became grown or an adult. I knew that through Faith in my Savior Jesus Christ and by praying, I could overcome and live a better life than my parents. I knew that things were not going to be easy. But through Faith and perseverance, things in my life could change. I had made up in my mind that things were going to change in my life one way or another. I did not have dreams to be rich, but the opportunity to be able to take care of my future family. As a child growing up, there was a time when we did not have nothing to eat at home. But it is a blessing to have relatives and family members that really believe in family and are great Christian people. Because due to these loving relatives, we had an opportunity to eat when there was no food in the house. As a student, I could not wait sometimes to get to school. Because school gave me an opportunity to eat something, other than chicken and rice, or Hamburger Helper without the Hamburger meat.

I attended church all the time as a child. And I learned early the power and significance of prayer. This example was set by my relatives, my mother, and my church leaders. I was extremely blessed that when we did not have things to eat or wear that my pastor and his wife were tremendous blessings to my mother and me. As a matter of fact, my mother was very close to my pastor's wife. They often would talk on the phone and would pray together. I have seen prayer work even as a young boy. And often I would pray by myself about things that were happening in my life. I prayed about grades, I prayed for my siblings, and I prayed even when I started playing little league sports. But often, I prayed for God to give me a heart to want to better myself as a human being and overcome the living conditions that I was growing up in. But it was the power of prayer that brought about a change in my behavior, my will and desire to become a better student. That is why I thank God for prayer.

Now! Here is a very important point that no doubt God revealed this to me when I was in the fourth grade. After getting in trouble at Slack Elementary those couple of years, it was revealed to me in order for my life to change that education was going to be the key to changing me and my economic status. No adult told me that, but God revealed to me.

I started watching TV a lot and noticed that successful people were either famous movie stars, athletes, or had degrees. In other words, they had an education. And once again, there was my Aunt and Uncle preaching education. So, I knew that for me to be successful, either way I was going to have to start studying my books. Even if I wanted to go to college and wanted to play collegial sports that I would have to study and get my

books. But my focus was on overcoming poverty and being able to provide for my family. I was not concerned about getting rich but being able to put food on my table and not go hungry. Even today I tell students that I work with in my school, if you want your life to change, get your education.

### **First Job**

I received my first job in Lufkin ISD. I was very excited to be working in Lufkin ISD. I was going to have a great opportunity to give back to my community, a community in which I had a teacher, and a coach who touched my life. I started out working at Slack Elementary then going to Lufkin High School to coach the rest of the day. I had moved back home so it was a great opportunity to help my mother and stay with her. My mother was still working at the nursing home in the kitchen then. Also, my mother was the head cook. And my mother was extremely happy to have me back home. I remember my first check I paid two of my mother's bills. So, my mother told me I did not have to do it, but I done it anyway.

I was really enjoying coach and teaching in Lufkin, Texas. The athletes were really responding to me as a coach even though I was young. I coached the Junior Varsity Running Backs. And I also was the Junior Varsity Track Coach. I was learning from a great group of coaches in Lufkin, Texas. I was hired knowing that the next year they were opening the largest middle school in the State of Texas, and I would be moved to the middle school the next year. I was all right with the hiring and knew what I was getting into. But the main thing I was having fun and having a positive impact on lives already in my hometown.

That summer I was hired by Lufkin ISD to help with the transition as they opened a new middle school and high school. It was great that they thought enough of me to offer me a job that summer. I made great money those three months. And once again I gave money to my mother. My mother was quite appreciative of my generosity towards her. I just wanted to give my mother and help her as much as possible while I was at home. So, that summer I did not go nowhere but work, and I lifted weights and ran with the high school students. Most of the high school students or football players that were working for Lufkin ISD were up under my supervision.

The fall of my official second year started, which was the Lufkin Middle School's first year. The year was hectic at first because this whole concept of one middle school was new to the area. However, the reason the superintendent wanted to do this was to bring about unity in the community and school. And this one middle school concept did help the community and the students. This school when it opened had over 2400 students on campus. In athletics we had three to four football teams a grade level. There were three to four basketball ball teams and one track team. And competition was fierce for those running and jumping events. I was the head track coach. And we were undefeated in just about all the sports you name. We were dominating schools and schools hated to see us coming to the events to compete.

After my second year, I decided to go back to college to work on my Mid-Management certificate. I was ready to accomplish the first step in my dream of being an administrator. At that time, I was working on my masters and we had to go to class on Wednesday's nights every other week. And some classes we had to attend on Saturdays.

And all the classes were on site. During this time, it took you three years to get a master's degree. I was coaching during this whole time, but I was young and could do it. There were some tough times for me during this time because a lot of my coaching peers did not understand why I wanted to be principal. Colleges were not offering on-line courses. And you could not get your Mid-Management in 18 months.

So, for three years it was a grind for me. I was fortunate to be in a cohort called the Sid Richardson Cohort named after Sid Richardson. But I knew it would be a sacrifice to make my dreams come true. There is no doubt that education can open doors in your life. And I wanted to be that example to all kids how education can help you overcome poverty and change your life.

### **Assistant Principal**

I started working out with Mr. Thompson (Pseudonym) my 10<sup>th</sup> grade year. I had met Mr. Thompson (Pseudonym) while I was in elementary, and I used to play with his son. And a couple years later I end up working out with Mr. Thompson (Pseudonym). Mr. Thompson (Pseudonym) was the 10<sup>th</sup> grade principal at the Lufkin High School (pseudonym). His family were big educators in Lufkin, Texas. His father even had a primary school in Lufkin, Texas (pseudonym) named after him. While we worked out we built a connection with one another. Mr. Thompson (pseudonym) had played several years in Canadian Football League.

I really admired my principal because he was family man, and he was just a great role model for African American boys in Lufkin, Texas (pseudonym). So, we talked about football, academics, and Mr. Thompson (Pseudonym) going to school working on

his doctorate. Mr. Thompson (Pseudonym) really inspired me the times when we worked out at school and talked at lunch while he was on lunch duty. Mr. Thompson (pseudonym) was such an inspiration to me that I said if I do not make to the National Football League I was going to be a principal just like Mr. Thompson (Pseudonym). When I get with my friends and we talked about me fulfilling my dreams to be a principal. My friends joke and laugh and say, “Dee, you always said you was going to the National Football League, or you going to be a principal”.

I graduated from college and thought I had the perfect plan. Like I said I always knew what I wanted to be and do. I always said I was going to teach about 3 years and get into administration. Well it was not as easy as I thought. I started teaching in my home town. I was very young at that time. I was teaching and coaching. But I would always tell the other coaches that I was going to be a principal so I can touch as many lives as possible. I applied for my first principal job when I was 25 five years old. I went on several interviews in my hometown. And all people wanted to talk about is that they remember when I played ball in Lufkin, my hometown. And I was not pleased with that. I received my principal certification when I was three years out of college, because I had prayed about, and God had revealed to me what my purpose was and is in life.

It was extremely hard for me to get a principal job where I grew up at. People was still looking at me as Derrick James, the student. I had to prove myself even as a teacher. I had a baby face when I first started teaching. Some administrators really did not want to put me on the high school campus at first. They would always talk with me about being professional. And not getting into trouble with the students. My focus was on being the

best teacher I could be. I knew that great teachers make great administrators. So, that is all I wanted to do is be the best Health teacher I could be to make a difference in students' lives.

### **Tired of Waiting on a Principal Job**

I decided if I could not obtain at least a principal job in the town where I grew up, it was time to move on. I left my home town when I got married. I knew that my purpose was to be an educator. I just wanted to be a testimony to all students and students of poverty. I felt that being in the classroom limited me on the lives that I could reach. I know that students of color need to see professional African Americans as teachers, and in administrator roles, too, to know that they can achieve anything they want in life when it comes down to occupations.

I went to Diboll, Texas. I went there for two years. The district was letting me do some administrator things during the day. Those administrator trainings were very beneficial to me. After my second year in Diboll, Texas, I was in Las Vegas on vacation. I was looking for principal jobs while on vacation. And finally, saw a job that interest me. So, I applied for the job. I got back the next week from Las Vegas. I interviewed, and I received the job. After five years being told I was not ready to be a principal, I finally received the clarification that I was ready. I was in this town for two years. I was very successful in this town.

### **Return to Lufkin, Texas as Assistant Principal**

After two years, I returned to Lufkin, Texas, to take a grade level principal job. I took the job because I wanted to show the District staff that I was always capable of



being a Principal. I really had taken pride in educating and learning to become the best Assistant Principal or Principal I could be. Things were a lot different, I felt this time for me in Lufkin, Texas.

### **Determination to Become a Head Principal**

I had five terrific years at the Lufkin Middle School. So, for some particular political reason, the same thing starts happening to me again, this time as an Assistant Principal. Administration in Lufkin Independent School District was starting to question my dedication and intelligence in being a principal in the district. Man! This really added more fuel to the fire for me to prove them wrong and that I am capable of being a building principal. It just seems that each time I prove myself to one group of leaders, that I must prove myself all over again to a different crowd of leaders in the district.

However, thanks to a superintendent that was willing to take a chance on me, he made the move to have me change schools, where I would be given an opportunity to deal with curriculum, and not just discipline. So, I immediately took a jump at the opportunity to join Whitney Jose (pseudonym) at Brandon Elementary

### **Joining Brandon Elementary**

So, I joined Whitney Jose (pseudonym) at Brandon Elementary, and we both made a great team. I was not just the Assistant Principal, however, now I was known as the Associate Principal of Brandon Elementary. I had a great time working with Whitney Jose (pseudonym) to turn Brandon Elementary into one of the best elementary schools in Lufkin, Texas. We worked hard at Brandon Elementary and had a great time in turning

that school around. TAKS scores were great, and we had arrived at Brandon Elementary to do exactly what the superintendent wanted the principals to do.

### **The Move to Garrett Primary**

Finally, after five years at Brandon Elementary with Whitney Jose (pseudonym), I was ready to take on the responsibility of having my own campus. Remember, campuses are hard to come by in Lufkin Independent School District. Principals get jobs in Lufkin Independent School District and do not leave until they retire in Lufkin, Texas. That is how long principals hold to jobs in the district. So, sometimes you have to take what you can get as a principal in Lufkin, Texas.

So, I was very much excited about given the opportunity to become the principal of Garrett Primary, which is known as one of the oldest campuses in the school district. There were some problems at Garrett Primary, however nothing that I have never had to deal with or have seen before, as a principal. I went into Garrett Primary and immediately we started to see great results with learning and teaching. I, along with the Instructional Specialists, implemented some great things that immediately had a great impact on instruction.

### **Lesson 9 Pressing Forward in Life**

#### **Philippians 3**

**<sup>14</sup>“I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.**

#### **Certifications”**

I started out working on my certifications during my last year of college to get certified to teach. When it came down to getting my certification I did not have no

problem getting my certification for me to be a professional teacher or get a teacher field. I did not have that much of a problem getting my principal certification. However, after taking my superintendent classes for some reason the superintendent certification was the hardest for me to pass. First, I was only taking off a half of day to go take a five-hour test. I was rushing through a test in about two hours that usually take about five hours to take, or you have a maximum up to five hours to take. And the sad thing about the whole situation was that I kept scoring 238 on the test. In which, the passing rate for the test is 240.

My wife kept telling me that I needed to take a whole day off and take my time taking the test. However, I wanted to do things my way. I would go in there and take the test, and then rush back to my campus. I was so afraid to take whole day off, because I was afraid something was going to go wrong at my campus. During this time, I did not have an Assistant Principal on my campus. Finally, the State of Texas put out a limit on how many times you could take the test. I had taken the test four times scoring 238 every time.

### **Peers Passing the Test**

One of the things that really bothered me about not passing the Superintendent TExES Test is that I had friends that were passing the test the first time. And when my friends would pass the test, they would call and tell me that they pass. I would not get mad at my friends. I would just question why I am having such of a hard time passing the test. I will get frustrated and pull out my test results and try to figure how many answers that I miss the passing scale by. However, on a test like that, which is weighted different,

it is hard to tell. Finally, after just praying about it I said if my friends passed the test, I can, too.

### **Taking Time off from the Test**

I took time off from the test. While I said I was going to take a year off before I attempt to take the test again, I was sitting at home and I googled passing Superintendent TeXes Examination. They had all kinds of material on site that they were trying to sell to people that were desperate like me. I went to visit Stephen F Austin State University one day during this break from the test. This professor told me about a book that If I decided to take the test again, I might want to read. Well I went and talked to the professor that wrote the book, and she told me that she might can help me. And this professor looked at the determination in my eyes and said, “I happen to have several copies of this book today. I will give you a copy to read.” And immediately I started reading the book, and I started to look at the learning community a little different. Plus, the professor invited me to another practice session. I felt a little embarrassed about going. Because, I had been to a session already before when I first started taking the test. However, God told me not to be embarrassed about having to go to another tutorial session. Next, it is not how many times you fail, but it is how many times you get back up after you fall.

### **Passing the Superintendent TeXes**

After, taking the test four times, I told myself that I was not going to take the test. I felt like I was not smart enough to pass the Superintendent TeXes Test. My wife talked to me and told me that once again I needed to take a whole day off and do not rush to get back to that school campus. Also, the state now had a limit now on how many times you

can take certification test. So, I had to swallow my pride and admit to my wife that she might be right.

Next, what I done when I sign up for the test this time, I took a whole day off at work. I went in there and took my time when I took the test. And just having the time to relax and not having to worry about rushing back to my campus, made me feel more relaxed than ever. I hated to admit it. But I had to go home and tell my wife she was right. Finally, after getting my test results back. Hey! I had to admit to my wife, once again, that she was correct. I knocked the socks of the Superintendent TeXes Test. But not only was my wife right. It is awesome what God will do in your life, if you just remain obedient and faithful. I owe everything to God. On how he has just ordained my life to be a servant for him. And accepting my call as a servant leader.

## **Lesson 10 Called to Be a Servant of God**

### **Matthew 22**

#### **<sup>14</sup>“For many are called, but few are chosen”**

I have always been brought up in the church. I have attended church my whole life. I was brought up in the Pentecostal church or you can say denomination. I went to the church Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Saturday, and Sunday, every night but the fourth Sunday. Going to church never has been boring or tiresome for me. If you know anything about Pentecostal churches, there are never no dull moments. We were always praising and worshipping God at church. The church that I attended never was in a hurry to get out of church.

Nor did I just go to Sunday morning worship, but I had to wake up early and go to Sunday School, also. However, I thank God for having to attend church, although there were times I did not want to go. Because it made me a better person and taught me that I could not depend on my own selfish motives, but I should always depend on God.

### **Prayer**

I learned at an early age the importance of prayer. Being in church, I learned that it is necessary and a need for a Christian to have prayer in their life. As a young kid I always felt better after having prayer. And the older I got, I really learned the significance behind having prayer in my life. I learned early that prayer can and will change people, lives, circumstance, and trials. And I learned from experience, I am not just telling you something I don't know. But I am talking about prayer from experience. Many people don't see the reason for prayer in life and still call themselves Christians. And if you haven't tried prayer, maybe it is time you try prayer.

### **Faith**

When I was a kid I would complain about going to church all the time. I remember thinking to myself that when I get grown, I not going to go church like I am forced to now. Growing up in the Pentecostal Church, I was in church long hours. There never was really a dull moment in church. I just felt tired of going, but once I was in church, I felt relieved. I was different from other kids in the church in that I loved the preaching more than I did singing in the choir. And it was just something about the cadence that African American preachers use in the voice when they are preaching that I really enjoyed and tried to copy as a child. However, during those years growing up, I

was reading and learning about the word God; it has had an influence on my life as a man.

I have come to understand that Philippians 4: 13 is deeply rooted in my heart and my Christian walk in life. I have so much faith that I believe that it is no limit on what God can and will do in my life. And all that faith came about because a great foundation in my life that was started as a little boy. I remember at the age of six attending church and Sunday school every time the church doors were open. Growing up in my family, attending church was just important as going to school. I do believe no doubt my mother's faith in God is what helped her survive during tough times, trying to raise me and my siblings on her own.

The prayer life and the foundation for prayer was established by my Grandmother, then extended through her daughters. My Aunt Ora Lee Morrison was a missionary in the church. My Aunt Ora Lee Morrison oversaw opening the church up every Tuesday for lunch hour prayer throughout the year. I do not care what was going on during the day. My Aunt opened the church up every Tuesday for lunch hour prayer all the way up until she felt her death.

And never have I seen people pray like the people at the church prayed. The people would really pray, and this was not a show. I know for a fact every time I need a special prayer whether spiritual or physical. These old-time saints or elders of the church will pray and cry out to God, and he would move and come through on time. And I mean that with great passion. And seeing these great elders pray like this along with God moving in their life. Prayer just increased my faith even more. And not only did the saints

pray, but they fasted. And fasting was not always about food. It was other things that they would give up that they liked doing and they obligated this time to praying and scripture.

My faith has helped me be able overcome a lot of things I did not understand in my life. Though all the pain and suffering as a little boy to the rejection by my father, I have learned to trust God through the good and the bad. Also, my faith has given me the heart to be able to forgive my father for the way that he treated my mother, my siblings, and me. And although the times was tough, I am all willing to forgive my father. I can say that I love my father. Things are not where they need to be. But I thank God that our relationship is not the way it used to be. And all this has come about because my faith in God. If my God is forgiving, I need to be forgiving like my God.

Even with not getting the jobs that I wanted in the past, I understand to trust God. Even though man may doubt you and try to stop progress of individuals, I do believe that God has the final say. That is why I have not given up on my dreams in life. God has revealed things to me, that is inspiration to me not to give up. I really want to be a servant for God and try to mentor and be an example to all children of poverty. To be an example that you can overcome unfortunate circumstance and trials.

So, my faith has encouraged me to hang in there and that I can do it. This whole life and journey are all about helping and being a servant for God, so that you can bless others. And that is the mission that I am on. And it has been my faith in God that keeps me going when there are times that it seems that I will not be able to reach my dreams.



### **My Acceptance of Jesus Christ**

The most important decision I have made in my life is the acceptance of Jesus Christ as my Personal Savior. Repenting and being baptized (Acts 2: 38) has been my foundation that I have stood on early in life. Being introduced to the Christian Faith as early as of five years of age built a foundation that has provided courage and strength in the rollercoaster ride called life. My mother along with Aunt (Ora Lee Morrison) were big in the Church of God in Christ. The principles and morals that I was taught as a Christian I still stand on today, instilled in me through my faith that I have maintained over the years. Life has a way of throwing a person several different curve balls to try to shake a person faith.

However, one thing that I have grown to understand in my life, and my professional journey is that God loves me unconditionally. I have come to understand on the journey called life that man will fail you every time. But God's love is eternal. And it is through my faith that I have let God reveal his love to me. Through this love I have learned in spite of what I am going through in rough times and life that man may might try to put limitations on a person. They might try to block your physical blessings. But if God says that you can have a blessing, there is not nothing that any man can do about blessings from God. The blessings from God might not happen when you want them to. However, God is always on time.

Next, thing I have come to realize is that God made me for a purpose. That my life that I am living today is ordained and I am here for a reason. And that no person, no individual, no physical or spiritual attack can stop what God has for me. Proverbs 3: 5-6

states “Tell me to trust in God with all my heart, lean not to my own understanding. In all my ways acknowledge him and he shall direct my path.” And by my Faith this scripture has maintained me in dealing with stereotyping, jealousy, hatred, and racism that have existed in my life. So, I know without a doubt that God’s plans for my life is to be prosperous and not to bring hurt in my life. That is how I have been able to maintain in life even though things have not always work out the way I wanted them too. That Faith that was established in me reaffirms to just hold on in tough times in life.

Next, one of my favorite verses in scripture is Jeremiah 29: 11, "For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Finally, I have learned that God is well invested in my well-being and my wholeness in life to be the person and servant that he wants me to be. My job is to educate and give other African American Males an example that you can make it in life. The negative light that television and the media display on television is not the life of all African American Males live. There are African American males that are doctors, lawyers, firemen, and productive husbands in this land called America. If God have blessed me and others before me to be good examples in life, so can he bless the next African American Male. That is the whole reason I have chosen to reveal my story so that children of poverty can overcome bad stereotypes and poverty to become productive citizens in society.

Finally, I have the assurance that God is always fighting for my well-being. In facing up-hill battles I am reminded that God spoke through King David in Psalms 55:22 “Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the

righteous to be moved.” So, I have learned and is learning to give it to God in a time of despair and trouble. That is why I have learned to keep pressing on in this life. But this faith started because of my attendance in church and my acceptance of my Savior Jesus Christ. That is why I know without a doubt that churches need to be full every time church doors are open in communities. And not just black communities but all communities in the United States where there is so much hatred being preached in a society that is supposed to be built on Christian values and love.

### **Going to Preach**

My Aunt (Ora Lee Morrison) would always tell me that I was going to preach. When I was six years of age instead, of playing outside, me and my cousins along with some friends would be having church. My cousins and friends would be the church choir and the members of the church. And I would always be the preacher. I would pay attention to the pastor on Sunday. And come home and preach the same message that I heard the pastor preach on Sundays to friends and cousins. It was always amazing how I could zone in and be so focused that I could remember what the preacher was always preaching about. And while I was preaching, they would get happy and praise God (My Cousins). The whole time we will be playing church. The adults could hear us in the near room. So, my Aunt (Ora Lee Morrison) had told me that I was going to preach ever since I was five years of age and up. My Aunt had told me and several other members of my family that God had revealed that to her.

But you must be careful, especially when it comes down to God. That you are not doing something just because people say that you are going to do something. Only God

knows the purpose and plan for every individual's life. Man can have you running in the wrong path, if you always listen to man. Besides, God only knows what the plans are for each person that he has created. I continued to preach and read the Bible and have church like that until I was about eight or nine years of age with my family. This was not just a show. I could at that early age understand scripture and God will reveal things to me in his word. I guess that is why I have always lived the life that I have lived, a very clean life with God always the head of my life. Of course, I have fallen short, but I never have gone too far left due to me being a God-fearing man.

### **Deacon**

After I had started going to church with my wife, which is a nondenominational church, I had started to reveal to people that I could sing. I had started singing with the male chorus and started singing quartet music. After, that I got on trial as a deacon. I was not in no rush to get ordained as a deacon. I stayed on trial for about two to three years because I just wasn't in a hurry. Then one day, God revealed to me that I really needed to stop running and accept my call to be a deacon.

Once I accepted my call as a deacon, I started teaching Sunday school and my ministry started to get bigger and bigger. When I would go sing people were being healed and delivered by my singing ministry and my teaching. Also, people would remind me that I was bootlegging as a preacher. In other words, I needed to go ahead and accept my call as a preacher. However, once again I understand that preaching and being a minister is a high calling on your life that you do not need to play with it. So, in the meantime, I just continued to pray that God would reveal his plans to me.

## **Preaching**

I started teaching mini lessons when I was a deacon. And one Sunday I was teaching a lesson on “What’s Love Got to Do with It”. I was coming from John 3: 16: “For God so loved the World he gave his only begotten Son”. I started out really teaching and expounding on the word of God. And about the time I was getting ready to close, I start preaching in a cadence.

In the African American church, we call that whooping in the church. And all of a sudden the church was praising God. And I continued to teach, or if you want to call it preaching, from a podium for about two years. And my pastor kept telling me he wanted to ordain me, and that I needed to get ordain. My pastor was and is a Bishop. And he could train and ordain me. My pastor was always willing to encourage me even to this day although he is not my pastor any more. He still is a big supporter of mines. I can call him any time of the day. And he is there to talk too, and counsel with me.

However, in 2015, I preached my first sermon in front of a church house full of believers. I could not believe the amount of people that came out to support me on this endeavor. It was a great day that I will never forget. I could not believe that family even flew in to see me preach this great message to the people of God. It rained very hard that Sunday afternoon. But people really turned out in big numbers to hear me preach my first sermon. My Aunt Ora Lee Morrison even came to hear me preach my first sermon. A few months later, My Aunt went home to be with the Lord. So, that is one of the best days of my life because my Aunt got to hear me preach. My Aunt was an ordained

missionary that was a Bible scholar and really knew the Bible. And getting her approval was a big plus for me on this spiritual journey.

## **Lesson 11 Seeking Knowledge to Become a Better Educator**

### **Proverbs 15**

**<sup>14</sup>“The heart of him that hath understanding seeketh knowledge: but the mouth of fools feedeth on foolishness.”**

I have always wanted to continue to grow in the field of education. The world is forever changing when it comes down to effective instruction for students. Educators must continue to stay updated with the different trends in education to provide effective instruction for students. We are living in a 21<sup>st</sup> century society that is changing by the second. Students are changing and are more involved in technology than ever. The 21<sup>st</sup> century student needs a teacher, principal, and instruction to give them tools to function in a society that is no longer an industrial society, but once again a society that is all about technology.

So, for me the decision was easy to go back to school to become a more effective leader for today's technology driven student. I want to be the most effective leader I can be for students. That is what made it a no brainer to apply for Stephen F. Austin Doctoral Program. A program that is face to face, that gives a leader like me an opportunity to interact with the instructors. I never have been the type to do well or like on-line programs. I believed that the program at Stephen F. Austin would equip me to be more of an effective leader that can provide for the P-12 student.

I initially investigated Stephen F. Austin Doctoral Program back in 2013. But my wife and I were raising twin babies at that time. So, I decided to wait to my twins were a little older before taking on the journey of being a doctoral student. I must admit I was scared that I was not capable of being a doctoral student. You know after being told all the years and whole life that you are not capable when it comes down to academics. You can become skeptical about going to school. So, I did wonder could I pull this off along with going to work full-time. Finally, that is why I hesitated in 2013. But I prayed on it and God gave me the assurance that I needed to go for it.

I went back in 2015 after getting the approval and the blessing from God and family. I met Dr. Patrick Jenlink and immediately I said I was in the right place and this was the right program for me. I really had done my homework and knew that face to face was the right thing for me. I was motivated to learn about theory and contextual knowledge that would make me a better educator. Stephen F. Austin Educational Leadership Program provides the learner the opportunity to be in the classroom with professionals specializing in higher education, administration, curriculum and research, and administration. Second, it gives the student in the cohort an opportunity to collaborate and learn from professionals in a classroom from all levels. And that is the great thing about going to Stephen F. Austin to obtain or seek your doctoral degree.

After presenting before a committee, I received confirmation that I had gotten accepted into the program. I started that summer of 2016 along with starting a new job as the Associate Principal at the largest middle school in Texas. I had my hands full starting a new job and the program at the same time. They tell you not to embark on a new job

while you are in the program. However, I did not know that because I was not in the program when I accepted the new job.

I never will forget the first day of class. The cohort went to hear prior students that had been through the program and had completed the program. That orientation and luncheon did not do nothing but intimidate me. Hearing the stories of individuals that had been through the program had my stomach just in knots. The past members talked about all the reading and writing that they had to do. And about how hard the words were to understand when you were reading. And about theories that that they had never heard before. But I thought to myself why I was eating lunch and said if they can achieve their dreams, I know I can do the same. And anything worth having is not going to be easy, if it is worth having.

Meanwhile, I finished my lunch. I remember as the cohort members walked from the cafeteria to the classroom where our books were kept. I could hear other members in my cohort have the same feeling I had; could they make it through the doctoral program? I guess I was not the only one that had gotten intimidated by past members. I thought they were speaking to the cohort to get us fired up that we can do this. However, it did not seem that way. Then we stopped outside and took a picture to put on the wall. When we went up in the elevator. There was still some discouragement.

Finally, here comes Dr. Patrick Jenlink and we looked up, and he had a stack of papers, along with the syllabus that looked like a book itself. The little motivation that I reestablish during lunch was completely gone when he started handed out papers. I mean you could hear a pin drop in the room. This was the beginning of the first class on a



Friday on a summer day in June. It was just overwhelming to everybody in the class. I had a headache the rest of evening due to the lack of confidence to start the program and finish. I prayed so many times that day. And I prayed like I have never prayed before. We took a 15-minute break for a restroom break and to relieve some stress. I and the rest of the guys in cohort were stressing. But somehow and somehow we all regrouped during the break and talked about the difference we will be able to make in society when we are finished.

The workloads were furious and hectic. I never have done so much reading in my life. Not only did I read, but I had to re-read what I read. Yes! There were words in the reading that I never had heard of before and could not pronounce. But I said to myself I can't let that detour me from learning. But as I read and read, I learned academia that I have never ever learned before. And the more I read, the more excited I started getting about reading. I was learning words like critical theory, narrative inquiry, bricoleur, theories that I would have never heard of if I would not have gotten in the doctoral program.

I stopped sharing with my coworkers about me being in a doctoral program. I received a lot of resentment from my coworkers about being in doctoral program. But I felt that to help students reach their fullest potential, all teachers should continue their education. Education changes people for the better. Education will transcend a person into a more productive human in society.

One of the things that being in the doctoral program done for me is that I started seeing things different and with more of a critical lens. I was assessing societal issues and

the classroom not like I never had done before. This critical lens that I have developed as a scholar really gave me a new perspective on how students learn. Next, it gave me a critical eye at looking at equality issues in the class involving quality learning for all students. I saw these things from the perspective of doing things morally and ethically right for all students. It is a fact that to build a better democratic society, we need to start with equipping individuals to be divergent thinkers with the concept of working with all people no matter what nationality, color, or what part of town they come from. If we are going to be a democratic society, it starts in education building leadership capacity or starting the social imaginary that it does not matter where you are from, but who you have become through education. If we do a better job of educating students to collaborate and respect diversity, then that can transcend into the real world.

### **Who am I?**

First, I am a scholar practitioner that believes that all students can and will learn. I believe through education, students can become anything that they want to be. I believe that all students that are living in poverty can overcome this situation in society through education. I am a leader, motivator, preacher, and life changer. I try to see the greatness in all students and people in society. I believe that as an educator it is my moral obligation to be a role model for all students. Especially, for students that come from single parent households, and poverty. I am a testimony if you keep God first and through prayer you can overcome bad circumstances that life has dealt you. Second, when I was coaching and teaching I only was able to influence basically a few students in education. However, as a principal I can impact many lives. Also, through my knowledge

that I have gained in the doctoral program at Stephen F. Austin State University, I will be able to impact more lives through research methodology and data. I am striving to change the social imaginary in society and strive for more democracy and collaboration in the classroom.

I have been a principal for 19 years. Although, a struggle to obtain a principal position of any kind, God blessed me to acquire my first principal in my late twenties. I have been an Assistant Principal, Associate Principal twice, and Head principal. I have been blessing to be on the Primary Level, Elementary Level, Junior High Level, and the High School Level. And my life story relates to children of poverty and one-parent households that through hard work you can change your life. You do not have to become that statistic, stereotype, or person that people predict that you will be. I am testimony that if you can dream it, you can achieve it. As a principal I believe putting students in situations where they can be successful, that why I have taken it personally to go back and help further my education. So, I can have an opportunity to impact lives to be successful in a 21<sup>st</sup> century society that is technology-driven.

As a leader, I feel obligated to equip my teachers to teach effective methodologies that can prepare those students to live productive lives. And the way to do that as a leader is through effective staff development and data made decisions. I have learned over the years that instruction cannot take place if teachers do not build or establish effective relationships with students. Students learn from teachers who they trust and know that they really care about them. That is why I know it is important for me as a leader to

establish hiring committees, that can hire effective teachers that really love and care about all kids no matter the color, home situation, or status.

### **What am I?**

I am an educator, mentor, and role model for all students. I am an African American Male that have overcome stereotypes and early discipline struggles in school to become the man and the principal that I am. I am working hard and educating myself to become the example for African American Males and all males from homes of poverty that you can overcome challenges in life and touch lives in the field of education. If I have overcome stipulations, people perspectives, and stereotypes to position myself to have an opportunity to impact lives in education, other African American Males can have the same impact to in the field of education where African American Males and females are needed.

### **The Change in Me**

I have really transformed into a person that really looks at society, educational topics, and policies with a Critical Lens. Prior, to entering the doctoral program I knew I would learn and grown as a person. However, I did not really understand to what extent that I would be transformed as a person and a professional educator. I want to be able to not just have a positive influence in the classroom but have a positive influence in society. I might not be able to impact every student that I meet. But if I can have a positive impact on just one student, I believe that the domino effect can take place in society. I look forward to the social imaginary where people can be judged by their character and not be stereotyped because of their ethnicity. I am hoping that after being

in the doctoral program that I will have an opportunity to be an example for all children of poverty that you can become anything that you want to become if you would just dream and reach for the stars. I want to continue to reach all students and be a great role model for all students in society.

I really have transformed as a leader since I have been in the doctoral program. John Dewey really has touched me as a scholar practitioner by how important it is for students to have ownership in the learning. I am really trying to enforce and model this as a scholar practitioner. However, this really has been a tough task to get teachers to the point where they let students have ownership in their learning. My leadership qualities really have developed into really promoting and pushing the democratic process in the classroom. I really have added to my arsenal that students learn by hands-on and by doing, which is called Progressive Education. This what have led me to believe and adopt the pragmatist approach that learning takes place through the experiences that students experience though collaboration along with the ability to think outside the box.

### **Who I Want to Become**

I am sure as I continue to go further into the doctoral program my beliefs will continue to change even more. However, right now I am grateful just for the growth that has taken place right now in my life as a scholar practitioner. I am determined to become the leader that can impact the classroom along with touching students' and teachers' lives forever. However, I do understand that to have an influence in education, I am going to have to continue to grow as a leader and as a scholar practitioner.

I would like to graduate from Stephen F. Austin in three years. If it is God's will, I will like to become the principal of a 6a high school. After, I have been a principal of a 6a high school, I would like to start looking into becoming a school superintendent. Finally, I will like to end my career as a superintendent. It really does not matter the size of the district. But just being able to achieve a dream where I can impact lives will just be a blessing to me.

My future is to continue to write and do research. I would like to become better at doing research. That is a tool that I believe can be a tremendous source to my career as a leader. Once, again I want to be an example to students of color that you can be anything that you want to be. Don't let people put you inside a container and put stipulations on you. If you do end up in that box, you can overcome. Philippians 3: 14 states, "I can do all things through Christ."

### **Summary**

This critical autobiography that is presented in this dissertation is the life of Derrick James. All these narratives that I have presented in this autobiography is not something that I am extremely proud of in my life. However, if these narratives can impact and change the way society looks at the African American male life, then my life story is worth presenting in this Critical Autobiography.

Racism is at the forefront today more than ever. There are challenges, stereotypes, poverty, and racism that is presented throughout this life changing autobiography. What I mean about life changing, well telling these narratives even allowed me, the researcher, to grow during this autobiography. This autobiography

allowed me to answer the question: How I have become the African American man and school administrator that I am today?

## **Chapter V**

### **A Critical Analysis of the Autobiography**

#### **Introduction**

In qualitative research, analysis begins while gathering data, but such analysis tends to be tentative and incomplete (Neuman, 2011). Most qualitative studies build on the assumption that certain areas of social life are intrinsically qualitative (Neuman, 2011, p. 175). For this reason, qualitative data are not imprecise or deficient but are very meaningful (Neuman, 2011). Instead of trying to convert fluid, active social life into variables or numbers, we borrow ideas and viewpoints from the people we study and situate them in a fluid natural setting (Neuman, 2011, p. 175). Creswell (2007) as cited in Martin (2015) informed the qualitative researcher that, “the process of data collection, data analysis, and report writing often go on simultaneously in a research project” and the “... researchers often learn by doing” (p. 134).

Critical Race Theory has given me the researcher an opportunity to journal, record, and analyze data that can be used to share my life experiences as a counter narrative and ultimately make a change in society. The data findings that are revealed in this critical research reveal how the intersection of faith, family, mentors, poverty, and teachers helped shape and mold me into the African American male and administrator I



am today. With each lesson, I constructed meaning to my experiences shared in the autobiographical narrative through CRT analysis.

### **Lesson 1**

It is hard to find good data on African American males being good parents and family men. Additionally, research studies show significant differences in the number of arrests and severity of sentencing between Caucasian, African American, and Latino perpetrators with African American groups experiencing significantly more arrests and harsher sentencing (Shernock & Russell, 2012), suggesting institutionalized racism. Also, a clear majority of parenting research demonstrates highly involved, nurturing, and supportive fathers are more likely to have children who thrive academically, emotionally, and socially (Scott & Crooks, 2004). However, African American males are shown to be harsher parents than any other ethnic group or often removed from the family due to prison sentences.

I was raised in a household than was lacking in male parenting. But thanks to a hard-working grandfather named Eddie James, uncles, African American male teachers, I was able to overcome the lack of a male parent. Due to these men of God, I was able to understand the importance of parenting in my life, and I made a vow to be a better parent than my father was to me. Also, due to doing research and writing about my experiences, I take value in being the best family man and husband I can be. Setting an example for 21<sup>st</sup> century African American males is the top importance of being an example for my family and boys.

The data that I accumulated and journaling I have done speaks to a need for African American males to change the negative connotations that research and other data show. Black men are more likely than White men to fall in the high-risk category for parenting attitudes (Ferreira, Moon, Cannon, 2015). Finally, with this critical autobiography, I hope to change these negative perceptions of the African American male as a parent and family man.

## **Lesson 2**

I have learned that family is very essential in all ethnicities. I know family was very important to me, and it started with my grandfather (Eddie James). My grandfather kept his family together even after the unexpected death of my grandmother. As a matter of fact, my grandfather learned how to cook from my grandmother and continued to cook those great family meals that my grandmother cooked. And through my grandfather, I learned how to cook from watching him. Eddie James always told me “It is nothing wrong with a man learning to relieve his beautiful wife of some of the household duties.”

Marriage rates in the African American community are one of the most contentious issues both inside and outside the African American community (Hattery & Smith, 2007). Although I did not have the greatest example of marriage and family, the loving relationship that my Uncle and Aunt showed as an African American couple set a terrific example for me. My Uncle was a great example for me growing up. Even today, I value the examples he set for me as a father and loving husband. I value all those great examples he set for me.

**Lesson 3**

Being lied to by my father just built a resentment from me towards my father. Initially it made me feel unloved by my father. Because I could not understand how he could lie to me so easy and so much. And here I am not being the biological son of my Uncle and never being lied to by him. I just could not understand why. However, because of the situation of being lied to now I am a stronger man and a devoted loving husband. Finally, due to the hurt the lying has caused me, I have been totally committed never to lie to my kids.

**Lesson 4**

Poverty in urban and rural areas has long been a topic of discussion, and research has largely been focused on the impact poverty has on learning for school age children (Freire, 1970). There are different ways of defining poverty. In terms of government policy and decision making, a definition that places a dollar amount to categorize an individual or family for poverty is useful (Schafermeyer, 2017).

Living in poverty made me hungry to change my circumstance or the way I would live when I became grown. I really wanted to work and educate myself so bad to overcome poverty. I don't know if I would have the same hunger that I have today if I weren't for living in those situations. In analyzing Lesson 4, I really appreciate things more in life due to having to do without as a child. Finally, as a parent I can teach my young boys the value of taking care of what God has blessed them.

## Lesson 5

In Lesson 5, I had come to the realization that school was a great opportunity to overcome poverty. However, to do that I had to stop getting in trouble in school, and in school that is when I realized that racism was yes indeed real. However, there are people in society today that believe racism is a thing of the past. It is certainly true that lynching and other shocking expressions of racism are less frequent than in the past (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Still, by every social indicator, racism continues to blight the lives of people of color, including holders of high-echelon jobs, even judges (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 10).

That was a tough thing for me at a young age having to deal with Michelle and having to give me the ring back. But that experience taught me the reality of life about how people feel about people dating and marrying outside their race. There are people today in 21<sup>st</sup> century society that do not feel that individuals should marry outside their race.

Next, if I would have not changed my behavior, I was headed in the wrong direction and on my way to prison if I did not change. However, due to the love of my teacher, Ms. Powers, and a new found love for sports and prayer, my life changed drastically. But the most important, I thank God for putting me with a teacher that understood cultural diversity. I thank my principal so much for hiring Ms. Powers who understood me as a student.

As a group, men are underrepresented in the PK-12 teacher workforce (Shabazz, 2008). For years, perceptions of low income, low social status, teaching as work for

women, few peers, and potential sexual and child abuse accusations have been the roots of discouraging this potential career choice for men (Rice & Goessling, 2005). But the impact that African American males can have on changing students' lives is more valuable than the dollar. I know if it was not for the male role models and the Assistant Principal I had, I would not have had any black role models I could look up to at school. Schools are dominated by Caucasian females in the classroom and Caucasian Males and females in administration. So, I am hoping this critical autobiography can influence more African Americans to go into education where change is needed for more African American male teachers.

Sports, in Lesson 5, was also an outlet for me. It gave me a chance to let off frustrations and taught me about being competitive in life. Critical Race Theory (CRT) starts with the premise of racism being present in every aspect of U.S. American culture (Martin, 2015, p. 22). Racism is so intertwined in U.S. American culture people have grown accustomed to it and view it as a way of life (Martin, 2015, p. 22). Sports and team games have taught me never to give up in the game of life and to try to become the best father and administrator I can be.

## **Lesson 6**

Lesson 6 was a great lesson for me. I realized that I really was good in sports. This lesson really made me realize that I had a chance to really go to college and be successful in life. I would be the first one in my family to go to college. And that was really a big thing for my whole family, whether playing football, track, and getting an education. I always reiterated to myself that if I did not make it to the National Football

League, I wanted to be an educator. However, I did know that I was facing a challenge to fulfill my dreams in either direction that God wanted my life to go through. Second, athletics and competing in sports taught me that I should never give up on my dreams.

Next, it was not just a victory for getting to play college football. Lesson 8 showed me that I really wanted to be successful in college. I did not want to become labeled just as an athlete. I was determined to break the stereotype of most college football players. Edwards (1984) elaborated that many student-athletes on college campuses at Division I National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) institutions report encountering stereotypes pertaining to the “dumb jock” image (Griffin, 2014, pg. 29). And I know that perception does exist because I have often heard people say those stereotypes about myself. Black male football players engage and cope with negative stereotypes at predominantly White institutions (Griffin, 2014). But I have learned through previous lessons that stereotypes are not always reality. Hard work and prayer along with faith can help overcome stereotypes, especially when you put God first in your life.

In lesson 8 I learned how to deal with stereotyping, and jealousy and racism amongst my own race. Deeply ingrained oppression can happen even amongst a minority race of people. Many people do not know that stereotyping, racism, and jealousy happen amongst people of color. Given an opportunity through this dissertation, I elaborated on my experience that racism exists amongst people of color. The hope is that well-told stories describing the reality of black and brown lives can help readers bridge the gap between their worlds and those of others (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 41). Engaging

stories can help us understand what life is like for others, and invite the reader into a new and unfamiliar world (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 41) Stories also serve a powerful psychic function for minority communities (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p.43). Stories can give them voice and reveal that others have similar experiences (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 43).

In today's society, all people are trying to put themselves in better positions due to capitalism. When it comes down to capitalism, color goes out the door and oppression acts in order to maintain dominance over another human.

## **Lesson 7**

For some reason, I have always had a little test anxiety. However, after getting out of high school, I thought I had conquered and gotten over test anxiety. Well I did okay on my certification test to become certified as a teacher and coach, even to get certified as a principal. Recently, they have changed the guidelines on how many chances you have to pass a certification test. Although standardization in today's terms is purported to close achievement gaps, it has been suggested that this approach contributes to facilitating deficits (Baker, 2001; Anderson, 2005, p. 18). For example, many ethnic minorities perform poorer on achievement tests, which are often based on a European American references frame (Anderson 2005, p. 18; Williams, Williams, & Mitchell, 2004). In addition, standardized tests are sometimes viewed as threats to perpetuating stereotypes for ethnic minorities (Anderson 2005, p. 18). These threats create anxiety, thereby causing reduced performance on standardized tests (Steele, 1997), all of which

can lead to restricted access to college enrollment, graduate and professional schools.

(Anderson, 2005 p. 18.)

I know for me, I experienced an anxiety like I felt back in high school when I had to take the superintendent test. I know it was because I knew that I only had five times to take and pass the test or not. But one thing I do know. That is how it was in high school. You had only three times to pass the TAAS, which is known as the STARR Test in today's public schools. And for some reason that made me feel a lot of anxiety just like the Superintendent TExES. As I mentioned, standardized testing has done well in identifying achievement gaps, but guidance to closing these achievement gaps is less clear (Anderson, 2005). When considering standardized testing, African American males are lagging other ethnic groups. Two highly contentious topics in education that are thought to contribute to this achievement are socioeconomic status and exceptionality (Anderson, 2005).

Finally, the one thing that I did learn from my struggle in passing the Superintendent certification exam is that you cannot rush through a test like that. You just need to take your time and read. I was rushing through a test in about two-half hours that really takes about five hours. And once I stopped trying to rush through the test to get back to my campus, God just took control and guided me through the test. And I know that it was God that has truly blessed me and placed me where I am so far in my career.

## **Lesson 8**

In lesson 8, I learned how to deal with stereotyping, and jealousy and racism amongst my own race. Deeply ingrained oppression can happen even amongst a minority



race of people. Many people do not know that stereotyping, racism, and jealousy happen amongst people of color. Given an opportunity through this dissertation, I elaborated on my experience that racism exists amongst people of color. The hope is that well-told stories describing the reality of black and brown lives can help readers bridge the gap between their worlds and those of others (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 41). “Engaging stories can help us understand what life is like for others, and invite the reader into a new and unfamiliar world” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 41) Stories also serve “a powerful psychic function for minority communities...Stories give them voice and reveal that others have similar experiences” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 43).

In today’s society, all people are trying to put themselves in better positions due to capitalism. When it comes down to capitalism, color goes out the door and oppression acts in order to maintain dominance over another human.

## **Lesson 9**

Statistics regarding the success of African American males especially in their professional careers are lacking (Johnson, 2018). Current and past research tends to portray stereotypes that exist in the African American culture, often focusing on failure (Kim & Hargrove, 2013). I know that for me, as researcher, it has been a journey in education. I have tried to position myself to be able to touch as many lives as possible in education. One of the ways that I have sought after to be able to touch many lives is get in to administration. It was Mr. Burley who touched my life.

In education, African American males do not always have males that they can look up to or be a role model to them like Mr. Burley was for me. According to the

Department for Professional Employees, African Americans made up 13.4 % of all educational leaders in 2015 (Johnson, 2018). The majority of these leaders were female (Johnson, 2018). The minimal presence of African American male educators in K-12 school settings is a concern (Johnson, 2018). And as an African American educator, I know firsthand that to be true. I know how important it was for me to have someone like Mr. Burley in my life. Because where I grew up in North Lufkin, Texas, I did not see any African American males in a suit unless it was the preacher or the funeral home director. Young males of color need to see males of color in a productive light in society in person, not just on television.

### **Lesson 10**

I really did not want to be a preacher. I honestly, ran from preaching. The sociocultural context of African Americans is quite different from, say, Jewish or Irish people, and vice versa (Newton, 2016). Much of black preaching is life-situation preaching as it speaks to the social, economic, political, and physical well-being of American's black masses (Newton, 2016). For me, the preaching about salvation is not hard at all. Because if we are all going to make to heaven, that is no doubt that salvation is the answer.

In *Preaching with Sacred Fire*, the authors consider three principles of black preaching: (1) the centrality of the Bible, (2) picture painting and narration of the Bible, and (3) a close observation of life known as existential exegesis (Newton, 2016).

However, for me, the lesson of being able to introduce people to Jesus Christ is a joy, that is very pleasing to my soul. Because there are many people are in the world who are

living life without any purpose for their lives. And to be to explain to them that God has a plan and a purpose for their life is satisfaction for me.

### **Lesson 11**

Doctoral students in the field of education are usually non-traditional students and face more challenges during the doctoral journey (Chance, 2018). The first EdD was awarded in 1921 at Harvard University (Chance, 2018). By 1982, EdD programs were offered at 128 universities (Willett, 2014). I know for me personally that there was no doubt that I needed to continue my learning in order to be the best educator that I can be. Once again, this journey is not about Derrick James. This journey is for all the African American children who have been told that they cannot succeed or are not smart enough to succeed in school. This journey is to show students that I have had to work and study hard in school to obtain knowledge and to be successful in school. Education is changing constantly in society, and education can have influence in a forever changing society.

Critical Race scholarship aims to challenge dominant ideologies that support racialized inequalities stemming from hegemonic educational practices (Gildersleeve, Croom, & Vasques, 2011). Educational policy seemingly has been to equalize education in the United States, but racism is so deeply entrenched that equal access and outcomes for African Americans have not been actualized (Martin, 2015). Being in the doctoral program has created in me the Social Imaginary to go out and be that change for a better tomorrow for all students.

**Summary**

This chapter portrayed the lessons I learned by applying Critical Race Theory to analyze my critical autobiography. Through a discussion of each lesson, I revealed how the intersection of faith, family, mentors, poverty, sports and teachers and educational leaders helped shape and mold me into the African American male and administrator I am today. In the next and final chapter, I will share the conclusions and implications, recommendations for research, and final reflections of my critical autobiographical dissertation study.

## **Chapter VI**

### **Summary, Conclusions and Implications, Recommendations, and Final Reflections**

#### **Summary**

Chapter V presented the discussions of my findings from my study on the African American Male that I have become today along with the Administrator that I am today. This chapter provides a summary of my critical autobiographical case study with conclusions, implications and recommendations for future research studies. As a qualitative study, my conclusions are based off of the analysis of the narrative data that was presented through my journaling and data I gathered from pictures, newspaper journals, and a diary of notes. The findings from this critical autobiography are qualified to this study only.

One of the central tenets of CRT is counter narrative or storytelling. Much of the literature on CRT in education over the past decades has focused on offering these counter stories based on the accounts of the experiences of students of color (Lynn & Dixson, 2013). So, using the tenet of counter narrative as a framework, I was able to analyze data and derive several themes in my life to give an expression of the man and the administrator that I am today. Family, Faith, and prayer along with the “I can’t give

up mentality” have helped me overcome the obstacles displayed in this critical autobiography.

Critical Race Theory also gives a person an opportunity to tell of their experiences when it comes down to racism. Racism is understood to be complex, subtle, and flexible; it manifests differently in different contexts, and minoritized groups are subject to a range of different (and changing) stereotypes (Gilborn, 2015). Intersectionality (Gilborn, 2015) was utilized to address the question of how multiple forms of inequality and identity inter-relate in different contexts and over time, for example, the inter-connectedness of race, class, gender, disability, and so on. Through qualitative autobiographical narrative and critical inquiry, I was able to share and analyze the experiences of my life through the critical lens of intersectionality observing race and class from the standpoint of being stereotyped as an African American male.

Intersectionality is a concept that enables us to recognize the fact that perceived group membership can make people vulnerable to various forms of bias, yet because we are simultaneously members of many groups, our complex identities can shape the specific way we each experience that bias. (Gilborn, 2015, p. 278)

As Stake explained, “All research requires interpretations, and, in fact, human behavior requires interpretation minute by minute” (Stake, 2010, p. 36). As you know, interpretations can be faulty (Stake, 2010). That is why the data that was used to give life to this critical autobiography was triangulated to ensure that I have appropriately interpreted the experiences I remembered and recorded in the journal along with the data I used to write this Critical Autobiography.

A written critical autobiography serves as an experiential knowledge that is shared with others (Martin, 2015; Standfield, 1994). This study has really given me an opportunity to implement myself into the narrative to tell my life story and my maturation process through life with the hope of giving other African American males the opportunity to dream for a bigger and productive life in society.

### **Conclusions**

The determination to write this story was to tell the experiences that I have lived as an African American male in the rural South and as a principal with the aspiration to help other men of color. Men of color do not have enough positive influence in society today in order to look up to nor does society portray African American males in a positive way. This dissertation was told in the form of a critical autobiography.

Unlike traditional civil rights, which embraces incrementalism and step-by-step progress, critical race theory questions the very foundations of the liberal order, including equality theory, legal reasoning, Enlightenment rationalism, and neutral principles of constitutional law (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Critical Race Theory as a methodology upholds that racism is endemic and its goal is to confront dominant beliefs about equality (Martin, 2015). Educational leaders must also have knowledge of discrimination in educational systems (Martin, 2015, p.154). Principals have the opportunity to hire teachers and staff campuses that will promote equality (Martin, 2015, p. 154). This implicates universities to create educational leadership programs and research that aid and result in social justice practices (Martin, 2015, 154). The training received by

educational leaders can help them to acknowledge racist practices in the educational system (Martin, 2015, p.155).

Critical Race Theory gave me, the narrator, an opportunity to express my life journey along with the obstacles that I have faced in becoming the man and the administrator that I am today. The reason for these narratives was not to complain about life and society issues that I have faced, but to tell my narrative to persuade other African Males that you can make a difference in the field of education and in society. With telling my life journey, I give a positive reflection on African American Males as family men, leaders, teachers, ministers, administrators, and leaders. Drawing on the metaphor of CRT, I seek to influence society to change for the better.

I implemented myself into the dissertation elaborating on my life as a young African American boy raised by an African American woman without a husband. However, I had African American male role models like my grandfather, uncles, and other African American males like Mr. Burley who proved their status as quality husbands, fathers, and in the case of Mr. Burley, as an administrator in my school district.

In concluding this critical autobiography, I have been able to critically analyze the data and answer the research questions:

1. How have my experiences growing up in deep East Texas contributed to the leader that I am today?
2. How have my experiences in deep East Texas made me into the person I am today?



There are several themes that have emerged in this study:

- ❖ The importance of the African American male in the family.
- ❖ The prominence of Religion and Faith is to the African American Culture.
- ❖ Intersecting race, racism, and stereotyping and the effects it can have on the African American Male.
- ❖ Education is vital in helping children of diverse ethnic backgrounds overcome poverty.
- ❖ The need for the African American mentor in public schools for students of color.
- ❖ African American males can be productive fathers in society.
- ❖ African American males can be productive principals in PreK-12 campuses.
- ❖ African American males can be successful college graduates.
- ❖ Teachers and administrators can have a great impact on student lives.
- ❖ The critical need for more minority teachers and administrators in schools today.

As I reflected on my life and noting the tenets of CRT, I have learned that racism is endemic, and racism can be overcome when it converges with the interest of whites.

In my dissertation, I talk about my experiences by telling my stories that have played a major role in the man and the administrator that I am. As an administrator, I firmly believe in equality for all students. So, I feel it is a great opportunity to tell of my experiences if they can help motivate and change a society that has not yet reached democracy. As Delgado & Stefancic (2001) explained a premise of the new storytellers is that members of this country don't understand what it is to be nonwhite. Critical race theorists have built on everyday experiences with perspective, viewpoint, and the power

of stories and persuasion to come to a better understanding of how Americans see race (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). That is why counter stories can be an effective way to impact change in a society where racism is embedded. My study has revealed my personal struggles along with interest convergence opportunities that were made available for me to get hired due to a court order to hire minorities.

When I look back over my life I don't know what I would have done without my Faith in God and prayer. My Faith has a major role in how I have overcome stereotypes, lack of failure on tests, and being overlooked for hiring for principal jobs. Christianity has always been a mainstay in the African American culture.

I have looked at my life observing the tenets of CRT. One tenet of Critical Race theory that kept emerging in my study was the Permanence of Racism. Delgado (1995) claimed that CRT begins with the notion that "racism is normal, not aberrant, in American society (p.xiv). Ladson-Billings (2003) added that "because it is so enmeshed in the fabric of our social order, it appears both normal and natural to people in this culture (Alston, 2018, p. 46).

When I was first hired as a principal, the district was hiring minorities due to a court order to hire minorities and recruit minorities. However, over the last couple years this court order was lifted. With the court order lifted, the hiring of African American males as head principals no longer is happening in the district, especially, on campuses that are STARR-tested campuses.

Two minority head principals are left are all on the primary level. These campuses are Prek-3 and Prek-4 campus. The campus that is Prek-4 campus was my campus just

two years ago. I left due to the fact that I know I am capable of being a principal of a grades 3 thru 12 campus. However, due to stereotyping of me as an African American male, I feel like I have not been given an opportunity to lead a 3 thru 12 campuses. A growing body of research in the field of education is beginning to examine the role that race plays in various aspects of the American Education system (Alston, 2018; Brooks, 2013; Elliot, 2013; Gooden, 2012). These include issues related to school funding, student suspension, underrepresentation of students of color in advanced courses, graduation rate of students of color, and the lack of diversity in the American education system (Alston, 2018).

### **Implications**

Statistics regarding the success of African American males especially in their professional careers are lacking (Alston, 2018, p. 1) That is the reason behind this study is to hopefully influence more African American males that there is a dire need for them in education. First, the students of color really need teachers and administrators of color. Students of color need mentors. I do not mean any negative meaning behind this, but students of color need teachers of color they can relate, especially African American males. The number is almost nonexistent when focusing on African American males who hold principal positions in K-12 education (Johnson, 2018).

I hope that this dissertation study will give more African Americans the motivation to get into education to have a positive impact on African American male students in education and change the negative connotation that different media outlets portray when it come down the African American male. Current and past research tends

to portray stereotypes that exist in the African American culture, often focusing on failure (Kim & Hargrove, 2013). Acknowledging the challenges of African American males is the beginning of understanding how some are able to succeed despite the alarming statistics (Kim & Hargrove, 2013).

I firmly believe that another critical component of CRT prevalent in my dissertation is Interest Convergence, a theoretical construct based on the premise that African Americans can successfully assimilate to White-American culture, if and only if, is in the direct interest of Whites (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004). I felt the only reason that I was even given an opportunity to receive an assistant principal job was due to the court order that the district had to have so many minorities in positions placed within the district. Bell (1980) suggested that civil rights gains within communities of color, specifically those for African Americans, should be interpreted with measured enthusiasm (Johnson, 2018). He argued that key rulings such as *Brown vs. Board of Education* were ultimately decided as much to help Whites as Blacks because they would create opportunities for White school leaders as higher number of African-American principals were displaced due to school integration (Johnson, 2018).

When the *Brown* decision came down within a span of 10 years almost 40, 000 African American teachers and administrators lost their jobs during the implementation of the Brown decision (Black, 2012; Echols, 2006; Fultz, 2004). There were various reasons and ways in which African American teachers lost their jobs during the desegregation period, but racism was the primary cause of firing Black educators as was

plainly evident in many court verdicts and in documents such as the “Southern Manifesto” (Gordon, 2002).

Race continues to function as a major influence in the operations of how society works (Scott, 2003). I know that the experiences that I have had in life have had good and bad impacts in my life. I really believe that those experiences have made me into the man and administrator that I am today. Through research, I became aware that knowing racism and race are not enough to impact change. But through the stories of marginalized people, there is hope for a change in 21<sup>st</sup> century society. I am hoping that if society really wants to get to a true democracy where respect is for all students and diversity is valuable, we as a culture need to get back to hiring people of color who can relate to today’s sector of students.

### **Recommendations for Future Studies**

This study provides valuable insight on the struggles of the African American male to overcome intersectionality of race and racism along with poverty. I shared my experiences to hopefully reveal to society that African American males can be productive citizens in society. And there is definitely a need for more males in the field of education. It is very important that critical autobiography as a research method continue to have its place so marginalized people can continue to narrate their stories with the intent to impact change in society.

Educators in a position to make policy for education need to put policies in place to give a voice to all students. It is time that educators step up and address the problem of inequality for all students in the classroom. I do not pursue to be a voice for all black men

or women. So, it is time that all people of color, African American, Chinese, Japanese, Mexican American, or educators who have overcome poverty, to be a voice for all students in these situations of life. In today's society there is need to increase awareness of intersectionality poverty, race, racism, and stereotypes of all marginalization in society. So, programs need to implement on all levels of education from college preparation programs for teachers to principal preparation programs with an awareness of overcoming inequality for all students in schools. Educators can be taught initiatives with the focus of criticality, examining social power structures that contribute to inequality in school curriculum, hiring process, and equality for all students.

Finally, the hiring processes in education need to be examined, to hire not just African American Males in education, but all people of color. Students of color need to be able to see successful men and women of all ethnicities. Classrooms in Texas are becoming so diverse that it is very important that there be more diverse populations of teachers in the classroom, principals, and definitely as superintendents.

### **Final Reflections**

Thinking and reflecting back over my life as an African American male and administrator, I know that there were plenty of challenges and obstacles that I have had to overcome. However, due to good mentors, family, prayer, and faith, I have overcome a lot of those obstacles. I know, without doubt, without a solid foundation in faith and without the desire to prove the naysayer wrong, I would not be where I am at today. I could have been kicked out of elementary school at the age of ten years of age. I was living up to the statistics of the school-to-prison pipeline without a doubt. However, due

to the impact of great educators really loving and caring about me, I was able to overcome being a troublemaker in school.

I can justly say more marginalized individuals or people of color need to tell their stories for future rights of equality and justice for all students. I hope nothing but positive impacts come from this study, and I hope it will have some form of impact in society, especially changing the image of the African American male. African American males are more capable now than they have been before to be great men in society and transformational leaders in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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