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The purpose of this qualitative study is to enlighten, illuminate, and elucidate readers as to the worldviews of African American women in regards to their recruitment and retention to the public school superintendency. The question this study seeks to answer is whether African American women perceive recruitment and retention to the public school superintendency as intimately connected to gender, race, and social politics. Finally, this qualitative narrative study will explore from their perspectives what can be done to increase the recruitment and retention of African American women to the public school superintendency.

In the following text, I discuss my conceptual framework which integrates historical and educational research literature with strands of Black feminist theory to consider key historical, cultural, and political factors that influence (and hinder) the recruitment and retention of African American superintendents, including the influences of the U.S. Civil Rights, the Black Feminist Movement, and the social politics of school districts.

THE FREEDOM TO BE: AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN AS PUBLIC SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS

by

Anita R. Brown

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Approved by

____
Committee Chair

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to my mom, Juanita W. Brown. I wish I could see your smile, but I feel it beaming from heaven. To my "mother" and best friend, Evalena Leonard, thank you for loving me as your own. To my grandmother, Evelena Williams, thank you for all the prayers. To all of my public school teachers, university professors and friends who saw something in me that I did not see in myself. Finally, to my nephew, Cedric "CJ" Brown Jr. for thinking my work is impressive.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty the Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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Date of Acceptance by Committee

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Date of Final Oral Examination

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"We've come this far by faith!"

I have been blessed with many friends, colleagues, and professors who have supported and encouraged me along this journey; many of whom I could never name or thank enough. However, I must acknowledge a special few.

My path on this journey would never have happened had not Dr. Cathy Barlow, then Dean of the Watson School of Education at UNC-Wilmington and now Provost at UNC-Wilmington been listening and dreaming of ways to incorporate my inconceivable aspirations into reality. It was because of her belief in "growing your own" that the Principal-in-Residence position was created. I will always remember Dr. Carol Chase Thomas saying, "Shug this is the call," as she told me about the position and the possibilities for completing a doctoral program. From that moment I knew a door had been opened and I would have to step through on faith to begin a journey that would require me to recall a couple of my favorite hymnal verses such as, "Fore he knows, yes, he knows, just how much we can bear," and to believe "He didn't bring me this far to leave me."

It is often said that as "We humans plan, God laughs;" and so now, I have an even greater appreciation of that saying. When I started on my dissertation, I knew it would take a while; however, I did not understand then that I could not command or rush the process. Hence, this is why God laughs. My plan was just to get it done; but I also wanted whatever I wrote to be meaningful and relevant. Therefore, I chose Dr. Camille

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

> The quality of light by which we scrutinize our lives has direct bearing upon the product which we live, and upon the changes which we hope to bring about through those lives. It is within this light that we form those ideas by which we pursue our magic and make it realized. – Audre Lorde (2007, p. 36)

Many African American women educators within our society seek to realize their dream of educational leadership through the role of the public school superintendency. Their magic is waiting to be released and allowed to bear direct light upon the lives of all children within our public schools; however, the realization of their dreams and the mere magic of their presence are stymied by race, gender, and social politics. If this research does nothing but illuminate the perceived challenges of race, gender, and social politics as they apply to African American women seeking recruitment and retention in the public school superintendency, then the purpose of this research will be realized.

Information about the role of race, gender, and social politics as it pertains to the recruitment and retention of African American women in the public school superintendency pales in comparison to the same information dedicated to non-African American women in the same position. According to Bloom and Erlandson (2003), much of research tends to assume and assign the challenges of race, gender, and politics to all women based upon the findings as they apply to non-African American women. Although African American women experience many of the same challenges shared by

non-African American women with regard to gender and politics, African American women must always contend with being Black. As stated in Bloom and Erlandson (2003):

> Failing to acknowledge that White women retain White privilege; women of color do not hold a color privilege, thereby making African American women's experiences similar in some ways to women in general but deviant from the White female norm. (p.344)

Therefore, research should not assume that the issues facing African American women superintendents are simply of gender and/or race; but rather, such issues also relate to distinct social politics.

This qualitative dissertation will discuss and examine the experiences of African American women superintendents in terms of the historical, political, and social contexts that frame their beliefs, values, and experiences. In discussing and examining the viewpoints of African American women superintendents this research indeed shows that gender, race, and social politics are still critical factors in the recruitment and retention of African American women to the public school superintendency.

As findings from this study will later indicate, the presence of African American women in the public schools superintendency can challenge culturally biased beliefs of communities while gradually bringing about a positive change in a school district's culture, student achievement, and increase its overall recruitment and retention numbers of leaders of color in the superintendency (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003). As discussed by Tillman (2004), African American leaders in the pre-Brown era "reflected the collective

ethos of Black communities that believed education was the key to enhancing the life chances of their children" (p. 105). Just as Black leaders believed their role during the pre-Brown era was to serve and provide leadership to the Black community, this study will later indicate that African American women superintendents continue to serve as role models and respected leaders within their communities. Thereby, making the following statement made in Brown (2005) even more imperative: "Schools in a racially diverse society will require leaders and models of leadership that will address the racial, cultural, and ethnic makeup of the school community" (p. 5). This imperative can only be achieved by examining the worldviews of African American women in the public school superintendency, as they are the voices that have been silenced and/or ignored.

Ironically, the United States is nicknamed the "melting pot" because of the diverse groups of people who call this country their home; yet, many Americans are intolerant of people and practices different from their own. As stated in Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003),

> Black women have so much to offer our country, so many gifts to share with all of us. And yes, as a society and as a nation, we have never quite stopped to appreciate the truth of their experience, the verity of what it feels like to be Black and female, the reality that no matter how intelligent, competent, and dazzling she may be, a Black woman in our country today still cannot count on being understood and embraced by mainstream White America. (p. 2)

Democracy for many within our society seems to mean living and working within the "White power structure" as stated in Tillman (2004), and was evident in the pre-Brown era. When in fact, "democracy provides the authority to achieve emancipation," (Quantz,

Rogers, & Dantley, 1991, p. 102). Recruitment and retention of African American women as public school superintendents has the potential to encourage school districts and society to examine and critique "the historical mechanisms which work against the achievement of societal ideals" (Quantz, et al., 1991, p. 106); thus, serving as a catalyst for social change and leading education towards the real purpose of democracy, which is "freedom and justice for all."

As a former teacher assistant, teacher, assistant principal, and middle school principal, I have an implicit understanding of the role of gender, race, and politics faced by African American women when it comes to recruitment and retention at the public school level. Grogan and Brunner (2005) state, "African American women do not obtain superintendencies as quickly as their White counterparts: 56 percent of African American women were hired within the first year of actively seeking a superintendency compared with 70 percent of white aspirants" (p. 3). Indeed, as an African-American woman, I am greatly concerned with the low number of African American women superintendents represented in public school districts. I share this sentiment because I too may one day wish to seek the role of public school superintendent and though my current understanding of gender, race and politics is innately developed, I have much more to learn. Still, my responsibility in conducting this study of the recruitment and retention of African American women superintendents into the superintendency has been to separate my personal feelings and any biases I may harbor in order to fairly interpret the literature and data that is reviewed. I believe that my years as an educator, and my overall respect for the process of research, has allowed me to remove my biases; so that my subjectivity

and objectivity is revealed through the literature and through the voices of the eight African American women who participated in this study.

I believe Delpit (1995) would agree that one must go directly to African American women superintendents to discuss the challenges of race, gender, and politics as they relate to their recruitment and retention. Why, because they are seldom asked to openly and honestly give their perspectives on such issues. Delpit (1995) and Brown (2005) concur that as public schools become more racially, culturally, and economically diverse it is crucial to research the challenges and barriers to recruitment and retention of African American women public school superintendents by asking them directly to discuss the issues at hand.

As an educator, I believe it is safe to say that my success and the successes of others like me have not been without some form of discrimination, silencing of voice, and predetermination of actions. I too have struggled to find my place in a society that has from the beginning of its inception expected women and particularly, women of color, to be silent participants. I have struggled with the meaning of democracy, power, and privilege while seeking to define myself as an intelligent woman who is capable of thriving in a society that supports power and privilege of a dominant culture. Without hesitation I can say that my worldviews have on many occasions been dismissed as inconsequential because, as Delpit (1995) asserts, in this society the worldviews of the privileged are typically viewed as the only reality.

The intent of this research is to explore how race, gender, and social politics impact the recruitment and retention of African American women to the public school

superintendency. Jackson (1999) states that there appears not to have been more than 50 African American women serving as school superintendents in the United States in any given year since records have been kept. Furthermore, the 2000 study of the American school superintendency indicates that there were 297 women identified as women superintendents and only 15 were identified as African American women, while the same study indicates there were 1,953 male superintendents and only 38 were identified as African American males. The discrepancy in numbers and the underrepresentation African American women in the superintendency give credence and urgency to this study. Finally, this study will explore, from the perspectives of African American women superintendents, what can be done to recruit and retain them in the public schools. The implications of this research seem apparent in that public school systems must identify the factors that increase recruitment and retention efforts, while also identifying and addressing the factors which impede those efforts. Recruitment and retention of women of color into the superintendency should not continue to be researched from the single aspect of gender, race, or social politics; but rather examined through the barriers and challenges brought upon by the complexities of these multiple and diverse identities (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010).

Superintendency Overview

The current landscape of the school superintendency has evolved in many ways since its inception approximately 170 years ago (Carter & Cunningham, 1997). Generally, the cities of Buffalo, NY and Louisville, KY are credited with establishing the first local superintendencies for their school systems; and, by 1870, more than thirty large cities had

their own superintendents (Konnert & Augenstein, 1990). Just as the landscape of the superintendency has evolved so has the role of the superintendent. No longer considered just a manager and overseer of operations within the school system, the superintendent is now viewed as the chief education officer, which as stated by Edwards (2007) means serving as a guide, advisor, and leader to the school board. Although the authority of the superintendent is decided by the school board, the superintendent is expected to provide leadership and evaluation of personnel and instruction. Superintendents are also responsible for preparing the district's budget and implementing the budget once approved by the school board. As the leader of the school board, the superintendent is expected to help the board establish and implement policy as approved. Lastly and most importantly, the superintendent is to work on behalf and in the best interest of all students within the school district.

Given the responsibilities and expectations of the superintendent, many in society believe it to be a role better suited to men. Throughout history there has existed a pattern of nepotism among males when hiring administrators to lead organizations, including school systems. In regards to recruitment and retention, the expectations of women as natural caretakers to children seemed more compatible to the inherent disposition and hiring of women as teachers, as opposed to superintendents (Tozer, Violas, Senese, 2002).

> While this public image of women as natural teachers due to their special nurturing qualities did open some doors to higher education and employment, it also helped keep other doors closed. Most professions, such as law, medicine, and commerce, together with virtually all branches of government, were thought to

> require such "manly" characteristics as logical reasoning abilities, stern discipline, and a sense of justice based on rationality rather than compassion and mercy. (Tozer et al., 2002, p. 138)

In fact, current research shows that women typically outnumber male students in educational leadership classes; the number of male superintendents significantly outweighs their female counterparts. The discrepancy in numbers is apparent in the ten year study of superintendents by Glass, Bjork, and Brunner (2000) which stated that out of 2,262 respondents across the nation, 1,953 were male, 297 were women, and 117 identified themselves as minorities. Out of the 117 minorities, 5.1% identified themselves as African American women. Later in the 2010 study by Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young, and Ellerson, the total number of African American superintendents was represented at 6%; however, for African American females the numbers increased significantly within the ten years to approximately 20%. Interestingly, the research indicated that out of 1800 respondents a total of 36 were represented as Black or African American. These numbers seem to beg the question of why and how there exists such a discrepancy in the recruitment and retention of ethnic minorities and African American women in the public school superintendency.

Recruitment and retention has always been a pillar of support for any organization. As stated in Tillman and Cochran (2000),

> Recruitment is inextricably linked to hiring practices. Only if Black women and members of other minority groups are identified early on as having the potential for success in educational administration will they ultimately be selected or encouraged to self-select urban school administration as a career option. (p. 50)

Although the two terms are frequently linked together as in this document, they each serve a distinct purpose. According to Webster's Eleventh Collegiate Dictionary (2010), recruitment is defined as the enlisting of new members. This enlistment means that every organization looks to bring in new people to support established structures, attitudes and beliefs, policies and procedures. Recruitment becomes critical to these organizations because they seek the best and the brightest, to carry on and bring new ideas to the table so that the organization will flourish.

Retention is the second pillar that supports organizations, and it is that feature which helps an organization hold on to "the best and the brightest." Webster's Eleventh Collegiate Dictionary (2010) defines retention as the power of retaining. It is a great power to hold on to those whom you consider valuable contributors to the organization; therefore many strategies are developed, maintained, and reviewed in order to keep valued employees. Tillman and Cochran (2000) indicate mentoring as a key strategy to retention for African American women.

The recruitment and retention of African American women in the public school superintendency reaches beyond the actual processes of interviewing, hiring, and non-renewal. In fact, these processes are routine in there conduction throughout most school districts (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). For the purposes of this research, however, recruitment and retention will be addressed in a much broader perspective. Because in many cases the actual process of applying, interviewing, and doing the actual job as a public school superintendent is not beyond the imagination or abilities of African American women, but the impediment of race, gender, and social politics on recruitment

and retention weighs heavily on self-recruitment and self-retention to the public school superintendency.

The recruitment and retention of African American women in the role of public school superintendent in United States is uniquely challenging due to historical and sociopolitical factors within regions. These factors may be categorized into three distinct themes related to the: historical influence of Civil Rights Era, the role of the Black Feminist Movement, and the social politics within public school districts. Common challenges are grounded in biases such as race, gender, and culture. Tozer and colleagues (2002) noted,

> The belief that national, ethnic, cultural, economic, racial, or gender groups possess some inherent social, emotional, moral, or intellectual characteristic(s) has been endemic in American history. It is based on unwarranted and malevolent assumptions. Almost universally this belief has been used to justify political, economic, or educational exclusion, which in turn fosters subordination and repression. Such assumptions continue to hamper women's full development as equals rather than as subordinates to men. (p. 130)

Moreover, as Chin (2010) states, "In the United States, they have typically been White, heterosexual, Protestant males, creating an image of gender, racial, and ethnic homogeneity that has been used to define society's elite groups" (p. 151).

Masks of freedom

The struggles that African American women have endured in regards to recruitment and retention in the public school superintendency appear related to democracy. The meaning and practice of democracy, however, is complex within our society. For many, it stands for freedom— freedom as it relates to being valued within

the systems of White male power and structure. For African American women this freedom to be has been challenged and stifled, and it often requires conformity or even a masking of their true selves in order to be what White society would have them to be. This conformity and/or masking may also be defined as "shifting," as described by Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003). Such shifting further means, "Engaging in a grown-up game of pretend as they (African American women) change their voices, attitudes, and postures to meet the cultural codes of workaday America as well as the broader societal codes of gender, race, and class" (p. 150). According to Greene (1988), "To tell the truth is to tear aside the conventional masks, the masks adopted due to convention or compliance, the masks that hide women's being in the world" (p. 57). Freire (1970) might interpret Greene's mask to symbolize oppression and the struggle to break free from the cloak of convention and compliance. Often, when African American women enter into positions of leadership and authority, the masks that society places on them can be fractured. This fracturing might also be seen as an act of transformation. It is as if minority women administrators momentarily embody Melville's Captain Ahab in Moby Dick and they say, "What I've dared, I've willed; and what I've willed, I'll do" (Greene, 1988, p. 38). These fractures within the masks worn and the sheer will to dare and do, surface through the words of many African American women. The will to dare and do becomes what Freire (1970) might conclude as internal conflict. Freire (1970) states,

> The conflict lies in the choice between being wholly themselves or being divided; between ejecting the oppressor within or not ejecting them; between human solidarity or alienation; between following prescriptions or having choices; between being spectators or actors; between acting or having the illusion of acting

> through the action of the oppressors; between speaking out or being silent, castrated in their power to create and re-create, in their power to transform the world. This is the tragic dilemma of the oppressed which their education must take into account. (p. 48)

Although, Freire (1970) speaks to oppressed people in any group within a society; his work is indicative to, and parallels the challenges within, the true meaning of recruitment and retention of African American women as public school superintendents. Therefore, it seems logical to research these women's stories and give voice to their perspectives. Through this research discourse that raises awareness and eventually leads to improved recruitment and retention strategies can begin.

Overview of Study

Overall, the number of African American women in the superintendency pales compared to the number of White women and men in the superintendency (Alston, 1996, 1999; Brunner, 1999; Brunner & Peyton-Caire, 2000; Jones & Montenegro, 1982, 1983; Pigford & Tonnsen, 1993; Shakeshaft, 1989; Snyder & Hoffman, 2000). As Alston (2005) explains, "In these United States, persons of color represent 10.9% of the nation's teachers, 12.3% of the nation's principals, but only 2.2% of the nation's superintendents. Women and persons of color, nevertheless, go largely underrepresented as superintendents" (p. 675). Furthermore, as Tillman and Cochran (2000) noted, there has been little research since 1987 that speaks specifically to challenges of African American women superintendents. My review of existing research indicates that if public school systems are serious about recruiting and retaining African American women as school

superintendents there are factors related to gender, race, and social politics that must be considered such as:

- school system recruitment and retention beliefs about African American women;
- African American women's self-recruitment and self-retention beliefs about African American women;
- school district strategies of recruitment and retention to cultivate leadership aspirations to the superintendency by African American women; and "Grow your own concept",
- the promise of Affirmative Action and equity as it applies to recruitment and retention.

I designed my study to explore and address these contextual factors and leadership issues.

Research Questions

This study, as evident in later chapters, provides insight into how and why African American women summon the will to seek and remain in the public school superintendency. Specifically, the research addresses the following questions:

1. How do African American women journey to the superintendency?
2. How do race, gender, and social politics impact the recruitment and retention of African American women to the public school superintendency?
3. In what ways can the recruitment and retention of African American women to the public school superintendency be increased?

The superintendency literature summarized in later sections comes primarily from studies that focused on recruitment and retention as they apply to women in general, most of whom were White. According to Murtadha and Watts (2005),

> Unfortunately, the omission of Black leadership narratives, along with an adequate analysis of the contexts in which leadership has worked, limits our ability to develop ways to improve schools and communities for children who live in poverty and children of color who are becoming the majority in this nation's schools. (p.591)

Given the viewpoints of Murtadha and Watts (2005), my research is appropriate and needed.

In formulating my research, I was guided towards a qualitative approach. By using a qualitative approach to research, I held true to my belief and other's observations that our life experiences, be they historical, social, or generational bring meaning and understanding to the constructed realities in which we live (Creswell, 2009). These constructed realities are what identify constructivists such as me. Constructivists believe that the subjectivities of the researcher and the research participants can come together to yield a "newer" social reality as participants share their worldviews from which the researcher makes meaning (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Therefore, new knowledge is constructed and becomes the "epistemology" of the research.

This qualitative study is specifically based on a phenomenological narrative design. Phenomenology allows the researcher to gain an understanding of phenomenon that participants have experienced; in this case, recruitment and retention (Creswell, 2002). By conducting a phenomenological narrative study data that incorporates race,

gender, and social politics into a contextual framework, I strive to “Bring to the foreground a vision for dismantling the old architecture of education as we currently study it” (Murtadha & Watts, 2005, p. 605).

Key Terms.

The following terms will be utilized throughout the study:

1. Recruitment speaks to the enlistment of new members to an organization.
2. Retention is the ability to hold on to those individuals that are valuable to an organization.
3. Self-recruitment speaks to the ways African American women position themselves for the role of the superintendency.
4. Self-retention speaks to the ways African American women position themselves to maintain the role of the superintendency.
5. Perceptions are the ways in which individuals see and make meaning.
6. Minority has been defined by sociologist Louis Wirth as “a group of people who, because of their physical or cultural characteristics, are singled out from the others in society in which they live for differential and unequal treatment, and who therefore regard themselves as objects of collective discrimination” (http://en.wikipedia.org).
7. African Americans or Black (used interchangeably for the purpose of this study) refers to a person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa. It includes people who indicate their race as "Black, African American, or Negro,"

or provide written entries such as African American, Afro American, Kenyan, Nigerian, or Haitian (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Census of Population).

8. Mentors are those persons who act as advocates and provide knowledge regarding an organization and offer strategies for success within the organization (Tillman and Cochran, 2000)
9. Affirmative Action is part of Executive Order 11246 which prohibits discrimination by firms doing business with the federal government and gave federal agencies power to enforce minority hiring.
10. Segregation is widely accepted as the separation of races, particularly in U.S. Southern States.
11. *Brown v. Board of Education* is the 1954 U.S Supreme Court ruling stating that segregated schools were unequal and violated the 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.
12. White Privilege is the gaining of social and political privilege simply by being White (Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009).
13. The Oppressed as defined by Freire (1970) is the yearning for freedom and justice, and the recovery of their lost humanity.
14. Social Politics refers to the cultural and political values that influence decisions and actions within organizations, communities, and people.
15. Unspoken Black Feminism refers to African American women who may not actively engage in Black feminism, do so in more subtle/quiet ways.

16. Othermothers or Motherwork refers to African American women who are seen as leaders who have the authority, influence, and power to encourage empowerment in others in order to nurture youth and promote survival of generations to come.

The above key terms reflect the language that is frequently used in the research of race, gender, and social politics.

Significance of Research

In summary, there are three significant reasons this research was conducted. The first reason being the need to reveal the voices of African American women and afford them the opportunity to share their perspectives on challenges they faced in the recruitment and retention process of the public school superintendency. As stated by Collins (1998):

> Some of the most important ideas in black women's intellectual history come from this sense of writing across time, of having dialogues with women who grapple with questions of injustice in unfamiliar social settings. Without listening to those who have come before, how can Black women prepare an intellectual and political space for Black women who will confront future, reconfigured injustices? (p. 75)

Given that research is limited to this population of women it behooves the research community to go to the source and ask the questions of how, why, and what.

Secondly, as detailed in Chapter 2, it is apparent from prior studies about African American women superintendents that race, gender, and politics play a significant role in the recruitment and retention process of African American women to the public school

superintendency. By conducting a phenomenological narrative study, credence and validation can be given to these influences and their impact.

Lastly, research by Tillman (2004) indicates that research about African American women is generally conducted by White researchers in predominantly White universities and colleges. Though there is nothing wrong with this and one might say "well at least research is being conducted," the truth of the matter is that African American women who serve as researchers bring some shared knowledge that can only be understood by other African American women. Tillman (2004) stated:

> The cultural standpoints of those persons who experience the social, political, economic, and educational consequences of unequal power relations must be privileged over the assumed knowledge of those who are positioned outside of these experiences. (p. 300)

The knowledge and experiences shared between African American women whether participant or researcher in a study often becomes an opportunity for growth in cultural knowledge and education that can benefit a wider audience. Indeed, this research will add to scholarly work about the public school superintendency, highlighting the intersection of race, gender, and politics as they pertain to African American women within the public school superintendency, which can inform leadership communities as a whole.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

> The public schools serve 48 million students and 49% of these students are female. All of these 48 million children need to see role models who let them know there are no artificial ceilings that limit their abilities to develop and lead. Each child needs affirmations and open doors to success. In order for children to develop as leaders, they must see themselves in the role. They must "see one to be one." (Jerome, 2007, p. ix)

Many public schools often negate the social need of all humans to belong to groups like themselves. It is important and natural for students to want to see others like them, and to be near others who share similar if not the same cultural experiences that they have experienced. Although many minority students do not have a choice as to what public school they attend, the presence of African American women as superintendents and building administrators is still just as important. The significance of the African American women for students of color has been described by Black feminist bell hooks (1994):

> My teachers were on a mission. To fulfill that mission, my teachers made sure they "knew" us. They knew our parents, our economic status, where we worshipped, what our homes were like, and how we were treated in the family. I went to school at a historical moment where I was being taught by the same teachers who had taught my mother, her sisters, and brothers. My effort and ability to learn was always contextualized within the framework of generational family experience. School changed utterly with racial integration. Gone was the

> messianic zeal to transform our minds and beings that had characterized teachers and their pedagogical practices in our all-black schools. Knowledge was suddenly about information only. It had no relation to how one lived, behaved. (p. 3)

This sense of connectedness that hooks (1994) describes was lost to many Black students during the process of integration during the 1950s and 1960s, which is why it is so imperative to actively recruit and retain African American women as public school superintendents. African American women as public school superintendents have the potential to bring cultural experiences, knowledge and a promise of what integration and education espoused. According to Carlson and Gause (2007):

> That promise, projected upon a new cultural landscape, is about bringing people together across their differences in ways that do not erase difference but that engage them in a collective dialogue. It is about providing opportunities for individuals and groups to engage in the creative production of meaning and to contribute in diverse ways to public life. And it is about empowering those who have been marginalized by class, race, gender and sexual orientation, and other markers of difference and identity so that they can develop their fuller potentials as human beings. (p. 23-24)

Once again the stories, lessons learned, and experiences of African American women as they pertain to seeking roles within the public schools as superintendents and other educational leaders requires that we take into account the historical and socio-political events that have helped to shape their moral and ethical beliefs, values, and attitudes about education.

History of the Public School Superintendency

"The word superintendent comes from the Latin words super, meaning over, and intendo, meaning direct "(Konnert & Augenstein, 1990, p. 6). The superintendent

position grew out of the need to have someone serve directly over school and school district operations. When state legislatures began allocating funds to local volunteer committees as a means to assist with the educational needs of the communities; the legislatures wanted accountability. Upon hearing of the allocation of state funds, many communities wanted their share and as a result of the growing demand for accountability and increased workloads, committees began searching for a superintendent; thus, beginning the history of the local public school superintendent.

As previously stated, the current landscape of the school superintendency has evolved in many ways since its inception some one hundred and seventy years ago. In the late 19th century the role of the superintendent was to oversee the operations of the school system, with most of the control and decisions being handled and made by the local school boards. The superintendent at best was a manager of the instructional programs within the districts and the school board maintained authority over the business aspects of the school district. Today, school superintendents are hired by the school board to serve as the "chief executive officer of multimillion dollar organizations" (Edwards, 2007, p. 13). The expectations for superintendents has grown significantly from the early years, making the role of superintendent one of the most difficult positions to assume. The role of superintendent requires one to be politically astute, a master of building and sustaining positive school board, staff, teacher, student, and community relationships. The superintendent of today must be able to successfully lead, guide, and advise all constituents in making a positive difference in the lives of students for the betterment of the society.

21st Century Superintendents

In our society, leadership has been predominantly seen as a male characteristic. "Until recently, most board members and even educators considered the superintendency the province of males" (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000, p. 39). Historically, women were expected to only serve in the role of teacher, as this role seemed compatible to the many traditional dispositions assigned to women by society such as: caring, emotionally driven, nurturing, passive, and submissive.

> While this public image of women as natural teachers due to their special nurturing qualities did open some doors to higher education and employment, it also helped keep other doors closed. Most professions, such as law, medicine, and commerce, together with virtually all branches of government, were thought to require such "manly" characteristics as logical reasoning abilities, stern discipline, and a sense of justice based on rationality rather than compassion and mercy. (Tozer, Violas, Senese, 2002, p. 138)

Thus, the historical and traditional assignment of dispositions to male and female leaders within our society begs the continued research of leadership styles based on gender and white male privilege.

An educational acumen was what communities believed would best serve their interest and develop the instructional operations within their schools. "At the time, good district leadership was largely synonymous with male-associated financial skills and bureaucratic control", thus allowing for the position to be filled predominantly by White males (Grogan, 1996, p. 13). Research indicates that since the inception of the role of public school superintendent in the early 1800s White men held 82% of all superintendencies, and as of 1980 they have held 99% of the superintendency positions.

Clearly, the numbers indicate that White males are typically the ones recruited and retained for the position of public school superintendent. Although the school superintendency has changed, Grogan (1996) explains that the public image of the superintendent has not significantly changed. Women continue to struggle against "The systems of advancement, the old-boys networks and the opportunities for on-the-job training" (Grogan, 1996, p. 26). Indeed, the number of white male school administrators is still significantly higher than their female counterparts. This is even more apparent when the numbers are compared to minority women in school administration. According to Tillman and Cochran (2000), there is little research on African Americans in general around the superintendency and even less on African American women in the superintendency. Furthermore, in research by Manuel and Slate (2003) it is noted that data on Hispanic women serving as superintendents is almost nonexistent. According to the 2000 publication of American Association of School Administrators, 2,262 superintendents were surveyed and of the 297 women superintendents who responded, only four Hispanic women contributed to the surveys (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000). In a more recent study it was reported by Grogan & Brunner, 2005, "women reportedly hold approximately 18% of all superintendents' positions," (p. 2). According to Mahitivanichcha & Rorrer:

> It is imperative to note that the issue of access to administrative positions is even starker for persons of color. Furthermore, when we consider the intersection of race and gender in the superintendency, the insufficient representation of women of color is even more disturbing. (p. 485)

These numbers in and of themselves show that the faces of the superintendency remain white males. The question therefore becomes, "Where do African American women fit in this equation of recruitment and retention to the public school superintendency?" Research indicates that right from the beginning African American women were faced with what is termed "double jeopardy," meaning both race and gender discrimination (Shorter-Gooden, 2004, p. 410). And yet, African American women continue to resist these challenges by seeking a role that has been traditionally held by White males, and to lesser extents, Black males and White women.

Interestingly, history shows that women and African Americans were represented in greater numbers in teaching and administration prior to *Brown v. Board of Education*. Alston (2005) explains, "In 1910, for example, women accounted for 8.9% of all superintendents. By 1930, the number had increased to 10.9%" (p. 676). Although *Brown v. Board of Education* states that separate and unequal education is unconstitutional, the implementation of the ruling – which mandated the desegregation of U.S. public schools - inadvertently changed the faces of school teachers and administrators in the public schools. In the U.S. southern states particularly, Alston (2000) discusses how African Americans who had been successful teachers and administrators were no longer accepted as such in what became predominantly white systems after *Brown v. Board of Education*, thereby many African Americans lost their leadership positions. Also, "A negative by-product of desegregation showed that during the 1970s, the number of women in the superintendency dropped to 1.3% and remained at a low level for nearly a decade" (Tillman & Cochran, 2005, p. 676). Although the

numbers of women overall in the superintendency has increased, the numbers for African American women are still low. As reported by Grogan and Brunner (2005) only 8% of women superintendents identified themselves as people of color.

Educational Preparation

Although one might ask after reading the numbers above if there is an educational difference that predisposes men to fulfill the role of the superintendency over women and minority women, the answer is formally "no." There are specific requirements that must be met and are determined by each state, should one decide to seek the superintendency. Generally a candidate must have a six-year advanced degree, with successful completion of the required graduate course work, a six month to one year internship, and previous experience as an administrator. For instance, North Carolina specially states:

- Eligibility to serve as a superintendent must be verified by the State Board of Education prior to election by a local board of education.
- Minimum of one year of experience (or equivalent) as a principal.
- Advanced graduate level (sixth-year degree) in school administration.
- Meet the required score on the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Assessment (SLLA) test administered by Educational Testing Service (ETS) OR
- At least a bachelor's degree from a regionally accredited college or university and five years leadership or managerial experience considered relevant by the employing local board of education.

  (http://www.ncpublicschools.org/licensure/administrator)

It is the last requirement stated that opens the door to non-traditional leaders serving as superintendents in North Carolina and many other states. This statement gives the local boards of education great latitude in choosing their superintendents. Due to an implied shortage of superintendents and large number of superintendents who can retire, states are looking to business leaders, lawyers, and military leaders to serve their districts. It is worth noting here that Glass, Bjork, and Brunner (2000) state the reason for the shortage as:

> Created perceptions that superintendents are leaving the profession faster than they could be replaced (Brockett, 1996). However, national attrition levels have not changed appreciably over the past several decades. In fact, data suggest the median age of superintendents has increased since 1992, suggesting that they are entering the superintendency later in their professional careers, and projections indicate, staying longer. (p.22)

The hiring of lawyers, business leaders, and military leaders as superintendents is troublesome to the overall face of the school superintendency, because, again these faces tend to be mainly white males. Mahitivanichcha and Rorrer (2006) state, "Although women represent at least half or more of the work force in public school teaching, law, business, and academia, the proportions of women who occupy top leadership positions appear almost identical (i.e., 14% to 17%)" (p.486). However, because many women are instructional leaders, larger districts who have chosen non-traditional leaders as their superintendents have started hiring women as chief academic officers (CAO). Newton (2006) explains:

> Because women are overrepresented, in the CAO position and report to a CEO (chief executive officer) who is most often male, some fear that this two-tier system will relegate women to a secondary position and increase the likelihood that superintendents will continue to be male. (p. 557)

If this is not troublesome enough, there also exists an informal or stereotypical preparation which has a propensity towards men in the superintendency. This informal preparation is generally presented in the form of gender bias. Dana and Bourisaw (2006) write:

> Boys are encouraged to participate in boy games such as football and war. These games teach winning above teamwork and drive home the importance of a competitive environment (Helegson, 1990). Girls, on the other hand, are encouraged to play cooperative games such as house, school, and jump rope. These activities have fluid rules that encourage collaboration and building relationships. In essence, the upbringing of young girls contributes to their preparation and success as classroom teachers but prepares them little for leadership roles outside the classroom walls. (p. 92)

Clearly, research indicates gender bias appears during the formative years of childhood development and is grounded within the stereotypical norms found in present day society. In Bell's 1988 study she stated:

> The expectations… of superintendents are likely to be based on a taken-for-granted conception of the superintendent as a middle-aged, conservative, married man (Bell, 1988, p. 42). Again, what appear to be operating are traditional mental models, born out of historical and personal experience with primarily white, married men occupying positions of leadership. These models reflect an enduring cultural preference for male leaders in American society. (Dunlap & Schmuck, 1995; Kanter, 1977; Marshall, 1997; Tallerico, 2000, p. 94)

Over 20 years has passed since Bell's study and yet there is not a lot of evidence that suggests the racial and social preferences for superintendents have changed.

Another informal sign of preparation often neglected is mentoring or advocacy. Mentors and advocates generally provide support, networking opportunities, organizational knowledge, and access to position availability. Dana and Bourisaw (2006) indicate, women are often without the networking opportunities afforded to men; thus inhibiting career advancement in chief executive positions. For women and particularly minority women powerful male mentors and advocates are crucial to gaining entrance and advancement into all fields dominated by men (Tallerico, 2000). In other words it behooves women to maintain positive relationships with all contacts and particularly those who seem to be genuinely concerned and interested in the success and advancement of the women seeking the superintendency.

In considering where African American women fit in the equation of recruitment and retention to the public school superintendency, it seems clear African American women continue to resist many challenges related to race and gender. Below, I discuss my conceptual framework which integrates historical and educational research literature with strands of Black feminist theory to consider key historical, cultural, and political factors that influence (and hinder) the recruitment and retention of African American superintendents, including the influences to the U.S. Civil Rights Era, the Black Feminist Movement, and the social politics of school districts.

The Historical Influence of the Civil Rights Era

As one reviews history and its influence on the recruitment and retention challenges facing African American women in educational leadership, one must examine segregation and discrimination, particularly as it relates to the Civil Rights Era. Historically, the forces of segregation, discrimination, and the political advancements made during Civil Rights Era have influenced the recruitment and retention challenges facing African American women in educational leadership (Tillman & Cochran, 2000). Therefore, in order to understand the past, present, and future of African American women in the role of public school superintendent, the forces of segregation, discrimination and social politics must be examined. However, before the impact of these forces can be examined it must be said that these forces may only offer similar leadership worldviews or standpoints. As noted by Collins (2000), "while common experiences may predispose Black women to develop a distinctive group consciousness, they guarantee neither that such a consciousness will develop among all women nor that it will be articulated as such by the group." (p. 25) Collins further indicated that as many African American women face the challenges of the past, present, and future in regards to the continued marginalization of their presence in society, individual African American women may not agree on the significance of those experiences on their individual positionalities. Despite variation of African American women's views about the significance of the experiences of segregation, discrimination, and social politics upon their lives, Collins (2000) reminds readers that these continue to be "a common thread

binding African- American women." (p.26) Therefore, examination of *Brown v. Board of Education*, the 1964 Civil Rights Act, and Affirmation Action must be delved into.

The Brown versus Board of Education Ruling

Segregation is typically defined as the public separation of the White and Black races, particularly in the U.S. South. May (2008) refers to the writings of the African American activist and educator Anna Julia Cooper who emphasized "The lengths White Southerners will go to forcibly maintain the artifice of segregation and to falsely lay claim to the South as 'theirs' alone (both to define and to preside over)" (p.129).

During the era of segregation, all Black schools in Black communities were the norm and African American women were typically held in high esteem as teachers, administrators, and leaders within those schools. In Tillman (2004), research shows educated African American women served as teachers and administrators in their own schools in the North and South during the period of 1907 through 1967. Tillman (2004) alludes, African American women who held the dual position of teacher and administrator were called, "Jeanes Supervisors". Alston (2005) also discusses how the "Jeanes Supervisors" created a legacy of service by choosing to serve first, while leading. Though the "Jeanes Supervisors" reported to White males who acted as the county superintendents, they served as a personnel specialist, negotiator, resource allocation specialist, staff developer, disseminator of information and crisis handler (Alston, 2005). These Black educators taught and nurtured an important segment of the Black community: its children (Tillman, 2004).

For instance, Tillman (2004) identifies Fannie Jackson Coppin a "Jeanes Supervisor" as one of many influential Black educators during the late 19th century. Coppin is distinguished as an educator due to her efforts of producing over 5,000 students seeking educational excellence at Philadelphia's Institute for Colored Youth from 1869 through 1904. The drive for excellence in education was indicative of the Black community as a whole. Black educators knew and understood many things could be taken away in regards to liberty and even their humanity; but they also knew and understood that education provided knowledge, which could never be taken away.

As stated earlier, prior to *Brown v. Board of Education* Black administrators maintained the power within their schools and communities, but little to no power outside of the social and political parameters of the period (Tillman, 2004). These same educators should be identified as transformative leaders because they understood unbeknownst to them the "Pedagogy of the Oppressed", referring to a process by which the oppressed strive to liberate themselves and thereby transform the world of the oppressors (Freire, 1970). Transformative leaders of pre and post *Brown v. Board of Education* needed to demonstrate moral and political acts of courage to "cause individuals to question the assumptions" of the society for which the essence of humanity was lost (Quantz et al., 1991, p.97). Many in White society pre and post *Brown v. Board of Education* believed Blacks to be inhuman, devoid of the ability to learn academically and be productive members within society; thus, treating them as second class citizens. Therefore, transformative leadership was needed to promote freedom and encourage the capacity for change in perceptions, beliefs, and expectations.

The 1954 Supreme Court ruling of *Brown v. Board of Education* stated that segregated schools were unequal and that they violated the 14th Amendment of the Constitution, which prohibits any state from denying any person equal protection of the laws (Lyons & Chesley, 2004). Segregation afforded intelligent and well educated African American women to be leaders within their communities. "Black women used their classrooms and status as educators to promote African-American community development" (Collins, 2000, p. 212). These same African American women who became teachers and leaders were seen as activists, the moral conscience within the community, and role models for Black children (Collins, 2000).

In 1954, the landmark case of *Brown v. Board of Education* sought to correct the inequalities and distribution of resources that had long plagued the all Black schools during the time of segregation (Tillman, 2004). The intent was to improve the teaching and learning conditions for African American students, but the reality of desegregation implementation created many unintended consequences. As stated in Horsford and McKenzie (2008):

> The irony here is that the basis of the case for school desegregation as put forth in Brown was the notion that separate schools for Black and White children psychologically damaged the self-concept of Black children by stigmatizing them as inferior in the eyes of law. However, low expectations and resistance to fulfilling the spirit behind desegregation may as many of the superintendents fear, be recreating segregated schooling and the 'the stigma of inferiority' that Justice Marshall hoped the Brown decision would erase. (p. 450)

In fact, the reality of erasing the inferiority complex and damaged self-concept of Black children through desegregation has been questioned by many for years. Just as Black

children were struggling with the harsh realities of desegregation, so were their families and communities at large. As noted in Horsford and McKenzie (2008), Black families and educators were forced to face individual and institutional acts of racism and resistance to integration, along with the diminished hope for equal educational opportunities, resources, and access.

For many in White communities, schools were seen as social institutions rather than political ones; thereby reinforcing the belief that the schools should reflect the neighborhoods in which they were located (King, 2004). The forced desegregation of schools, as mandated by *Brown v. Board of Education*, called for what many in the White communities considered as "justified" White parental resistance. Given that the "freedom of choice and freedom of association did not so much open white school doors to black children," created much concern within the Black community (King, 2004, p. 336). Many Blacks questioned the wisdom of placing Black children into the hands of predominantly hostile White teachers and communities who did not want African American students in "their" schools. Another unintended consequence of the desegregation ruling was that African American teachers and leaders were demoted from positions of authority to that of subservient positions in schools (King, 2004). The loss of tradition in excellence, role models, leadership, and expertise within many Black communities was profound.

For instance, research indicates that in North Carolina between the years of 1967 and 1971, the number of Black principals declined from 620 to 40 (Tillman, 2004). The decline was due to many Whites resisting integration and forcing Blacks educators into

subordinate positions. Those who once held positions as principals found themselves working as assistants, supervisors, or coordinators in schools and school districts where they were already seen as second-class citizens. The strategy of moving Black educators into subordinate roles within in the schools during desegregation made integration more palatable to many Whites; as they were already willing to close schools in opposition to integration.

Furthermore, with regard to superintendents, the public's perception according to Tillman (2004) "Was that Black school superintendents could not effectively lead the districts and that Whites would not cooperate with a Black superintendent" (p.295). So, instead of desegregation opening the structures of public schools to Blacks, in many ways, desegregation led to the silencing and utter powerlessness of many Black educators. Prior to *Brown v. Board of Education* the inequalities, inequities, and injustices associated with race, gender and socio-politics were overt. Subsequent to the ruling, however, more subtle forms of discrimination emerged. The loss of African American administrators in the Black communities was devastating because voices that once fought for excellence and commitment to educating Black children within those communities were stripped of their power to lead; thus giving way to instability, as well as what many might interpret as rape of the Black communities. As Tillman (2004) states, "Black educators were often powerless to defeat school districts as courts upheld these discriminatory policies that allowed the mass firing of Blacks" (p. 296). Even with the court mandate of *Brown v. Board of Education*, Black educators had little power over factors such as: White school districts relying on standardized test to deny employment,

failure of the courts to uphold the mandate of Brown, the closing of all Black schools, and racism in general (Tillman, 2004). Toppo (2004) writes:

> In 1954, about 82,000 black teachers were responsible for teaching 2 million black children. In the 11 years immediately following Brown, more than 38,000 black teachers and administrators in 17 Southern states and border states lost their jobs. (p.1)

The government and the courts may have considered the mandate of *Brown v. Board of Education* as a symbolic act of providing equality and equity in schooling for Blacks, but the question that continues to linger within the African American community is whether what we, as African Americans, fought for and won, was worth what we had and lost? No one could have known that the loss of jobs, self-esteem, self-worth, and identity as a people would be stripped away by integration. However, bell hooks (1994) captures the overwhelming lost when she discusses and describes how school changed with integration. Bell hooks (1994) writes that with the integration of schools education and knowledge cultivated in schools was, "No longer connected to antiracist struggle," and, "Bussed to white schools, we soon learned that obedience, and not zealous will to learn, was what was expected of us. Too much eagerness to learn could easily be seen as a threat to white authority" (p. 3). She added:

> When we entered racist, desegregated, white schools we left a world where teachers believed that to educate black children rightly would require a political commitment. Now, we were mainly taught by white teachers whose lessons reinforced racist stereotypes. For black children, education was no longer about the practice of freedom. Realizing this, I lost my love of school. The classroom was no longer a place of pleasure or ecstasy. School was still a political place,

> since we were always having to counter white racist assumptions that we were genetically inferior, never capable as white peers, even unable to learn. (pp. 3-4)

In essence, the joy of learning and achieving was replaced with isolation and condemnation. The forced integration of African Americans during the *Brown v. Board of Education* era would be crippling for years to come because of the social divide between White society and Black society regarding freedoms that were once claimed solely on the privilege of being White. However, after 300 years of fighting for equality, justice, and freedom within society and education, African Americans would still have to continue to fight in order to "Overcome the socialized barriers of poverty and institutionalized racism" (Murtadha & Watts, 2005, p. 606).

The 1964 Civil Rights Act and Affirmative Action

Although segregation had a stronghold on the South through the early nineteenth century, discrimination was widespread throughout the country. The subtle forms of discrimination prevented African American women from obtaining decent paying jobs and leadership positions. The issues of being illiterate, not having the right to vote, or being denied access to public places subtly kept African American women controlled by White society. Ten years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, the 1964 Civil Rights Act addressed and attempted to correct the overt and subtle forms of discrimination (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). Specifically, the 1964 Civil Rights Act outlawed discrimination by race, sex, age, national origin, or disability status (Collins, 2000). According to Crenshaw (2000):

> The dominant message of antidiscrimination law is that it will regulate only the limited extent to which race or sex interferes with the process of determining outcomes. Notions of what constitutes race and sex discrimination are, as a result, narrowly tailored to embrace only a small set of circumstances, none of which includes discrimination against Black women. (p. 218)

Crenshaw (2000) puts into words what most African American women knew and understood collectively as a group; that even as the 1964 Civil Rights Era began to take shape and the Act was passed it would take more than a ruling by Congress to bring an end to discrimination.

The Civil Rights Act addressed overt discrimination; however, another ruling was needed to address subtle discrimination. This ruling would come by way of Affirmative Action. According to Scott and Shade (2000), "The term affirmative action was developed as part of Executive Order 11246, which prohibited discrimination by firms doing business with federal government and gave federal agencies power to enforce minority hiring" (p. 28). Furthermore, in their review of research and practices following this legislation, Dana and Bourisaw (2006) commented:

> Affirmative action legislation was passed with hopes of prescribing reasonable and bias-free actions for removing barriers to race, gender, and age in all organizations, agencies, companies, and communities. Yet, nearly three decades later, the evidence of the effects of affirmative action is very limited. (p. 58)

Indeed, Affirmative Action continues to be a double-edged sword. It has the potential to open doors to roles and positions that were predominantly held by White males, such as school administration positions. Moreover, it has the potential to close many doors as

well because it often inadvertently leads to more discrimination in the work place. Marshall writes (1994):

> Affirmative action policies are token gestures that do not reach into the depths and subtleties of micro-politics in schools. Adding micro-political lenses reveals political and cultural forces that undermine women and minority administrators. (p. 173)

Although Affirmative Action was intended to remove these types of racial and gender barriers within organizations, the reality is that discrimination through stereotyping and isolation is much harder to alleviate for African American women. Marshall (1994) also states that policymakers and gatekeepers of the superintendency fail to recognize issues facing African American women upon entering the position of superintendent. In essence, Marshall (1994) says, “Affirmative action lacks moral legitimacy” (p. 173). She continues by stating, “Where minorities experience career assignments and resentments that are race-related, they learn to talk about these as normal aspects of administrator life and not as race-related” (p. 173). As data later shows, many African American women can identify the contradictions within the recruitment and retention processes as they are applied to them, but often are silenced in identifying the contradictions publicly, thus attributing them to the “nature of the beast” —school administration and leadership roles in general. Often when women of color believe they are encountering discrimination they must be able to specifically identify which form of discrimination be it race, gender, cultural, or sexual they are experiencing through concrete documentation; in order for any legal recourse to occur (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010).

Many believe that the tides have turned for Affirmative Action in this country. According to King (2004) Affirmative Action is no longer viewed with optimism, but "By the early 1980's the once radical concept of colour-blindness had become the touchstone of opposition to most forms of affirmative action and the network of positive rights and discrimination policies that had evolved" (p.343). Contrary to the belief of many, the intent of Affirmative Action was never about hiring unqualified people. For instance, the most accepted and widely used definition of highly qualified in the public schools as defined by Cochran-Smith (2002) means that an individual must have full state certification and/or passed a state licensing exam; however, for many African American women the definition of highly qualified is laden with stereotypical beliefs and assumptions. Somewhere in the translation of Affirmative Action society began to view it as granting a favor to women and people of color, as opposed to seeking highly qualified women and people of color to apply for positions traditionally held by White males.

As Tallerico (2000) noted, "The national climate is currently not supportive of affirmative action in employment, resource allocation, or college admissions. In K-12 education generally, concerns for equity have been largely displaced by an almost exclusive focus on excellence" (p. 87). Therefore, Affirmative Action once considered an act of morality and ethical behavior by the government has now become an unwanted consideration for many African American women. Instead, the other side of the sword requires African American women to continue their struggle to prove their qualifications, capabilities, and knowledge as well as dismiss or even challenge stereotypical beliefs

and/or assumptions held within many organizations in which they seek leadership positions. According to Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003):

> Though often underpaid, Black women must take on, along with all of their obvious job-related duties, the additional task of shifting. With their White peers, they must shift to shatter the stereotypes of the lazy welfare mother who would rather not work at all, and the unqualified "token" who only has her job because of affirmative action. (p. 151)

Given the above reality, many African American women believe they must outperform, outshine, and outthink their colleagues in order to maintain status as a leader (Bacchus, 2008). According to Tillman and Cochran (2000), Black women see themselves as survivors of injustice, role models for their communities and advocates for all children. Because of the way they view themselves they also exude strength, perseverance, and work to be a source of pride within the Black communities all the while knowing:

> That the eyes of both minority and majority community members are on them as they carry out their responsibilities in the highly visible and politically charged position of superintendent. Black women superintendents know that their successes and failures will have an effect on future opportunities for other persons of color. (Tillman & Cochran, 2000, p. 46)

The literature suggests that for many African American women superintendents the above statement is a constant thought, which requires the acceptance of the pressures, risks and isolation that are inherent within the role of superintendent. Lastly, Tillman and Cochran, (2000) suggest, that Black women superintendents are critical in influencing higher behavioral and academic expectations for all but especially, poor and minority children.

Given the stated benefits of recruiting and retaining African American women in the realm of educational leadership, the numbers for Black women continues to suffer today despite efforts by the government to erase discriminatory practices. African American women in many administrative positions still struggle to be hired; receive the same and equal pay as their White male, White female, and Black male counterparts; and, receive respect for knowledge and abilities. Kim (2002) attributes the discrepancy in pay to "occupational segregation". As stated in Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010), "The higher pay of White women mask the lower pay of Black women relative to White women; the lower pay of Blacks masks the lower pay of Black women relative to Black men despite Black women's greater education" (p. 176). African American women also struggle to be treated with integrity. Laws, edicts, loss of human life, shedding of blood, and sacrifice have lessened many overt practices of discrimination within society that impede the recruitment and retention of African American women in educational leadership positions.

Linking Race and Gender to the Social Politics of the Superintendency of African American Women

As I have previously alluded, the most commonly identified sociopolitical challenges for African American women in the public school superintendency relate to; (a) sexism, (b) racism, (c) stereotyping, and (d) and the isolation that can occur when these women are do not have mentors or effective professional networks (Settles, 2006). According to Dana and Bourisaw (2006), "The number one barrier to workplace advancement is gender prejudice, pure prejudice. This factor has remained steady for

decades" (p. 93). Although Dana and Bourisaw (2006) indicate gender prejudice as the number one barrier to work advancement for women; in fact, for African American women this barrier is often intersected with race. As stated in Settles (2006),

> Black women hold other identities that may impact their daily lives (e.g., social class, age, sexual orientation), their unique experiences in the US may lead them to be especially conscious of their racial and gender identities. (p. 589)

Thus, once again, iterating the need for qualitative narrative research, which allows Black women to speak the consciousness of racial and gender identities, is not only needed but critical to understanding the disparity in African American women representation in the public school superintendency. This type of research supports the position of Shorter-Gooden (2004) in that it is often difficult to separate race and gender oppression for African American women. However, by listening to the recalled journeys and perspectives of African American women superintendent's research may shed light on the impact of gender and race biases to recruitment and retention of Black women to the public school superintendency.

Gender prejudice, racism, and stereotyping may go unnoticed as school boards make hiring decisions, but it remains present. In many cases there has been a preconceived face that is expected to fulfill leadership positions in education; the face of a White male. It is often argued by scholars and educators that race and gender have little influence on whether African American women are recruited and retained within the public school superintendency, but according to research by Gewertz (2006), former

African American women superintendents believe otherwise. Tallerico (2000) gives an account of a hiring consultant's description of a preliminary meeting with a school board:

> Normally, when I sit down with a board, if the board has anything to say about gender, it comes across as if it's almost axiomatic that we're going to hire a male, who is going to be married, and who is going to have kids. He's going to live in the community, and the kids are going to attend the schools. So they have this stereotypic notion about what the candidate will look like. (p. 94)

The description indeed supports the belief that there are traditional mindsets within our society that are centered on personal and historical experiences based upon Western-European American beliefs that privilege leadership within the dominant group (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). These mindsets reflect an enduring preference for male leaders in our society (Tallerico, 2000). Often school boards and districts will seek educational leaders that mirror the community's beliefs, lifestyles, and values. When the image in the mirror is altered it often becomes a distracter; particularly for the African American woman who is capable of successfully leading a school district. Such distracters and societal perceptions were recounted in Gewertz (2006):

> Other black women superintendents told stories of drawing negative reactions based on their clothing, a burden they don't believe men carry. Some white community members in Minneapolis reportedly grumbled that Ms. Peebles, who wore her hair in dreadlocks and favored flowing dresses in African-patterned fabric, had too "rough" or "Afrocentric" a look. (p.5)

The above societal perceptions are all too common for African American women serving as superintendents or in executive positions and can be a factor in their recruitment and retention.

As school boards and school districts look to recruitment and retention of African American women for leadership positions, it becomes necessary to consider the challenges of being an African American woman working to serve but being subjected to "bullying" by their communities and school boards. African American women are often criticized for their choice of dress, jewelry, hairstyle, questioned competency, loyalty to or lack of to either race (Gewertz, 2006). Each of these challenges in many ways can affect or impact recruitment and retention of African American women because each challenge is unique in its presentation. These challenges are not the only ones African American women face in regards to recruitment and retention, because as Dana and Bourisaw (2006) reminds us, women in general face the challenges of being women, single or married, having or not having families, relocation, and salary. However, for African American women and as noted in Gewertz (2006) "Race and gender are always the elephants in the room" (p. 6). As stated in Tillman and Cochran (2000):

> Recruitment is inextricably linked to hiring practices. Only if Black women and members of other minority groups are identified early on as having the potential for success in educational administration with they ultimately be selected or encouraged to self-select urban school administration as a career option. (p. 50)

The challenge of being an African American woman clearly continues to speak to recruitment and retention within the public school superintendency. As an African American woman in a leadership position, one must continually prove herself worthy of the position. "Current and former such leaders said in interviews that grappling with

negative assumptions and having constantly to prove they were capable made the already difficult job of being superintendent that much harder" (Gewertz, 2006, p.2).

More often than not, many Black women do not have the social influence or prestige afforded to their peers prior to applying for the superintendency; thus leading to harsher critiques by school boards and the community at large. The lack of social influence or prestige can be linked historically to misperceptions and stereotyping of Black women identities and roles; often contributing to isolation and being perceived as credible (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). Even when an African American woman may have exceedingly high credentials educationally, socially, and morally and more often than not meet the definition of highly-qualified – there exists within the fabric of society a hidden bias or question as to whether the African American woman can truly lead, be decisive, and astute in the areas of politics, management and education. Tillman and Cochran (2000) recount:

> The search consultants and school boards tended to display prejudicial gender stereotyping that was evident in questions about whether women were "tough enough" to carry out the responsibilities of the superintendency in highly charged political situations and whether they were knowledgeable enough to deal with budgetary decisions as well as those regarding physical plant and transportation concerns. (p.52)

They further infer that White males continue to have the advantage of getting referred by search consultants and hired by school boards because of societal perceptions. As recounted in Gewertz (2006):

> I’ve always had to make sure that at every moment, I’m at the top my game, said Ms. Byrd-Bennett, who departed earlier this month after serving seven years as the chief executive office of the Cleveland school district. At every meeting, I feel as if I’m going into the courtroom prosecuting or defending someone, and I’d better have an airtight case. (p. 2)

Once again, the challenge of “being better” appears to resound in the limited research of African American women superintendents.

According to Newton (2006), these biases stem from male perspectives in research, management theory, and male-dominated fields of corporate leadership and have become essentially the norm in thinking about who should be leaders (Newton, 2006). Parker (2001), also states, “Organizational members come to expect leaders to look, act, and think in ways that are consistent with the socially constructed meanings of organizational leader and leadership” (p. 45). Even as Giddings (1984) suggests, the perception of Black women is that they are less capable than their White male and female counterparts are, thus keeping them from obtaining executive positions; such as the public school superintendency. Sadly, it seems that too often when White males fail in their leadership responsibilities many school districts will by default offer the administrative position to minority women; and even this is seen as rare instance (Hill & Ragland, 1995).

The fight to erase unseen biases and prejudicial practices in superintendency recruitment and retention can be better understood through examining the influence of the Black Feminist Movement. In addressing the Black Feminist Movement one must understand that the movement provided the much needed social capital for African

American women. Social capital as defined by Noguera, (2001) speaks to the "Collective benefits derived through the participation in social organizations and networks" (p.189). The Women's and Black Feminist movements provided what Noguera (2001) calls the "Features of social organizations, such as networks, norms, and trust that facilitate action and cooperation for mutual benefit" (p. 203). Often through the use of social capital African Americans attain legal justice, education, and employment (Yosso, 2005).

Putting Black Women's Leadership in Context: The Influence of the Black Feminist Movement

My conceptual framework is heavily related to Black Feminist Theory (BFT), as articulated by Guy-Sheftall (2000) and Collins (2000). The integration of some Black Feminist Theory concepts and assumptions helps to frame the impact of desegregation, the Civil Rights Era and the Black Feminist Movement in regards to race, gender, and social politics and how they influence the recruitment and retention of African American women in the public school superintendency. In essence, the narrative perspectives from African American women about the impact of race, gender, and politics on recruitment and retention to the public school superintendency are profiled later to increase knowledge and bring an overall awareness to the challenges faced by African American women as they seek recruitment and retention in the public school superintendency.

History of Black Feminism

During the 19th century, Black women activists and community educators such as Sojourner Truth, Mary Church Terrell, and Maria Stewart gave voice to the challenges of Black women. These women along with many others were instrumental in developing

the Black Feminist Movement. Although much of what is written about the beginnings of the Black Feminist Movement indicates that its focus was to end racism, the focus was more, if not, equally about advancing women's rights in general (hooks, 1981). As Collins (2000) writes, "Popular perspectives on Black political activism often fail to see how struggles for group survival are just as important as confrontations with institutional power" (p. 202). Therefore, it became necessary for Black women to create organizations specifically for the purposes of gaining social equity, working together for the benefit of all women, and to further benefit the Black race as a whole.

In 1896, The National Association of Colored women was formed. This organization brought over 100 Black women's clubs together. The motto for this organization that still exists today is "Lifting as We Climb" (nacwc.org, 2009). "Lifting as We Climb" was a lesson that was instilled in many African American children during the nineteenth and twentieth century, thereby making the lesson of the motto somewhat of a cultural expectation. This cultural expectation as noted and defined in Shorter-Gooden (2004), is known as "standing on shoulders;" meaning, "relying on resources outside of oneself," resulting in "a commitment to giving back through their own work and life examples" (p. 417). As one begins to understand the significance that lies within the lesson of the motto, one can begin to understand the tremendous charge placed upon many African American women that often results in a choice to prioritize work, family, community, over self. Often this tremendous charge is attributed to the "superwoman syndrome," as defined by Huddleston-Mattai (1995). According to Bacchus (2008):

> A Black woman affected by this (superwoman) syndrome believes she must balance the high demands of work, family, and social obligations all at the same time and all with the same intensity. In addition to these responsibilities, she must also be active in uplifting her entire race. Her responsibility to the Black community is to lift as she climbs. (p. 64)

Lift as she climbs, for many Black women, serves as the social foundation for which their life reality and perspectives have been built upon, and, I later show how this ethos continues to influence many African American women superintendents. This ethos also can be found in historical analyses.

Over one hundred years ago, the Black women's organizations provided strength in numbers, and increased Black women knowledge and power. Maria W. Stewart, an abolitionist, feminist and public speaker was the first African American woman to speak publicly to a mixed audience in regards to issues facing the African American community. She was specifically adamant that Black women should seek leadership roles within their communities and fight for their rights as they sought independence (Guy-Sheftall, 2000). Maria Stewart also spoke to the fact that oppression did not come just from White society, but that it also comes from within the Black race itself: "Let us no longer talk of prejudice, till prejudice becomes extinct at home. Let us no longer talk of oppression, till we cease to oppose our own" (Stewart as cited in Guy-Sheftall, 2000, p. 349). This statement spoke to the race and gender oppression during that time in history, and sadly enough for too many African American women it still holds true. Many African American women continue to struggle against the belief they should be obedient and subservient to the will of others. This belief is often mirrored within the religious

teachings of the African American Christian faiths that many African American women embrace. Harris (1990) writes:

> Practicing Christianity has for African-Americans meant turning the other cheek, walking in humility, and enduring cruel and debasing treatment. During three centuries of slavery, black folk learned how to sublimate their anger; they increased their chances for survival by tolerating the oppressors. (p. 5)

Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003) share Harris' beliefs regarding the role of African American Christian faiths in contributing to the belief of obedience and subservience as expected behavior for Black women. Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003) state, "Black women are asked and even coerced to shift and to be submissive" (p. 260). The contradiction for many African American women in trying to serve within the boundaries of the Christian faith lies in the reality that the message of obedience and submissiveness is often presented in the traditional patriarchal dogma (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003). This instance can also be found when reviewing history of the Feminist movement.

The Feminist Movement of the 19th and early 20th centuries started with the call for equal voting rights and it served "primarily the interests of middle and upper class college-educated white women seeking social equality with middle and upper class white men" (hooks, 1981, p.147). King (1988) further states:

> Initially, there was an alliance of blacks and women for universal suffrage. However, as the campaign ensued, opponents of universal suffrage, and of any extension of voting privileges, were successful in transforming the debate into one of whom should receive the vote—women or black males. (p. 59)

In order to get the southern vote many prominent white suffragists sided with known racists, and used racially charged remarks to further bring more attention to their argument that White women were superior in intellect and character and more deserving of the right to vote than Blacks (King, 1988). Consequently, Black women were left on their own to fight for their right to vote through their own organizations.

Although many write that African American women were only concerned with racial equality during the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the truth is they also were concerned with sexism. As bell hooks (1981) writes, “Nineteenth century black women were more aware of sexist oppression than any other female group in American society has ever been” (p.161). bell hooks (1981) describes the beliefs toward Black women during the nineteenth and early twentieth century, as sexually immoral, loose, and undisciplined. In many ways, the same beliefs of the nineteenth and twentieth century have followed African American woman to the twenty-first century. The need for African American women’s organizations and clubs still widely exists as they provide a platform for African American women to work and change stereotypical assumptions and beliefs that are inherent within society.

If anyone needed representation during the Feminist Movement it was African American women. However, because the Feminist Movement “Was consciously and deliberately structured to exclude black and other non-white women”, the challenges and concerns of Black women could only be voiced collectively through a distinct Black feminism (hooks, 1981, p. 147).

Therefore, Black feminism would provide the structure for dispelling the stereotypical beliefs and assumptions within society that can often result in self-fulfilling prophecies that align with race, gender, and social political discrimination. Black feminism provided the voices of many to be heard; thus, helping a society question the negative impact of discrimination and helping to open the minds of many to the vast potential, possibilities, and power of African American women. The power of Black feminism laid the foundation for the community of African American women to see themselves as leaders; even public school superintendents.

Core Objectives of Black Feminism

According to Guy-Sheftall (2000) there are five components of Black feminism: (1) it addresses oppression due to race and gender that is based upon the dual identity of being African American and female; (2) it recognizes this dual identity presents challenges, needs, and concerns unlike those faced by African American men and White women; (3) it maintains that African American women struggle for equal rights and freedom; (4) it recognizes that there is nothing in the U.S. Constitution that speaks against the many "isms" faced by African American women; and, (5) Black feminism asserts that due to the challenges of being marginalized in society, many African American women have formed a view of the world that is unique to them as African American women. This unique view is developed by the ongoing struggles of living on the edge of a society that continues to struggle with accepting African American women as viable, competent, and positive contributors to society. The marginalization endured

by many African American women becomes the lens for how society is viewed within their eyes.

In addition, Collins (2000) identifies three common characteristics shared among many Black feminists, including a critical understanding and insight into the oppression that they live with daily, as opposed to others who live outside the group; being generally less willing to walk away from the struggles of oppression even when the rewards of continuing the struggle are greatly diminished; and, believing that empowerment is essential thus so is the need to aggressively define themselves on their own terms. In addition, Collins asserts that Black women feminists need to be diverse in backgrounds and intellect in order to foster leadership and collaboration to form self-governance, freedom, and moral independence.

The features of Black feminism expressed by Guy-Sheftall (2000) and Collins (2000) likely have a clear impact on African American women as they seek to be recruited and retained in K-12 educational leadership positions because such features drive the leadership dispositions, character, ethical and moral values of many African American women. As King (1988) states, "Our experiences, and our interpretations of our own realities at the conceptual and ideological level have been devalued and excluded from women's feminism, thus opening the door to Black feminism" (p.58).

Black feminism was further propelled through the struggle for equal rights by Black women leaders/activists such as Sojourner Truth during the early 19th century and bell hooks today. During the early 19th century, it was widely believed that White women were fragile and needed to be taken care of; however, this belief did not widely

apply to African American women. Sojourner Truth thus called the question, “Ain’t I a Woman?” (Collins, 2000, p.14). According to Brunner, bell hooks (1999) stated, “We can and do speak for ourselves. And our struggle today is to be heard” (p.84). African American womens’ voices, along with many others have continued to speak to the elimination of classism and sexism, as well as the expression of views that solely come from the African American woman’s perspective. The sole perspective for many African American women is in the action of putting their needs second to all others even if it violates the soul within her (Collins, 2000). The soul represents the emotional and moral sense of identity, which Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003) would say is depressed in many African American women. They have even defined this depression as the “Sisterella complex,” (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003). As stated in Jones-Shorter Gooden (2003):

> Sisterella is the Black woman who honors others but denies herself. She achieves in her own right—indeed, she may overachieve—yet she works tirelessly, sometimes masochistically, to promote, protect, and appease others. She is trying so hard to be what others want and need that she has lost control of the shifting process. It’s overtaken her. Sisterella has had to give too much to others. Or she she’s given up too much of herself. (p. 124)

Thus, the soul of Sisterella is denied and held captive by the very oppression that they themselves seek to eliminate in the lives of other African American women. As a result of the “Sisterella complex”, the soul for many African American women seeks freedom from the masks of convention or compliance to which white female philosopher Maxine Greene (1988) refers. However, for many Black women when this freedom of oppression

or the fracturing of the mask jeopardizes the very essence of being a mother, daughter, wife, sister, friend, co-worker, etc., many would rather contend with the oppression; as opposed to becoming an active feminist. As bell hooks (1981) states:

> Today masses of black women in the U.S. refuse to acknowledge that they have much to gain by feminist struggle. They fear feminism. They have stood in place so long that they are afraid to move. They fear change. They fear losing what little they have. They are afraid to openly confront white feminists with their racism or black males with their sexism, not to mention confronting white men with their racism and sexism. I have sat in many a kitchen and heard black women express a belief in feminism and eloquently critique the women's movement explaining their refusal to participate. (p. 195)

The fear of losing relationships that are sustaining or suffering alienation because of speaking out against racism and sexism is far more frightening to many African American women and leaves them placing the needs of their emotional and moral sense of identity to others.

The 'isms' that African American women live with on a daily basis continue to reinforce that Black feminism is complex and remains a critical influence in the lives of African American women as they seek leadership positions in education, as well as in other professional careers. The struggles addressed by Black feminists are the same challenges seen in the social politics of educational leadership and many other leadership positions within society. Sexism and racism continue to hinder the recruitment and retention of many African American women in K-12 educational leadership. Thus, continuing the need for active /aggressive or passive feminism. As stated earlier, many African American women prefer to stay away from active/aggressive feminism, but will

consciously or unconsciously participate in what I perceive as unspoken Black feminism. Passive Black feminism may be demonstrated through the actions of "Sisterella" as Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003) refer, but it may also be seen in African American women leaders' through the actions of "mothering, othermothering, or mother-activist."

The Role of Unspoken Black Feminism and Othermothering

Black feminism grew out of the need for African American women to take a stand for themselves and to let their voices be heard. This call to action by Black feminists would be aggressive and deliberate as only they could speak to the injustices that Black women painfully endured at the hands of Whites and Black men. In essence, the words of Sojourner Truth still "runs through the veins" of African American women because she spoke to the fact that she could work just as hard as any man, bear children, be persecuted, and still overcome (bell hooks, 1981). As a result of African American women heeding the call and coming together as one in regards to issues only known to them, African American women organizations were given birth. The birth of these organizations for African American women provided the solidarity, guidance, and support needed when they as a group of people had nowhere to turn. Out of the wisdom shared by the women leaders within these organizations, it is understandable how and why many Black women leaders began to be viewed as other-mothers; thus encouraging the members within their organizations to become other-mothers in their communities. Thereby, sustaining the political action of unspoken Black feminism; which I later suggest is also apparent in many of today's African American women superintendents.

Othermothering and motherwork as discussed in Collins (2000) is how Black communities “Distinguish the roles of biological mothers and other women who care for children,” (p. 236). The care that is extended from these women reaches beyond the physical and emotional well-being of Black women, young adults, teens, and children to a more substantial role of providing influence, demonstrating power, and having the authority within the community to encourage political change through empowerment. The role of other-mothering and motherwork may also be identified as political consciousness of mothering. For instance, Collins (2000) explains, “In this case, African American women participation in a constellation of mothering activities, collectively called motherwork, often fostered a distinctive political sensibility” (p. 209). The political sensibility that Collins (2000) speaks of is being one of survival and institutional change of policies and procedures often discriminatory in application towards many African American women. As Collins (2000) states, Black women were disenfranchised, they were not without political influence (p.209) and through the actions of othermothers and motherwork this political influence would be demonstrated and generated.

Many African American women leaders were perceived as mothers within their communities. The work of women leaders whether active or unspoken was seen as Loder (2005) states, “as deliberate acts of love, nurturance, guidance, and community rebuilding,” (p.308). Their actions also resemble Cooper’s (2007) discussion of the educational advocacy that African American mothers often perform, noting that, “These mothers’ quest to acquire each of these things is linked to their experience with oppression and their desire to ensure that their children can prosper in a racist society,”

(p. 494). Furthermore, African American mothers have typically understood education to be the key to survival in a society that throughout history had viewed them as less than equal. Mothering also represents once again the motto and life lesson of "lifting as we climb." For instance, Collins (2000) recounts Maria Stewart's challenge to African American women to use their special roles as mothers for political action:

> O, ye mothers, what a responsibility rests on you! You have souls committed to your charge….It is you that must create in the minds of your little girls and boys a thirst for knowledge, the love of virtue, and the cultivation of a pure heart. Do not say you cannot make anything of your children; but say…we will try. (p.2)

These mother-activists knew that gaining a good education was critical to the empowerment and success of the individual, community, and race as a whole. They sought to nurture and care for the children within their communities as their own mothers did.

In her study of principals, Loder (2005) states, "In the spirit of community othermothering these African American women principals viewed teaching and leading as deliberate acts of love, nurturance, guidance, and community rebuilding" (p.308). As mother-activists, African American women also sought to give the children within their communities the knowledge and tools necessary to break the cycle of poverty and racial disparity found in many areas throughout the country (Collins, 2000). Many African American women in leadership still seek to provide the nurturing and care provided through mothering. In many respects this sense of "mothering" has become a social and moral obligation, as well as, a political action (Collins, 2000).

The activism seen as a result of Black feminism is relevant to recruitment and retention of African American women to the public school superintendency, because it is the strength of Black women coming together to provide support, encouragement, and mentoring to Black women in various leadership positions. Thus, active and unspoken feminism as noted by Ayman and Korabik (2010) "Affect identity and group cohesion, interpersonal interactions, and access to power and resources" (p.159). Overall, Black feminism gave African American women the support and confidence to face the daily oppression endured by the social politics of a society and the power to transform their lives.

Freire (2007) states, "The oppressed unveil the world of oppression and through the praxis commit themselves to its transformation" (p. 54). As African American women leaders be they educators and/or feminists understood that the oppression Black women faced was because of their gender, race, and the pre-conceived beliefs within White society; therefore the challenge was and continues to be how to overcome and transform the social politics that threaten to keep them oppressed.

Freire (2007) further reminds us, "The great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: is to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well" (p. 44). He explains:

> This lesson and this apprenticeship must come, however, from the oppressed themselves and from those who are truly solidary with them. As individuals or as peoples, by fighting for the restoration of their humanity they will be attempting the restoration of true generosity. Who better prepared than the oppressed to understand the terrible significance of an oppressive society? Who suffer the effects of oppression more than the oppressed? Who can better understand the necessity of liberation? They will not gain this liberation by chance but through the praxis of their quest for it, through their recognition of the necessity to fight

> for it. And this fight, because of the purpose given it by the oppressed, will actually constitute an act of love opposing the lovelessness which lies at the heart of the oppressors' violence, lovelessness even with clothed in false generosity. (p. 45)

In essence the transformation of race, gender, and the social politics that have been placed as constraints on African American women must be fought and transformed at the hands of African American women; hence the power of Black feminism. In the following chapter I explain how my study is designed to explore the phenomenology of African American women public school superintendents and the structures of race, gender, and social politics within recruitment and retention to the superintendency.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

> One must see from the point of view of the participant in the midst of what is happening if one is to be privy to the plans people make, the initiatives they take, the uncertainties they face. (Greene, 1995, p.10)

The participants were African American women who have, or are currently serving as public school superintendents. This study sought eight participants. Initial contact was made by telephone and electronic mail. During the initial contact, I described the purpose of their research, and asked for the participant's participation in the study. The participants and I designated a date, time, and location for me to conduct the interview. Once all permissions were documented I met with the participants and asked them to tell their stories regarding recruitment and retention as public school superintendents. As participants recalled their stories, I recorded, listened, and took notes as needed. I refrained from interjecting or asking other questions while the participant responded in order to allow their train of thought to go unbroken. As questions were generated in my mind as the participants are responding, I wrote them down as questions for further probing.

Designing a Phenomenological Narrative Study

Creswell (2009) might define the point of view that Greene speaks of above as a worldview. Worldview as discussed in Creswell (2009) means the beliefs which direct

the path of individuals. This phenomenological narrative study examined the worldview of eight African American women in regards to their recruitment and to retention within the public school superintendency. The purpose of this study was to inform readers about the potential impact of race, gender, and social politics on recruitment and retention of African American women in the public school superintendency as experienced and recalled through the narrative research process. Collins writes (2000), that it is the responsibility of African American women to define their realities with those who have lived and experienced those realities. Thus, there is no better group to define the reality of recruitment and retention challenges of African American women superintendents, than African American women who have experienced the public school superintendency. Collins (1998) writes:

> Some of the most important ideas in Black women's intellectual history come from this sense of writing across time, of having dialogues with women who grapple with questions of injustice in unfamiliar social settings. Without listening to those who have come before, how can Black women prepare an intellectual and political space for Black women who will confront future, reconfigured injustices? (p. 75)

Therefore, the realities of recruitment and retention as experienced and perceived by African American women superintendents is critical to understanding and knowledge. The realities, experiences, and perceptions in turn, help to formulate the worldviews, standpoints, and leadership style for many African American women.

Furthermore, Shorter-Gooden (2004) refers to the fact that racism is often the focus of research regarding African American women; however, she states that little

research is conducted on sexism in regards to African American women. Her statements and discussion of the double jeopardy phenomenon infer that African American women have complex coping mechanisms that they use to deal with the dual "isms" that many experience. This study considers those isms along with how they intersect with social politics.

Standpoint theory

The inherited resource of every African-American generation lies within the stories and life experiences of previous generations and serves as the beginning of standpoint theory. According to Cooper (2007), "Feminist standpoint theory urges researchers who study women to place women's lives at the center of analysis in order to gain a better understanding of them and how sociopolitical structures impact their lives" (p.495). This theory emerged in the early 1980s as part of the broader Feminist Theory. It was seen as "A method for naming the oppression of women grounded in the truth of women's lives" (Hekman, 1997, p. 356). Collins (1997) took standpoint theory a step farther by saying that over time individual experiences of inequality due to race, gender, class, age, sexuality, or ethnicity becomes the reality of the group. Therefore, standpoint theory is a critical link to Black feminism because the realities African American women speak to the inequalities that they have experienced due to race, gender, class, age, sexuality, or ethnicity. Once again, it must be reiterated that the use of standpoint theory was to draw upon the commonalties of African American women as a group and does not mean to imply that every African American woman public school superintendent's experiences resonates with the group's experiences. Drawing upon both Black feminist

concepts and standpoint theory allows for greater understanding of the impact of gender, race, and politics as they apply to many African American women in recruitment and retention to the public school superintendency.

By aligning standpoint theory with Black feminism, the intent was to share information and bring about awareness from the participant's voices, and inspire change in what is perceived and often defined as White male power and privilege in the superintendency. As stated in Dillard (2000):

> In this way, these narratives may be viewed as at least part of the "evidence of things not seen," demystifying African-American feminist ways of knowing, in moments of reflection, relation, and resistance. (p. 664)

As a way to facilitate change and to develop ways of understanding the oppression and marginalization endured by African American women within the social, political, and historical contexts of their lives then meaningful discourse has to occur (Wrushen & Sherman, 2008).

According to Collins (1998), Standpoint Theory provides insight into the intellectual and political landscape of Black feminism. As explained in Bloom and Erlandson (2003), "Standpoint theory focuses on the production of knowledge that is emancipatory, antioppressive, nonhierarchical, negotiated, and politically focused" (p. 341). Standpoint Theory allows a group's relationship and experiences with dominant groups of power to be analyzed and interpreted. However, the interpretations and analyses rendered from the use of standpoint theory often conflicts with the interpretations and analyses within the dominant culture. This being said, the analyses

and interpretations rendered from the relationships and experiences as told by African American women who grew up during segregation, integration and the Civil Rights Era regarding recruitment and retention may differ significantly from the experiences and relationships of predominantly White males as public school superintendents or even the experiences and relationships of younger African American women superintendents. Thus, the truth as recalled through relationships and experiences of African American women superintendents is often discredited or ignored by other truths within the dominant culture (Collins, 1998). Truth be told, not only are the relationships and experiences of African American women often discounted within the dominant culture but they are rarely shared outside of academia. Afrocentrism or "Black consciousness" as discussed by Collins (1998), "Aims to influence the thinking and behavior of Black people outside of academia," (p.156). Although, research and educational communities are sure to benefit from the standpoints of the participants within this study; it is the understanding and broadening of awareness for Black women outside of academia that might lend itself to Black feminism.

Collins (2000) discussion of Black feminist epistemology also aligns with standpoint theory in that it speaks to the core themes of work, family, sexual politics, motherhood, and political activism as influencing how African American women develop their knowledge. These issues are often expressed through the lens of White males and often discounted when the discussion is expressed through the lens of Black women (p.251). This in turn leads to the following statement in Collins (2000), "Epistemological choices about whom to trust, what to believe, and why something is true are not benign

academic issues. Instead, these concerns tap the fundamental question of which versions of truth will prevail," (p. 252).

The eight participants in this study shared a truth – or standpoint – that related to the following research questions, which I designed a qualitative, phenomenological study to address:

- What was your journey to the superintendency?
- How do race, gender, and social politics impact the recruitment and retention of African American women to the public school superintendency?
- In what ways can the recruitment and retention of African American women to the public school superintendency be increased?

A qualitative research approach was appropriate for this study because it allowed the worldviews of the participants to support or negate the theoretical framework that is the premise of this study. As the researcher I listened, analyzed, and sought validation or disconfirmation of my conceptual framework given the perspectives of the African American women in this study (Riessman, 1993). Furthermore, by considering the intersecting aspects of Standpoint Theory, and Transformative Leadership in this study, the challenges faced by many African American women as they seek recruitment and retention to the public school superintendency becomes more complete.

More specifically, by seeking phenomenological narratives for this qualitative study I sought to gain insight from eight African American women as to their perceptions and experiences regarding recruitment and retention to the public school superintendency. Patton (2002) states that phenomenological research requires the

researcher to engage in in-depth interviews in order to capture and describe the memories, perceptions, descriptions, and feelings of life experiences. In this case, the phenomenon is specific to the recruitment and retention of African American women to the public school superintendency because of the low numbers of African American women represented in the position. Once again, the narrative becomes the vehicle in which the participant's standpoint is acknowledged and they can name their reality. Lawrence-Lightfoot (1994) stated:

> You know where the minefields are... there is wisdom…You are in touch with the ancestors …and it is from the gut, not rationally figured out. Black women have to use this all the time, of course, the creativity is still there, but we are not fools…we call it the 'epistemological privileges of the oppressed.' How do you tap that wisdom—name it, mine it, pass it on to the next generation? (p. 59)

Like Lawrence-Lightfoot (1994), Dillard (2000), emphasizes that the gathering of narratives provides a window from which the identities, issues, and political influences shape the lives and perspectives of African American women seeking the superintendency or other leadership roles.

According to Patton (2002), in 1913 a philosopher by the name of Husserl made the following assumption "We can only know what we experience by attending to perceptions and meanings that awaken our conscious awareness" (p. 105). Using data gathered from narratives, I too sought, as did Greene (1995), "To connect with women who, after years of having their understandings dismissed, are now affirming that their experience is as significant as men's" (p. 22). When it comes to research about the experiences of African American women in recruitment and retention to the public school

superintendency and education in general, often their stories and numbers are generalized to the gender and race of White females and Black males, which leads to marginalization of their specific challenges and experiences as African American women (Tillman, 2004). Therefore, conducting a narrative study that speaks directly to the recruitment and retention challenges and experiences of African American women was relevant, significant, and affirming.

Qualitative research can offer a rich description of one's existence, and it is based upon the historical and daily context of one's life. At the same time, qualitative methods lend to a deeper and more complex understanding of what, when, where, why, and how events shape a life (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). More specifically, narrative research requires the researcher to gaze beyond the present, to listen, and to search for meaning that may be hidden within the cultural framework and anti-positivism presented in the narrative. Casey (1995) explains that researchers must be aware that narratives will not be exact because the narrator chooses what to share (selectivity), omits some information (silence), and may contradict other information gathered (slippage). As stated in Casey (1995):

> The principal value of a narrative is that its information comes complete with evaluations, explanations, and theories and with selectivities, silences, and slippage that are intrinsic to its representations of reality. (p.234)

Thus, the value of narrative research lends insight into the multiple and diverse realities of each participant.

This portion of the research gathering required recording or extensive note taking in order to capture everything said within the narrative. Once the narrative was told, the researcher transcribed the narrative so that analyzing of the narrative could begin. This process allowed the researcher to interpret and analyze the data and relate it to the literature and theoretical frameworks within the study conducted (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

Lastly, the researcher has the responsibility of validating their research. Validation according to Riessman (1993), means showing "trustworthiness" of the interpretations and analysis presented in the study. Unlike quantitative studies that rely upon a hypothesis that is proven or disproven through the use of numbers, qualitative studies can be validated in four different ways: (a) through persuasiveness, found within the rhetoric of the writing; (b) through correspondence, the affirming of the researcher's interpretation by the individuals who participated in the study; (c) through coherence, the participant answers in response to the type of questions asked by the researcher; and (d) through practical use, the study becomes the supportive research of other researchers (Riessman, 1993).

According to Riessman (1993), telling, transcribing, analyzing, and validation are the succinct parts found within the process of conducting a narrative study; however, the process is not without its limitations. Within the scientific world of quantitative research, the main limitation of qualitative narrative studies is the lack of their reliability and validity. This concern is heightened by other limitations such as researcher bias, the processing and coding of data, and over generalizations made by the researcher (Miles &

Huberman, 1994). The counter-argument for qualitative research, according to Miles and Huberman (1994), is understanding that "Words, especially organized into incidents or stories, have a concrete, vivid, meaningful flavor that often proves far more convincing to a reader—another researcher, a policymaker, a practitioner—than pages of summarized numbers" (p. 1). Therefore, each part of the qualitative narrative builds the whole and ultimately unveils a truth. This truth cannot be revealed by the researcher without interpretation and understanding of the context from which the participants express their worldview.

Data Collection

In order to acquire narrative data I conducted one face-to-face interview that incorporates the telling of the participant's journey to the superintendency. Then I asked specific questions regarding education, recruitment, gender, race, retention, mentoring and family impact. I also asked for a hard copy of each participant's professional vita in order to review any discerning commonalities or discrepancies that may help to answer how each participant was ultimately prepared to be recruited and retained as a public school superintendent.

Prior to any data being collected I obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), which ensured that no harm would come to the participants in the study. Once IRB approval was obtained, participants were asked to sign a confidentiality agreement. The purpose of the confidentiality agreement was to provide the participants an assurance that I as the researcher would adhere to confidentiality and only use the data gathered from their interviews for the sole purpose of the study. This process of data

collection is critical because it fosters trust, permission, and access from all participants associated with the study. Data collection was gathered from the review of professional vitas, narratives, and interviews.

In reviewing the vitas, I sought basic information about each participant while looking for comparisons and differences (see Appendix A). During the first half of the face-to-face interview, I asked participants the grand tour question (see Appendix B). Quantz (1992) says the grand tour question is designed to be broad and explicit, thus allowing the participant to answer openly and with a focus. The interview was digitally recorded and uninterrupted once the participant starts to share. Once the participant concluded their response, I asked specific probing questions that were personalized and based upon participant's response. The second half of the face-to-face interview consisted of me asking ten probing questions that relate to recruitment and retention factors such as: (a) gender, (b) race, and (c) social politics (see Appendix C). Once again, the second half of the interview was digitally recorded and uninterrupted during the participant's response.

The forms of data collection are appropriate to this qualitative narrative study because as stated by Greene (1991), "Without some knowledge of connective details, it is extraordinarily difficult to overcome abstraction in dealing with other people" (p.113). The data collection process in this study assisted me in connecting the patterns, perspectives, and positionality of each participant; while also, maintaining my objectivity. Positionality, as stated in Cooper (2005), originates from feminist scholarship

and “relates to the extent to which they are privileged, resourceful, powerful and thus able to navigate and succeed within the dominant social structure.” (p. 175)

The narrative research required me to meet with each of the participants in mutually convenient locations. Initial contact was made by telephone and electronic mail. During the initial contact, I described the purpose of my research and asked for the participant’s participation in the study. The participant and I then designated a date, time, and location for me to conduct the interview. Once all permissions were documented, I met with the participants and asked them to tell their stories regarding recruitment and retention as public school superintendents. As participants recalled their stories I recorded, listened, and took notes as needed. I refrained from interrupting or re-directing the participant in any way. By refraining from interjecting or asking other questions the participant was free to share that which they felt is important.

Each participant was involved in one face-to-face interview that was divided into two parts. The time allotted for each interview was three hours. The grand tour question was allotted one hour and a half, with the second half of the interview devoted to asking specific questions regarding education, gender and race, recruitment, retention, mentors and family. A total of approximately 24 hours of recorded data was yielded from the participants.

The participants in this research were located in four Southeastern states. Their location was irrelevant due to the low numbers of African American women serving as public school superintendents and their availability. However, it was important for the participants to be located in the Southeast so that I could drive to meet with each of them

and minimize my travel costs. Driving to meet with each of them generally took four to six hours; with a total of about 3000 miles being driven in meeting with all the participants. Of the eight participants who have agreed to serve as participants, five are current superintendents, two are retired, and one is retired and a former associate state public school superintendent. All participants are the first African American women to hold the position of public school superintendents in their respected districts and states.

Table 1.

Interview Summary*

Participants	Dates	Hours	Participants	Dates	Hours
Dr. Galinda Peters	September 16, 2010	3	Dr. Margaret Reed	October 5, 2010	3
Dr. Ester Cameron	September 17, 2010	3	Dr. Jocelyn Markworth	October 6, 2010	3
Dr. Karen Agee	September 22, 2010	3	Dr. Tricia Gates	October 8, 2010	3
Dr. Phyllis Stokely	September 27, 2010	3	Dr. Ann Douglas	October 12, 2010	3

* All names are pseudonyms.

Participant Profile's

Searching and reviewing literature pertaining to the location of African American women currently serving as public school superintendents was challenging because general demographic profiles were often embedded within data and statistics that required a considerable amount of time to locate. Therefore, it became necessary to request the specific demographic information from professional organizations such as American Association of School Administrators and more specifically the National Alliance of Black School Educators (NABSE). In order to review the specific demographics in regards to race and gender a formal letter of request was sent to the organizations specifying the reason and intended use of the information. Interestingly, the most current edition of demographic information available is still relatively old. I received the Sixth Edition of the Directory of African American Superintendents. According to the data received there were only 366 African Americans serving as public school superintendents across the United States and the Caribbean; this is out of the nationwide total of 14,559 superintendents.

Given the historical turmoil within the United States in regards to race and gender, it was surprising to learn that African American superintendents were concentrated in the southeastern regions of the country. According to NABSE (2010), 180 or 49% of the African American superintendents lead districts in the South and 50% or 184 of the districts are considered urban. Although, this information directed my search to the southeast I disaggregated the data to determine the number of African American women versus African American men and whether they were still serving, had

moved, or retired since the release of the documented numbers. As previously stated of the 366 total African American public school superintendents 137 women and 218 men were clearly identified. However, there were 11 superintendents' names that were unclear as to whether they were female or male. Given my financial and traveling constraints, I was reduced to approximately 25 African American women superintendents as participants within my research study. The next hurdle would be whether I would get eight of the 25 to agree to participate given the realities of time and responsibilities within their positions. Considering how small the pool was in the beginning, and then how small it had become given my constraints, the challenge became even more daunting.

It took a concentrated, determined, and concerted effort to obtain consent from my participants. I sent emails to mass groups and individually, trying to gain participants. It eventually took a general message sent on my behalf from a retired African American woman school superintendent enlisting the participation of fellow African American women, to motivate the target population to consider participation in my study. As a result of her request, several of the superintendents agreed to serve as participants.

Given the degree of confidentiality needed to protect my participants from being identified, I gave them each pseudonyms and purposely refrained from identifying states, universities, cities, districts served, and any other seemingly pertinent demographic information.

Thus, my research sample included eight African American women who have or are currently serving as public school superintendents. As stated above, all eight participants are from the southeastern region of the United States. All of the eight are originally from the southeast and received their undergraduate and graduate degrees from universities within the southeast region. Many of the educational leadership experiences of the eight participants prior to assuming the role of superintendent were located within the southeast regions; however, at least two have had experiences that have taken them to other regions of the United States as school administrators, teachers, or superintendents.

Most of the eight superintendents attended segregated schools until they reached high school. Five of them attended Historically Black Colleges and Universities for their undergraduate degrees and graduate degrees. They each have the distinguished title of being the "first African American woman public school superintendent" in their respective districts; along with the recipients of numerous awards and honors. One of the participants has the honor of being named National Superintendent of the Year by NABSE, while another has been a finalist as National Superintendent of the Year by AASA.

Table 2.

Demographic Profile of Research Participants

Participants	Age	HBCU	Undergraduate Degree Region of US	Graduate Degree Region of US	Superintendent Region of US	Currently Serving as Superintendent	Total Years as Superintendent to Date
Dr. Peters	52	Yes	Southeast	Southeast	Southeast	Rural	9
Dr. Cameron	54	Yes	Southeast	Southeast	Southeast	Rural	17
Dr. Agee	57	No	Southeast	Southeast	Southeast	Urban/Rural (retired)	4
Dr. Stokely	66	yes	Southeast	Southeast	Southeast	Rural (retired)	9
Dr. Reed	63	Yes	Southeast	Southeast	Southeast	Rural/Urban	14
Dr. Markworth	57	No	Southeast	Southeast	Southeast	Rural	1
Dr. Gates	56	Yes	Southeast	Southeast	Southeast and South-central	Urban/Rural	5
Dr. Douglas	68	Yes	Southeast	Southeast	Southeast	Southeast (retired)	5

Data Analysis

Once interviews were transcribed verbatim, I began the process of analysis. This involved reading through each transcription in its entirety, reflecting upon the general meaning of each one, and writing general notes of initial impressions. As Creswell (2009) explains, by first reading through each transcription I developed a "general sense" of the overall meaning. The transcribed interviews allowed me to gaze beyond the recorded words to begin identifying and comparing themes, patterns, and experiences. As these themes, patterns, and experiences emerged, they served as codes for later synthesizing. As stated in Creswell (2009):

> Coding is the process of organizing the material into chunks or segments of text before bringing meaning to information. It involves taking text data or pictures gathered during data collection, segmenting sentences (or paragraphs) or images into categories, and labeling those categories with a term, often a term based in the actual language of the participant (called an n vivo term). (p. 186)

Codes ranged from predetermined to emerging. Predetermined codes for this study included the challenges of race (r), gender (g), and social politics (sp); as well as the theoretical components related to Black Feminist Movement, Standpoint Theory, and Transformative Leadership. These codes began my qualitative codebook and as other codes emerged within the narratives, they were added.

Subjectivity

As an African American woman in leadership, I suspected that I might share in some of the experiences and perspectives brought to light through this study. My objective in conducting this research was to reflect upon how my experiences, values,

and perspectives may guide me to seek the public school superintendency; along with maintaining sustainability in a position that is highly sensitive to race, gender, and social politics. The worldviews of the participants in this study may help to determine the path of my career. The data findings of this study may answer questions that have gone unanswered by me and others who seek recruitment and retention to the public school superintendency.

The answers that I sought may be found within the reflections of my fieldnotes, analysis, methods, and my frame of mind (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). I acknowledge that my subjectivity comes with assumptions and preconceptions that are tied to race, gender, and social politics. Although, my specific positionality is not based upon the direct experience of segregation, integration, and the Civil Rights Era, it must be acknowledged that I may share the standpoints of the group because my grandparents and parents were products of the historical era shared by the women participants in this study. The only way to confront my assumptions and preconceptions is to compare and contrast them to detailed data gathered throughout the study.

The assumptions and preconceptions are a part of my subjectivity. According to Peshkin (1988), as researchers we each bring subjectivity to our research. Often our subjectivity is unconscious, but Peshkin, proposes that every researcher examine their own subjectivity. Although, I cannot shed my subjectivity, I can monitor "where self and subject are intertwined" (p. 20). In which case, I must be able to identify where I and the research may be joined. I must monitor myself for when the research "strikes a positive or negative chord," within me. I must be able to identify what Peshkin calls my "Ethnic-

Maintenance self" (p. 18). As an African American woman, I may very well approve of and share the same values as the participants in my research, but I also must be able to value the participants that may not share my worldview simply, because of the generational differences between us.

As the researcher, I not only wanted to define my own questions, but I also wished to, as Bogdan (2003) states, "Generate theory, description, or understanding" (p. 33). The knowledge that I sought was intended to generate discussion, insight, and a few possible solutions to a plight, which few may be willing to acknowledge as a concern, but many may know and understand as critical to the valuing, appreciation, and tolerance of different perspectives, opinions, ways of doing things and capabilities; despite race and gender. I simply wish my research to elucidate the "Freedom to Be: African American Women as Public School Superintendents."

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness required that I visit each interviewee personally in order to establish trust, get to know the interviewee, and check for distortions that may occur within the study. I had never met any of the women in my study therefore; I read about each of them through internet Google searches. I also presented to each of them a small North Carolina themed goodie basket as a small token of my appreciation for them consenting and taking time out of their schedules for me to interview them for three hours. I believe this gesture of appreciation helped to establish our relationship as participant and interviewer; as well as demonstrate my genuine appreciation for each of them consenting to be participants. I also invited each of the participants to my home

university as guest speakers of a leadership forum regarding their perspectives and knowledge about the superintendency. Although this forum will not have any impact on this particular study, the invitation on behalf of my home university infers our understanding and need to publicly give voice and open discourse to the appreciation, valuing, and tolerance of different perspectives and ways of leading: despite race, gender and/or social politics. I have sought to connect patterns and themes from my data collection in order to identify a truth within the study. All data collected was available for external audit, so that my process for gathering the data can be validated and the final product can be assessed for accuracy. In addition to all data collected being available for external audit, I sent each participant a hard copy of their transcribed interview and invited them to offer feedback on the accuracy of each transcription. Transcripts were mailed to each participant in order to maintain confidentiality.

The freedom to be an African American woman recruited and retained in the public school superintendency has historically been silenced. The voices of many African American women superintendents have been assigned to the voices of White women and African American men. Rarely are the voices of African American women superintendents revealed to solely address the issues and challenges of recruitment and retention faced by African American women to the public school superintendency. Neither, has credence or validation been given to the impact of race, gender, and social politics on the recruitment and retention process of African American women in the public school superintendency. The very voices that have been devalued and marginalized are the same voices that have transformed many school districts into towers

of light. Finally, the fact that I am an African American woman conducting this research, and that the participants in my research were African American women who have or are currently serving as public school superintendents, became my privilege and honor to meet and interview. I hope to bring about the opportunity for increased educational and cultural discourse as my participants share their experiences and wisdom specific to them because of the historical eras they have lived through – eras in which they experienced the impact of race, gender, and the social politics of recruitment and retention of African American women in the public school superintendency and “the freedom to be.”

CHAPTER IV

SUPERINTENDENT'S JOURNEYS- FINDINGS FROM PARTICIPANT NARRATIVES

> Prepare to be changed. Looking deeply at other people's lives will force you to look deeply at yourself. – Patton, M.Q. (2002, p. 35)

In this phenomenological narrative, I have examined the subjective knowledge of my participants through their recalled journeys to the public school superintendency. This examination required me "Being-In," as defined by the humanistic psychologist and phenomenologist Clark Moustakas (1995) to mean listening deeply with the intention of understanding the what and how it is (as cited in Patton, 2002). This chapter reveals the experiences, perceptions, depth of emotion, and thoughts of what happened to make each of them who they are as public school superintendents (Patton, 2002). By me "Being-In," the "what and how it is" of recruitment and retention for the African American women in this study, the data gathered will provide a better understanding of the common similarities and differences about race, gender, and social politics as applied to recruitment and retention of public school superintendents.

As previously stated, the first portion of the research was conducted in order to answer: What was the participant's journey to the superintendency? The following narratives shed light on the moral, ethical, and spiritual convictions that drove the women to be public school superintendents. I am awed and inspired by their personal journeys

and the similar messages of purpose, social responsibility and change, human potential, hope, promise and possibility, education, choices, community, authenticity, and critical reflection; themes conducive to transformative leaders. I describe the journeys of each of the eight participants, offering some analysis of their journeys after discussing the first four superintendents and additional analysis after the final four superintendents.

Journeys to the superintendency

Before delving into each participant's journey imagine arriving to seven district offices and one participant's home, waiting to be received by each superintendent. Upon entering their offices and home I knew I was in the presence of very powerful, intelligent, and "no non-sense" women. Immediately, I sensed they were all about the business of their respected school districts; and though three were retired they were still working with school districts and education. They each had allotted the three hour block of time that I had requested for the interviews and for the three hours they were now my conduit to the ways of "being" an African American woman public school superintendent.

Dr. Peters

Upon meeting Dr. Peters, I immediately sensed she was quiet, a listener and cautious. She was dressed in a white suit and sat behind her desk. She seemed to watch me carefully as I thanked her for her time and presented her with the North Carolina gift basket. It would be a challenge to get her to relax and freely talk about her experiences.

Dr. Peters grew up in as she describes, "A very small, close knit, predominantly black community; but a community that really valued the power of education." She says this is truly where her journey began. It was the high value placed upon education that

helped Dr. Peters to understand the "bridge between the have and have-not's and it's what you use in order to reach back into your community and help other people," she says. Dr. Peters shares that she is a second generation African American college family. She attended a one-hundred percent Black elementary school and approximately a ninety percent Black high school. The high school that Dr. Peters attended was not integrated until around 1971 or 1972, as she remembers. She says:

> I remember preparing for integration and I remember that the Whites came into our school and stayed there probably one week and left. And, I remember, I can remember thinking why is it that we can't all be educated together, what's the problem? My school is great and I love it here. And, I remember my high school principal was an African American female; a dynamic lady that really stressed the importance of education and made us all feel as if we could conquer the world and that it was our responsibility to go out and reach back in our community and help.

She says it was understood that this was what you were expected to do; after graduation. Dr. Peters graduated high school number one in her class and voted the most likely to succeed and as she says:

> All that other good stuff, was an added burden. I said, oh God, I gotta really go out there and really help. It wasn't about I've got to brilliant but is was about whatever skills God had given me I now had to you those skills to help other people and for me, educations was the mission, or the goal.

Once graduated from high school Dr. Peters attended a Historically Black College University (HBCU) with the intent of becoming a lawyer. She said because she loved history, becoming a lawyer would be the career that would allow her the opportunity to

help in society's struggles. Teaching was not her first choice because in her mind there were already a lot of teachers. Dr. Peters states:

> It just seemed like everywhere I turned, everywhere I went it was education, it wasn't you gotta be a teacher, it's just you're destined to be in education. You know, that's where your passion is, go do it. So, I said ok I'll go ahead, I'll go ahead and get the certification as a teacher while I work on the lawyer thing. So, when I graduated from college, I had every intention of going to law school but for some reason, every scholarship that I applied for, I didn't get not one of them.

As a result of being denied every law scholarship that she applied for, Dr. Peters says started to understand that maybe education was where she really needed be. Therefore, she applied to an educational master's program and received a fellowship from the university she subsequently earned her Master's degree. Although she was strongly advised to go into Educational Leadership, she still resisted. Dr. Peters says:

> I really focused on the history because I wanted to look at the people and their struggles and how they meet advances and how do they rise to power and how they utilize their power in order to help other people and that's what I was really interested in.

However, after taking one Educational Leadership class she says she fell in love with it; but still resisted because she was not ready to commit. So, she moved back home and accepted a position as a teacher. Dr. Peters was five years into teaching and loving it when she realized that maybe she was ready to seek a career in Educational Leadership. During her five years of teaching she says she closely observed her principal as a leader. She recalls her principal as a dynamic African American male. Dr. Peters says, "He was just wonderful. Maybe he saw something in me that I didn't see but he would always

kind of encourage me." As result of his encouragement she applied to a principal intern program offered through her school district and was accepted. Dr. Peters says just as she was adjusting to being a principal intern and learning how to be an administrator in one month she was promoted to assistant principal. The subsequent promotion came about because the school district believed Dr. Peters was ready to the do the job. The district had made the right call because Dr. Peters only remained in the role of assistant principal for approximately two years before being promoted in the middle of the school year as principal of her former high school. She says:

> So, I went into this broken school which was my school, where I graduated from where I was valedictorian, where my high school principal told me that this was the best school in the whole nation and that kids here were great and you just had these wonderful things going on when I was there. Well, when I went back, it wasn't that way. And that really I think was a defining moment for me in that who I am and what kind of chances am I willing to take. You know, don't just talk it really walk the walk.

After eight years of serving as principal and forging through difficult situations and issues, the district decided to merge her predominantly Black high school with the White high school in order be in compliance with the Justice Department regulations. Moreover, the school district decided that neither high school principal should serve as the principal of the newly integrated high school. This decision resulted in Dr. Peters being promoted to central office as the director of the Social Studies and Fine Arts departments. Dr. Peters says, "I hated the job. I could not stand it, but stayed with the job for about three months." After an agonizing three months Dr. Peters decided that in order to continue to grow professionally she would have to leave her town, her mom, and all that she knew

and loved. So, she applied for a Director of Administration in a school district three hours away from home. Once again, in about six months the school district recognized her talent and abilities as a leader and offered her the superintendent's position. She recalls:

> I started working as the Director of Administration in November and by April 1 I was the superintendent. I did not want to apply for the job. When they came to me and said you should be the superintendent I said I don't think I'm ready for it because really I'm just coming from the principalship. I don't have any experience, I'd already gotten my certification and I'd already finished my doctorate degree in the process of all this. When I was principal of the high school, I went back to school and got my doctorate. But, some of the board members convinced me to give it a try. We'll work with you, we know you're inexperienced, we'll work with you. So, I took on the job in April. I started in November the year before and by April I was a superintendent, so I was thinking I came from the principalship to the superintendency and it happened to me because I was never seeking the superintendency.

Dr. Peter's current superintendency in a rural district came about after several applications and interviews with other districts. She says that she interviews well, but she just may not get the job. This job was offered to her after the school board's first choice decided to decline the offer. She started the job in November (2001) and this makes her ninth year as superintendent in this district.

Dr. Peter's current position soon proved extremely challenging because she was the first African American superintendent and a woman. She says, the young man that should have, would have, gotten the job was also African American. There was a lot of resistance to me, the female. Ok, they didn't mind the male, but me the female, they did not want. I mean, really (they were) using the "N" word. I even got hate mail. I thought to myself why is there so much resistance, why is that, you know, you got the audacity to write me hate mail and write awful things about me in the paper and start a blog on me

for no reason. You don't even know me. You don't know what I can do. I prayed on the whole situation and then found peace because I believed this is where God meant for me to be. That is why I say this is a mission.

After the initial challenges of being accepted as an African American woman superintendent, Dr. Peters says that she believes that eighty percent of the people in her community respect her. Dr. Peters states, "I still have my ten percent that will hate me forever and there's nothing I can do about it. That's their problem; that is not mine." She shared the following:

> I was listening to a motivational tape in my car one morning on the way to work that said, so, you will have people that will come to you and say well you know I really didn't like you at first but now I like you. The tape said now so what does that add to my life by you telling me you like me. That's your problem. Not mine. So I got to learn that I don't take on other people's problems. You don't like me because of who I am or what I stand for, that is your problem. I've got a mission; I've got to do it.

It has been a total of twelve years thus far in the superintendency for Dr. Peters and despite the challenges and struggles, she is very proud of her work as an African American woman public school superintendent.

Dr. Cameron

If it had not of been for my Global Positioning Satellite (GPS) system I might not have found the Board of Education where Dr. Cameron and I met. As I pulled up into the parking lot I was not sure I was in the right place because the facility was clearly an old school building, which currently houses a preschool center. My uncertainty was such that I asked a delivery man if I was in the right place. While walking down the hall to the

administrative assistant's office I noticed bright colors and reading posters along the walls. I thought to myself that even though the building was apparently old, the colors and posters really livened up the building. The administrative assistant took me to what seemed to be a former library now used as a school board meeting room to wait for Dr. Cameron. I sat at a long table unsure of where Dr. Cameron might sit and I waited. Dr. Cameron entered the room smiling and ready for business. She sat at the end of the table diagonally across from me and leaned in as if we had known each other for a long time. Clearly, Dr. Cameron was the superintendent but as we sat and talked it was as if we were "sisters."

Dr. Cameron grew up in the state for which she is currently serving as superintendent in one of its rural counties. She describes her parents as hard working; her mother worked as a hotel maid and her father worked in a lumber mill. They had seven children, of which Dr. Cameron was the third child. And though her mother and father completed eighth and fourth grades respectively all of the children were expected to graduate from high school. Dr. Cameron says:

> I left high school without any thought of going to college. I worked as a waitress and a cook for approximately seven months. A friend of mine from high school was in college and she gave me an application to take the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). That friend now works for me. Prior to that time no one ever discussed college with me. I was accepted to college but did not have adequate funding. I was extremely hurt because I felt my parents should have given me the money. I called my Aunt that lived in New York and told her my dilemma. Several hours later, I was on a Greyhound bus to Manhattan, New York. When I left home that day, I knew that I would never live there again. I worked in a factory from January 1974 to May 1974. I returned to the state to attend college during the summer of 1974. I was able to get Basic Education Opportunity Grants and student loans to finish college.

Dr. Cameron stated that her mission in life was to "Fix all the ills. I was going to fix the problems so that children like myself would be guided and directed to a path as to what do with your life upon leaving high school." This mission put Dr. Cameron on a path to become a guidance counselor. After preparing to graduate in three and half years as opposed to four, Dr. Cameron was advised to work towards a minor in education. Being obedient afforded Dr. Cameron a degree in counseling and the minor in education. However, Dr. Cameron has never served as a guidance counselor. Upon graduating from a HBCU Dr. Cameron was offered a teaching position as a Chapter One Reading teacher. During her eight year tenure at the school she was encouraged by her principal "To get some additional education because I think you've got the making of being a principal." Once again, being obedient, Dr. Cameron received her Master's in education; never ever considering a doctorate and pursuing the role of a principal. Although it was not in her realm of thinking, her principal had been assigning her leadership roles along the way and pushing her towards getting certified in school administration. As time progressed, she became the first Black assistant principal of a large school where it was obvious to her that the White principal would have chosen her best friend to serve as assistant principal, but the superintendent saw differently. Dr. Cameron served as an assistant principal for three years, and then three years as a principal before being recommended by the superintendent to be hired as assistant superintendent of instruction. After one year of serving as an assistant superintendent, the opportunity for superintendent of the very district for which she worked to open up. Dr. Cameron says that after the school board received notification about the opening, a White man approached her "out of the

blue" and commented that he knew she was thinking about applying for the position. He also wanted to share that there was also another district seeking a superintendent. She states:

> I thought to myself oh my goodness this man's afraid that I'm going to apply for the job cause Manning had never had a Black superintendent and you know what, sometimes you work better when you are angry. I then thought, well I'm gonna show you.

The total number of applicants for the position was 28 with eight chosen by an outside firm. Once it was apparent that the nine member board was going to vote along racial lines one White board member tried to change the majority vote to a super majority vote; so, that the votes could be counted as six to three instead, of five to four. Dr. Cameron, who was ultimately hired, says, "I had no idea that it would be so weird, but I gave them seven good years as superintendent." Dr. Cameron is currently in year 17 as a public school superintendent.

Dr. Cameron describes her journey to the superintendency as one of hard work and passion. She says that she tries to surround herself with people who are supportive and willing to help others; "good people are essential to the success of superintendents." In many instances it is because of the support and willingness of others to help that African American women become superintendents. Dr. Cameron then cautiously reveals a truth that is often hurtful but understood by many Black women, which she referred to as the "colored girl's syndrome." She then defines the syndrome as the reluctance or unwillingness to reach out and support other Black women. Dr. Cameron says, "I can't understand why if a Black female has the makings of an administrator that I would (not)

do anything I could to support them." Although credentials and credibility are key factors in securing the job as a superintendent, "We as Black females can be our worst enemies in terms of supporting each other and helping each other." Another interesting component of the "colored girls syndrome" according to Dr. Cameron is the seemingly lack of respect for Black women serving as superintendents by other Black women seeking the position. Dr. Cameron stated:

> White people that I've worked with have been more inclined to respect the position whether they respect you or not, and they'll do what you ask of them because it comes with respecting the position. This is crazy but a lot of times the Black females won't respect your position and it sounds crazy saying that, but believe me I know what I'm talking about okay? I have seen it all and I think Black females are the hardest working group of anybody that I've seen and we get less recognition and support. Those of us who really understand the big picture do the job well, and (others) say 'Well I've got my credentials and I am being overlooked'; it's just crazy to me.

The passion of Dr. Cameron is evident as she acknowledges that no matter what credentials or credibility you bring to the job, many African American women will not get the job if a door is not opened. She says African American women serving in the superintendency must remember, "That as we ascend through the ranks we have done so because someone afforded us an opportunity to stand on their shoulders." Her statement is even more striking because she is the first African American female superintendent in her state since the Reconstruction of the 19th century. In Dr. Cameron's state there are approximately less than ten Black females serving as superintendents. She is frequently referred to as the "historic lady, in a historic district." Both Dr. Peters and Dr. Cameron's school districts are steeped in the racial and political history of discrimination. Given this

fact Dr. Cameron says, “We’re (African American women) a relatively new breed in our state and the rest is history.”

Dr. Agee

Dr. Agee met me in her office at the university where she currently works on large money grants for the school of education. As I walked in she invited me to sit at the table outside of her desk and then apologized for the loud air conditioner unit that blew right above the table. Dr. Cameron was dressed in a gray skirt suit that looked tailored to fit her frame. Although retired from the superintendency she did not look of retirement age and she certainly did not act the part. She appeared extremely energetic and ready to tackle the world.

Dr. Agee grew up in the segregated south with her backdoor neighbors serving as adoptive parents. She explains that her neighbors where childless and that they understood that it was hard for her mother who was a single parent to raise a child and willingly opened their home and hearts to her. They too were poor economically but rich in faith. Although, Dr. Agee speaks of adoptive parents, she really, only spoke in regards to her adoptive mother. Dr. Agree recalls how her relationship was developed with her adoptive mother:

> I probably spent more time over there than I did at home and eventually just started being there all the time and I started by going to Sunday school and church with her and then it was I’d spend the weekends and then it was well you might as well just stay the week and so it ended up my going home on the weekends and staying with my adoptive mother during the week. It was really good for me though because she was very talented in a lot of ways. She was a master seamstress and could make anything. She made drapes, she upholstered furniture she could make slip covers and she made everything I wore; I mean she could make anything. I lived with her and then she lived with me until she died at 89.

This relationship would serve to provide a lifetime of love and support for Dr. Agee and help to establish a strong foundation of moral and ethical character. Dr. Agee says:

> I've always kind of felt that where you end up is kind of dependent upon where you want to go and understanding where you came from, knowing how that was, and realizing that it does shape you to a degree.

She credits her adoptive parent with providing her the opportunities to participate in Easter and Christmas pageants, and oratorical contests offered through the church. For Dr. Agee and many of her friends it was the church that kept them from getting off track and as Dr. Agee says "St. John church was probably the thing grounded us and formed who we are." It helped them to form positive identities while growing up in a rural county in the southeast during segregation. It would be in 1968, during her senior year of high school that integration would be enacted. Prior to senior year every day of her junior year was filled with daily bomb threats; as students were trying to decide whether to continue to attend the all Black high school or move to the White high school. Dr. Agee says, "It was just really interesting." Despite the changes going on, Dr. Agee enjoyed high school, and describes herself as having more common sense than book sense. She says:

> I am a firm believer that common sense will take you further any day cause I know a lot of people who have a lot of and very high IQ's who couldn't think their way out of a box.

Dr. Agee also recalls the first year of integration as "a real eye opener. We were very much on foreign soil and we were treated that way for the most part." During her first

meeting with the counselor who was white, Dr. Agee was told to work towards attending a community college. Once the Black counselor on faculty heard what Dr. Agee had been told, the Black counselor told Dr. Agee, "That is not going to happen to you." From that point on, this counselor started providing a roadmap for Dr. Agee to follow, so that she could apply to any university and gain acceptance. The roadmap included taking the Scholastic Assessment Test, commonly referred to then as the SAT, applying for financial aid, and having a planned major in Business Education. The Black counselor even drove Dr. Agee to the southeastern university that she would be attending. After the first business course and the arrival of the Wall Street Journal daily at her dorm door, Dr. Agee decided business was not where her interest rested. Therefore, she changed her major to Speech Pathology. Once graduated, Dr. Agee was hired as a Speech Pathologist of a school district and remained in the position for ten years. She says:

> About the year three, the principal at one of the schools that I served asked me to apply for a central office position; it was a title one position (for serving high poverty schools). I'm thinking I haven't even been here long enough to figure out what I'm doing but you know the thought of that was just WOW you know somebody thinks I can do something like that, I hadn't really thought about it.

Although she did not apply for the position, the thought provoked her to return graduate school and work towards a Master's in Supervision, at which point she was advised to seek certification in School Administration. Dr. Agee became an assistant principal at the school where she was assigned as Speech Pathologist. She had been in that position for six years when one of her former professors called her to say she needed to apply for a principal's position at an elementary school with about 250 students. Within two years

of her arrival to the school her population increased to about 500 students and approximately half came from a housing project in the city. Dr. Agee remained in the position for five and a half years before being approached about taking a high school principal position. Not one to say no, she accepted the position and became principal of 1800 students. Dr. Agee states:

> I learned so much about leadership I that in the role and I tell people all the time I learned all I know pretty much all I know about leadership I learned when I was at the high school. It was like running a city because you had everything. I mean it really was like running a city.

During her four-year tenure at the high school, Dr. Agee started working on her doctorate degree. Upon leaving the high school she then went on to an associate superintendent's position at the central office. It was not that getting the doctorate was means to becoming a superintendent for Dr. Agee, but it was more about the success of achieving the doctorate degree. Dr. Agee says, "Becoming a superintendent was not something she had to do or die because the thing I really wanted to do was get my doctorate and I had done that so the superintendency was kind of icing on the cake for me." Once again fate lent a hand and opened a door to the superintendency. Dr. Agee applied, was hired, and was superintendent of a 17-school district in the southeastern United States for five years.

For Dr. Agee location of the job was critical because she had two children that she raised as a single parent with devoted help from her adoptive mother until her death prior to Dr. Agee applying and being hired as superintendent. The value of family time was important and Dr. Agee says she made sure to be home for dinner most nights to share the meal and talk with her children before returning to work, which she regarded as a

twenty-four hours and seven days a week position. It was essential for Dr. Agee to be near her children; particularly the oldest child who was an exceptional child and her youngest who had just started the second grade. Work was just five minutes away so it was very conducive to Dr. Agee fulfilling her motherly responsibilities.

After five years serving as a public school superintendent, Dr. Agee says school boards in general change and hers was no exception. The members of the school board who hired her had all been replaced with new members and so did the school board's focus. Dr. Agee says:

> It was very evident to me that the board that brought me in and the second board that I had was very different you know the board that brought me in had some very specific things they wanted me to do and we worked really well together. I worked pretty well with the second board that I had but they wanted to do my job. They wanted to pull the school district in a direction that I felt wasn't appropriate. It got to the point that it was more and more difficult for me to do my job, so I decided to retire. Although, I still had a couple years left on my contract I thought, 'You know the one thing you always wanted to do is go on your own terms,' and that's exactly what I did.

Since retiring from the public school superintendency Dr. Agee has moved back to her home and to her second husband of ten years. She currently works at a state university on developing a virtual Early College High School and she recently worked as a principal investigator for a nine million dollar grant. During the time that she was superintendent she and her second husband lived in two different cities; approximately three hours away from each other. Life is good for Dr. Agee as her youngest son has recently gotten married and her oldest child is happily living in a group home. Dr. Agee says, "It's amazing how things work out."

Dr. Stokely

Dr. Stokely did not speak of her family history per se, but she did share that her stepfather was the first Black assistant superintendent in a southeastern county the state and that her mother had been supportive of all her endeavors. As I had asked the same question regarding the journey to the superintendency to previous superintendents, each started with talking about their childhood and parents. However, Dr. Stokely did not appear willing to divulge that part of her life and immediately focused on when she was in high school as the beginning of her journey.

Dr. Stokely begins by saying, "Actually as a young student becoming a principal and not to mention a superintendent was nowhere in my dreams." She wanted to be a mathematics teacher. After completing high school in the central part of a southeastern, Dr. Stokely attended a HBCU and majored in mathematics and science. Upon graduation she was the only female out of five graduates to earn a degree in mathematics and science. She also was the only female of any minority in her graduating class. Dr. Stokely states:

> I guess women have always been a minority in numbers of certain careers and it was true with mathematics. You can see how it's been sort of a trend along the way for women in education (leadership) as in other careers.

Dr. Stokely began her career in an all-white high school in the southeast after initially being considered for a teaching position at a segregated high school in the region. During her interview the principal asked if she would have a problem teaching at a White high school where she would be the only African American and her response was, "No, I am

just going to teach kids, no matter where I go." As result, Dr. Stokely worked as the only African American teacher at the high school for two years serving as chair of the math department. During the second year of teaching at the predominantly White high school the decision was made to make the Black high school a ninth grade center and to integrate the predominantly White high school where Dr. Stokely taught. This move required an assistant principal be hired at the high school, which opened the door for Dr. Stokely. Dr. Stokely was asked to work half a day a as assistant principal and the other half of her day as teacher. The dual role of teacher and assistant principal lasted for half a school year before she was asked by her superintendent who was a White male to serve as a guidance counselor in the local predominantly White high school. The superintendent also encouraged her to get her Master's in Guidance and Counseling. Dr. Stokely remained as a guidance counselor for nine years before being promoted, without applying to a central office secondary supervisory position. Once again, she found herself seeking an advanced degree in curriculum and instruction and school administration.

Dr. Stokely says that after getting the dual degree she was through with school, but through friendships established while completing the dual degree with Blacks and Whites she was encouraged to apply to the doctoral program. Upon completing the degree Dr. Stokely was moved from the central office into a principal's position at an elementary school. The move might have been viewed as a demotion but Dr. Stokely saw it was an opportunity to learn the role of principal. She had previously served in many roles but the principal's role was a new learning experience and she treated as such. Once

the superintendency came open in the district she was serving as principal she was encouraged to apply. Dr. Stokely then served as a public school superintendent in that district for nine years.

Early Analysis of the Journeys to the Superintendency

In considering the first four journeys of my participants there are a few clear and recurring themes that run through each of their stories. The first theme common to the first four superintendents is the Civil Rights Era and segregation in the south. Drs. Peters, Cameron, and Agee clearly spoke to growing up poor in the segregated south and the expectation that they each would finish high school and go to college; and although, Dr. Stokely did not come outright and say she grew up in segregated south, it can be reasonably assumed that she did and that she also was raised with the same expectations. Many might argue that the Civil Rights Era had little to do with African American parents placing a high value on education, but I would argue that the Civil Rights Era had everything to do with African American parents expecting their children to complete high school and attend college. African American parents often wanted more for their children because many had been denied an equal and equitable education under the period desegregation. Yes, for many parents to expect their children to complete high school and attend college is a given, but for African American parents during this period in history, education for Black children in the south was more than an expectation it also was a well fought after privilege.

As I listened and read their responses it seems that each of them were brought up in homes that held faith and perseverance as leading moral characteristics. The lessons of

faith and perseverance as demonstrated by their mothers and fathers would ultimately be the lessons and characteristics that would allow each of the women to withstand the biases, prejudices, and discrimination experienced based upon their gender and race. They each described to some extent leaving their safe and secure segregated schools and communities in order to attend integrated school systems and a world less than receptive to the notion of integration. The impact of *Brown v. Board of Education* would become another common theme shared and expressed by the superintendents as they described their experiences with integration.

Although, none of the women spoke in regards to the role of Black feminism within their lives, I would have to say that they each can be seen as pioneers who fought to move up the ladder of leadership to obtain the highest point of service in the public school system; the superintendency. Each of their struggles, resistance to the status quo and white male privilege seem to echo the efforts of the Black women leaders within Black Feminism. So, though they did not speak of Black feminism directly; their actions model it.

The path to serving in an educational leadership role for these four women was not intentional. They did not self-recruit themselves for the positions of leadership for which they served. It is that fate and/or the self-fulfilling prophecy lent a hand in directing their paths towards the ultimate leadership position in the public schools. I say fate and/or self-fulfilling because it was the vision of principals or professors who saw within each of them leadership qualities and then acted as advocates to help develop or plant the seed of leadership in each of the participants.

Interestingly, it seems that none of the participants had true mentors but rather had as previously mentioned advocates that provided opportunities and planted seeds in regards to leadership, but none of the four appear to have had a trusted confidant who not only informed them of positions but also provided guidance as to how to get the position and keep it. In all four cases it seems that once each woman went off to college it was fate and the advocacy of others that determined their paths.

As the participants discussed their entry into the superintendency, their journeys seem to support the research in that as with most African American women getting to the top of any organization requires working up the ladder and the journeys of each woman clearly showed how they moved from one position to another. As they each journeyed up, there does not appear to be a deliberate act by any of the women to become superintendents, but rather the insights of the school districts recognizing the leadership talents of the women, that doors were opened for each woman to apply for the vacancies. These acts of fate as I would like to refer to them, actually become the means of recruitment for the first four African American women superintendents.
Discussion will continue regarding Journeys to the Superintendency for the final four superintendents that were interviewed, and once, I have shared the journeys of the last four superintendents; I will again do an early analysis of just their journeys.

Journeys to the Superintendency Continued

Dr. Reed

Finding Dr. Reed was challenging because she was located in a little rural community seemingly hidden in Georgia. Once again, my GPS had me waiting in the

parking lot of central office for our appointed meeting. The central office appeared to be a renovated school building. Upon being invited into Dr. Reed's office, she offered me coffee and we sat a round table in the middle of her office to talk. Interestingly, Dr. Reed did not begin her journey by discussing her family or personal history, but rather she jumped right into discussing how she became a superintendent.

Dr. Reed describes herself as an introvert; so much so, that she believed she should work in a laboratory as a scientist. After graduating from high school, Dr. Reed met a wonderful teacher and decided that through teaching she could positively impact the lives of children. Dr. Reed began her teaching career as the only Black in a Dutch Reform Community. While in Chicago, Dr. Reed not only served as a teacher but also as a central office administrator over 223 of the lowest or the poorest elementary schools out of a total 482 elementary schools in Chicago and pursued her doctorate. During her pursuit of the doctorate she met a White gentleman who would serve as her professional mentor; still to this day. It was her mentor who said that she needed to become a principal, despite having already served as administrator at the central office level. As the central office administrator over 223 elementary schools Dr. Reed states:

> They were elementary schools and you know every once in a while you run into a little bit (of) resentment when you're talking to area principals, and I realized that they probably resented the fact that I had never been a school administrator and here I was coming into the schools to recommend things that they should do to improve student achievement.

While at central office Dr. Reed wrote a five year proposal that was used to explain how a desegregation decree from the federal government worth 83 million dollars would be

used in the schools to increase student achievement. As a result of writing the proposal she was asked by the superintendent to direct the program in the schools. Dr. Reed used this opportunity to request placement at one of the schools used in the proposal as principal. Although the superintendent was surprised by the request he honored it and assigned her to a high school where she remained for five years. Once again, her mentor called and said, “You have got to get out of that high school. It is time for you to move on and do something else.” Her mentor had set her up to work for the Center of Creative Leadership, where she stayed a year. Dr. Reed found herself training corporate groups, private and public groups, and school groups who were sometimes resistant to her presence and leadership. She says:

> Even in 1993 I think the worst groups were educators who were all white males. It was like they weren’t listening to the quality of what I had to discuss or the context, but rather they were all into the fact that they had never seen a Black woman high school principal or that they hadn’t seen a Black woman, and I don’t know really what they were looking for, but what I did know was that I couldn’t stay and work through that.

The experience left her wondering why her mentor would recommend she take such a position and in talking with him as she was preparing to leave the position she asked him why and then went on to answer the question herself. Her conversation with her mentor was as follows:

> Well, I know why you brought me down here now and he said why? I said because you know I was an outstanding high school principal in basically a Black or minority school district and I said its one thing to be that. You brought me down here so I could learn how to work with White people and learn how to work with the White male’s point of view and he looked at me and he said I knew you were a smart girl. I said I hope I haven’t disappointed you. It’s been a real

> experience for me but I think I want to get back to the school thing. He said I think that's a good idea, but you now have a wider choice about the school thing and your horizon is much broader.

After her conversation with her mentor, Dr. Reed told him she would like to become a superintendent. Despite having her doctorate, her mentor recommended she attend a superintendent's program. Dr. Reed then applied to a program called Superintendent's Prepared. The program offered out of Boston, MA and was designed to produce over a five year span a total of 100 urban superintendents. Dr. Reed was accepted into the second cohort of 30 for the program. The program attracted the likes of two federal judges who considered becoming superintendents and even a Central Intelligence Agent. Dr. Reed says:

> In the midst of being with people who were educators there were the nontraditional people too who were looking for others who had leadership abilities but not necessarily an educational background, such as one who became an Under Secretary of Education.

So, it goes without saying that this was a prestigious group to be trained with and as a result it would be two years later that Dr. Reed would assume her first position as a public school superintendent in an upper mid-western state. Currently, Dr. Reed has worked as a public school superintendent for 14 years. Many school boards use recruiters (private personnel search firms) to locate potential candidates for the superintendency position and it was a recruiter who contacted Dr. Reed about the vacancy, which would ultimately be her first superintendency. Dr. Reed was initially hesitant to apply for the position because of the state's location in the upper Midwest

region of the country. After voicing her hesitancy with her African American female friend who had also earned her doctorate and had been an assistant superintendent in the same region, and who had since moved on to become a superintendent in another state in the Midwest, she decided to pursue the position. Dr. Reed friend then began to prepare her for the interview process. The most important question for Dr. Reed would be, "Why do you want to come to here?" As an African American woman applying to a predominantly white district the answer Dr. Reed gave would be critical to whether she was considered for the position. One would think that responding with a general answer would be sufficient but Dr. Reed was instructed by her friend to make her answer more personal. Dr. Reed recalls their conversation as:

> The biggest question they're going to ask you is why do you want to come to the upper Midwest and I want you to understand that's the most important question you have to answer because it's not about what you know and what you're going to do for them. It's really going to be about why you want to go to the upper Midwest.

Dr. Reed says that she just laughed at her friend and then replied that she "really didn't know why." Immediately she was told that her response would not be good enough, in which case Dr. Reed replied, "I'm a fisher person. I love to fish." Dr. Reed's friend was surprised by the answer but said it was authentic and passionate. Dr. Reed describes her interview:

> It was a seven hour drive to the interview upon which I ended up having breakfast, lunch, and dinner because the board wanted to interview me further—not as a board but in small groups. The next week I get a call saying that I am one of four finalist and they want me to drive seven hours again for a three day visit. The first day was to visit schools, the second day to meet with business people

> from the community, and the third day to meet with the board again. By now I've been on the website to find out something about it and called my friend to get more information. The faces of the community were Jewish and White. I didn't see any colored church people. On the third day the board asked me to ask any questions that I might have. So, when I sat down with them I asked if there was a problem with me being a single woman and they replied no; why should that matter? 'You know our mayor is single and she's living with somebody.' I said, 'Ok.' I then said, "but I do have a boyfriend and he'll probably come and visit me will that be a problem?' Once again they replied that it would not be a problem. Then the conversation shifted to money of which I was honest and said that I'm sure we can negotiate something that will be fair to the both of us, including funds for moving expenses. The next thirty minutes consisted of them asking me questions and as my friend said the question of why did I want to come to the upper Midwest was asked. I said well this is a very progressive school district blah, blah, blah I mean and then I said because of fishing. They said what? I said 'you have 10,000 lakes here. I'm going to have a great time going from lake to lake to fish and see what I catch.' They all laughed and you know I thanked them very much for the interview.

The school board attorney called Dr. Reed a week later on a Sunday morning offering her the position. Once the news came out that Dr. Reed had been named superintendent she received numerous calls of congratulations. One caller asked, "Doesn't it feel good to have that kind of affirmation?" She says, "You can't understand what it feels like to have that kind of affirmation until it happens to you." In order to learn her new school district before officially starting the position Dr. Reed flew in and out three times. Each time she learned something different and then if finally hit, "this is real." The sudden realization caused Dr. Reed to have an anxiety attack and to be sick on the flight back home. Dr. Reed describes her anxiety:

> All of sudden it just hit me this is real you know. I'm not going to be living here anymore. I'm going to be living there and then I went to the cleaners to get my clothes 'cause it was all over the front page of the newspaper in my hometown. I walked into the cleaners and the lady looked at me and said you know I'm just so proud of you. You're just an amazingly courageous woman. I said what? She said

> you know you're almost 50 years old. I said how do you know that? Well it was in the newspaper. You were 49 or 48 or something. I said they put my age in the newspaper. She said you haven't read it. I said nah, I didn't read that stuff and she said and to think that you're just going to pick up and move your life to whole different place at your age. And I said well you know that's what life is about; fun, experiences, new things. Thank you very much. Went home and said damn look at what I've done.

It turns out that the superintendency in the upper Midwest would last for six and half years. Dr. Reed described it as" one of the best superintendencies known." Her friends had told her she was living in a kind of utopia. However, there were many challenges such as the one she recalls here:

> I'm in this little school district, I had a little boy who hung himself because his parents were getting a divorce and this was on a Saturday and you know the little league coach goes over to pick him up and so who do they call first? They call the superintendent and then they call the church people and so forth, but my job is to call my crisis intervention team and get the counselors together for parents and students who are affected by this and though it was one school out of six in the district it affected everybody. And I was being measured by how fast I got this done and being compared to the previous White male superintendent who did not live in the town but attended the same rotary as I was in. After this incidence he invited me to breakfast and straight out asked me why I was there in that little upper mid-western town. He said you are a single woman, why would you come here? And I found myself getting my hackles up a little bit but also recognizing I have to be gracious, but you know they would not as a man that; so I replied, why shouldn't I be here? The community reached out to me and besides I like to fish. Well, this man had been the superintendent for 11 years and he had a lot of deep friendships on the staff and so forth, and I knew that he knew everything I was doing. So, I slowly worked and it took three years to get rid of all of his spies; of which I even had to buy out and the board supported me.

Dr. Reed replaced the assistant superintendent that she had to buy out with a White male who had been a finalist with her for the position. She said, "He knew the town and I

didn't; and he knew how to be loyal which he did. So it worked out well." Dr. Reed goes on to say:

> African American woman in a White situation they (Whites) always look to see who you're going to hire and when I didn't hire any Blacks they felt better. You could almost hear a collective sigh. But then I hired a Black woman, which scared everybody, but I was tired of doing this work without any Black you know. Just walking into work every day and not seeing anybody that looked like you except some of the children and there weren't many of them really got old. However, bringing her in required strategic thinking because they (the Whites) just kind of like went crazy cause, oh here it comes kind of thing, but she had been working with Whites and she was from the upper mid-west. So, I knew and she knew how they would act.

As a matter of fact, according to Dr. Reed there was only one Black teacher in the whole school district and when they met the teacher told Dr. Reed she needed to hire some Black teachers because she would be retiring in about two years. So, Dr. Reed started recruiting but quickly found out that although the university had been granting full scholarships to minority students and they were in no hurry to leave or graduate; thus getting advanced degrees and seeking employment anywhere they so desired; just not her mid-western town. Recruitment was remained a challenge.

During the last three years of the six years there Dr. Reed divided her time by sharing in the care-giving of her mother who lived in the southeast. Dr. Reed says, the business of the school district went on and they never charged her absences against her sick leave. Many of her friends said she was working in utopia and she agreed; but by the sixth year in the district Dr. Reed decided that it was time for a change. It was time for a change to a bigger school district with children who looked like her. Once she left the

position there, she moved on to assume another superintendency position back in the Southeast.

Dr. Markworth

Dr. Markworth is eldest of six and the first within her family to pursue a four-year degree. Prior to considering a degree in education, Dr. Markworth aspired to be a classical singer. Her talent for singing was nurtured through voice lessons provided at a church and then more formally. While developing her voice Dr. Markworth started tutoring at a youth correction center. It was during this time that she started to realize that she also had a gift for teaching. The youth at the correction center needed much instruction in reading and at the time, Dr. Markworth did not have her certification in reading. So, she returned to school, graduated, and began her career in teaching in a White rural school community. As a teacher, Dr. Markworth found parents requesting her as their child's teacher and volunteers wanting to serve in her room because of the classroom environment. Even the White male principal wanted to know what she was doing to the parents for there to be so many requests for her as a teacher. Her response was, "Sir, I just teach and when you teach you do it with love." She also began to notice that even though she was hired as a teacher when issues and problems appeared in the school fellow teachers would come to her for advice and ask her to share the collective thoughts and concerns with the principal. She says that even though she might be "shot down" she would still stand her ground and share.

Dr. Markworth was viewed by administration as someone who would say what she thought and mean what she said. Upon the eleventh year of teaching, the White male

superintendent of her school district went to her and said, “We had you pegged wrong, you really are a talented young lady and we need you to get your degree in administration.” Initially, Dr. Markworth said no to the suggestion because she believed she would have more impact with the children by continuing as their teacher. She was then asked to consider becoming a truancy officer and once again she declined. Her superintendent, once again, stated that he thought she should get her administrator’s license. So she asked what she needed to do and found out that she needed to only take the licensure assessment because she already had a Master’s degree. Dr. Markworth says:

> Now you know typically for African-Americans that’s the weapon that’s used to keep us from moving further, but when you have learned and you become educated and understand knowledge is power you just do what you know.

After successfully passing the licensure assessment it also became apparent that positions for African Americans in lead administrative positions were “far and few between.” In the district where Dr. Markworth taught, she saw little advancement for African Americans other than what she refers to as the “conscious appointment,” referring to the symbolic placement of an African-African male as a principal. Dr. Markworth states the African American male placement was to convince the community that the school district did not promote discrimination practices in hiring. She also says that such conscious appointments were more about whether the individual was “worthy” as opposed to being qualified. As a result of this understanding and being told directly that she would never get an opportunity to serve as an administrator in the district, Dr. Markworth applied for an assistant principal’s position in a rural district with about 2200 students. The school

had never had a female assistant principal, but they had had a Black male assistant principal. Dr. Markworth was hired as an assistant principal and found that she was both appreciated and despised because her values and expectations for teaching and the children were different from the community. Because she was so strong in curriculum and instruction and her dissertation was on discipline and anger management, her approach to the teaching methods and strategies were aggressive. She says, "I rocked the boat but got the teachers working." As a result of her high expectations, she was told by her White male principal the following, "You know your gifts are just too much for this building." Dr. Markworth says, "I knew what it was, they didn't want me there anymore because I was holding those folks to the wire." As a result of all of this, the principal told the superintendent that Dr. Markworth was ready for a principal's position, and so she was hired as principal of a rural school that the district had considered closing. This appointment by the superintendent angered many because it appeared that Dr. Markworth had not followed the district's informal pecking order and she was perceived as being given preferential treatment. Although, she had been serving as an assistant principal, past recommendations for principal were made based upon seniority; as opposed to performance. However, the superintendent defended and maintained his decision for the appointment.

In a matter of three years Dr. Markworth turned the troubled school's achievement around and instead of people wanting to close the school down the State Department of Instruction started sending staff to the school to meet with Dr. Markworth and her faculty to discuss the growth and achievement of the school. Despite the success

of the school it was eventually closed and replaced with a new school. Dr. Markworth was then appointed to the director of an alternative school. Being placed at an alternative school might have been viewed by some as punishment, but for Dr. Markworth it was an opportunity to help the children at that particular school. She demanded better education for the children there, saying, "If you're going to give children a different setting they need more services, not less."

Overall, Dr. Markworth was seen and known for being a "powerhouse," because she empowered the parents, students, and teachers; thus also making her a political threat within the community and to the Board of Education. As result she suggested that some powerful district leaders felt she needed to be silenced and she consequently was dismissed as the director of the alternative school. The dismissal was devastating to Dr. Markworth, and she recalls after graciously receiving the dismissal letter she closed and locked her office door. She explained, "I got on my knees and I cried like a baby and asked God why was He doing this to me, when I had given my all?" She says in that moment and time she could not understand why she was being punished, and then she says:

> The Holy Spirit – this is the truth – came upon me and told me to dry my tears. A calmness that I can't explain came about me that nobody could understand because God had promised me something else was better coming but I couldn't see it at that time, and would have to accept the dismissal.

In the middle of all this a new superintendent had been named; a female. The new superintendent understood that Dr. Markworth had gotten herself into a political mess and that the only thing way to help her was to allow her to take her accumulated sick and

annual leave, go home, and pursue other job avenues. Lastly, the new superintendent said, "It's never over you, remember that." In order to re-establish herself as a leader after being "black-balled" by members of her former school district Dr. Markworth would go on to work as a substitute teacher, assistant principal, principal, and an associate superintendent for a number of years before being named a superintendent in 2010 with a four year contract a rural school district.

Dr. Gates

Dr. Gates began our interview explaining, "My journey to the superintendency started when I was a small child and it started with my mother." She was raised in a family with both parents and four other siblings. Neither of her parents graduated from high school but they instilled the value of a good education. She says one of her mother's greatest dreams was that her children would accomplish more than she accomplished and she always said to them, "I didn't have a chance to get a good education but I want you to." This was the message that Dr. Gates and other siblings received throughout their childhood and education as a youth in rural-segregated communities during the late 1950s. Dr. Gates says:

> When I went to school I felt as if every teacher that I encountered had the same attitude that my mother had; that they believed in me and that they wanted me to succeed. So, I very quickly warmed up to my teachers and I just assumed they knew my mother and they felt the same way and I was going to succeed. So, school became a place in which I could really soar and I do those things my mother believed I could do.

Ethnicity and disparity were never discussed according to Dr. Gates because her mother's father was Caucasian and her mother was as she states, "More Indian than Black bat a

mixture of the two." Her father was a Native American; thus giving Dr. Gates a multi-ethnic background. Therefore, she did not grow up understanding that there was a difference between Blacks and Whites. Dr. Gates says it was not until the 1960s when the Civil Rights Movement started that she even began to notice and realize racial conflicts existed within society. She attributes this to and states, "The encouragement had already been instilled in us and a true sense of worth had been instilled; so that took us through that period and gave us a true identity during that period." Once in the integrated high school Dr. Gates found the African American teachers very encouraging, but the Caucasian guidance counselors were not. She says:

> I'm not sure of the motivation but in their minds what African American females should do was to be secretaries or something of that nature and they clearly told me that that was what I needed to do; secretarial work.

Once told that she should become a secretary Dr. Gates says she became very stubborn and refused to take a typing class. As a result of taking a stand Dr. Gates still does not know the keyboard and says that it is "Unfortunate, but I was determined not to go that route." It would be through a an active local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) that Dr. Gates would gain direction, encouragement, and knowledge about college opportunities. Although her parents knew colleges existed they did not know how to navigate the system or how to seek financial assistance. The NAACP provided help to Dr. Gates and others on the applications, grants, and scholarships processes. Dr. Gates was awarded a teacher scholarship and decided her major had to be special education. The decision to major in special education did not

come lightly, but was the result of a love and friendship for her childhood neighbor who was mentally handicapped and hydrocephalic. Dr. Gates says she cried all the way to college, which was approximately 106 miles away because leaving home and leaving her parents behind was not something she had really prepared for.

After graduating with her degree in special education Dr. Gates had no desire to teach because the field of education was being as she says, “bashed.” So, she went home, got married and worked as a telephone operator. After a period of time, Dr. Gates decided to return to graduate school to obtain a Master’s in Psychology. However, the untimely death of her father caused Dr. Gates to drop out of school. Dr. Gates says she mourned the loss of her father for quite some time before convincing her husband that she needed to be near one of her sisters. It was through this sister’s connection with a gentleman in education that Dr. Gates was able to begin work as a substitute teacher. She describes the moment she started teaching again, thereby “falling in love,” and she added: It was as if I had come alive again.” Dr. Gates taught for nine years but during the seventh year while she was taking a professional development workshop on personality development using the Myers Briggs assessment the following occurred:

> I was filling out the forms and I had my profile on my desk and the facilitator for the meeting came by and she was just walking up and down and she pointed to mine and said that’s an administrator’s profile and I’m thinking is she talking to me. I’ve never given that any thought. I went home, prayed about it and decided that I would go back now and work on a Master’s in Administration.

Not only did Dr. Gates work on one but she also worked on two Master’s at the same time; one in administration and one in special education. Once graduating with both

degrees she moved right into her first administrative position as an assistant principal. She exclaims, “It was great!” Dr. Gates worked as an assistant principal with a population of 700 students, of which only 45 were African-Americans. She states, “I felt like I had a real calling there to serve all of the students but to make sure that I served as role model for students who did not see anyone in the building like them.” The school did not have any African American teachers either. She then made it her mission to get some. During the three years she served as assistant principal, she helped to bring in two African American teachers. Dr. Gates was promoted to principal at the end of her third year in the same school; serving as principal for six years. Towards the end of her fifth year as principal she the superintendent called to discuss a new position being created at the central office for a Director of Leadership Development and to offer her the position. Dr. Gates accepted the director’s position and stayed in it for two years. She says the position “was a great place to learn systems and processes of operation.” From that director’s position she moved to a new school district with about 50 schools and a 99% African American student population with a great deal of poverty. Dr. Gates states, “serving as the Director of K-12 Instruction for the urban school district was the most rewarding position I’ve ever had in my life and it was fabulous to work with people in need.” Two years into that position the following happened:

> A call came that my husband received because I was asleep and he wouldn’t wake me. It was the brother of a superintendent in another school district calling because, as he told my husband, we want your wife to come up and be assistant superintendent for my brother. The next morning my husband didn’t tell me about the call, he waited a full day after he had time to think about it, then he told me and we prayed about it, eventually making the decision to leave. I had now gone from suburban into the urban setting and now I was headed to a rural setting,

> really rural. Once I arrived, the superintendent restructured the entire division and placed most of the day-to-day operations under me. I was scared to death to assume all of that responsibility but the superintendent who was a White male worked right beside me and taught me a lot.

Once again, Dr. Gates got a call two years into serving as assistant superintendent asking her to apply for a superintendent vacancy in a larger school district with a population of approximately 46,000; which had a population of approximately 17,000 more than the school district where she formally served. She once again prayed and assumed the position. She describes the school district community as being traumatized due to many unfortunate incidents, but she says, "All along the way there were my parents, neighbors, administrators, supervisors that influenced me and above all God that influenced me to get to where I am. I had never envisioned myself being a superintendent. I've had a great tenure here." Dr. Gates has served as the superintendent for five years and has been nominated as Superintendent of the Year for her state.

Dr. Douglas

Dr. Douglas begins by recalling her father expecting all of his five children to be educated. She says, "There was never any doubt in her mind that I was going to college." Her father did not graduate from high school but he had always wanted to be a doctor. She says he was a very bright person, especially with high school mathematics. He did eventually return to night school on the GI Bill during the late 1940's and became a licensed contractor, electrician and mason. Dr. Douglas was inspired by her father's hard work, commitment to getting an education, and his faith.

Upon entering first grade she was advanced to third grade; thus, graduating at sixteen from high school. Although attending college was a given, Dr. Douglas had no idea as to what her major would be. She says. "I knew my daddy kind of wanted me to be a medical doctor, because it was his dream; however it was not mind." Due to one of her aunt's passion for sewing and because this aunt taught all of her brother's children to sew Dr. Douglas decided to major in Home Economics and minor in Science. Once graduating Dr. Douglas was hired as Home Economics teacher but soon realized that being a Home Economics teacher was not what she really wanted to do. So, while teaching she returned to school to work on a Master's degree in Biology Education. After completing the program, Dr. Douglas was recruited for two teaching positions out the state where she was teaching and had earned her master's degree. The first offer would require Dr. Douglas to fly in for the interview and because she did not have money for the flight, she declined the interview. The second offer came a few days later with the superintendent telling Dr. Douglas, "I'm not asking you to come for an interview, but that I am sending you a contract." Dr. Douglas was overwhelmed by the offer and immediately went home to discuss the offer with her father. After encouraging reassurance from her father, Dr. Douglas accepted the position. She would be assigned to a high school with 143 teachers on staff and roughly 2200 students. Out of the 143 teachers there were only four teachers of color. Later Dr. Douglas says:

> I found out that the superintendent was head of predominantly black schools looking for minority teachers because the federal government at that time really enforced it's rule about schools being integrated and staff's being integrated and that the school was about to lose their funding because they didn't have a significant ratio of minority teachers.

Even with this knowledge, Dr. Douglas says that she enjoyed the experience and the students in the schools. She says that from the experience she learned "school systems all over the country are very similar." Dr. Douglas taught for six years in the high school before leaving to move to another state with her then husband. After more years of teaching, Dr. Douglas says she needed to return home to be closer to her family and particularly her father who was in ill health. Upon returning home, Dr. Douglas accepted a position as a high school science teacher, all while going through a divorce and working as single mother of two. Dr. Douglas would remain in her home state as a high school science teacher for five years before being recruited in a neighboring state as a Math and Science Coordinator. Initially, Dr. Douglas was hesitant about interviewing for the position located in an urban school district but the male superintendent insisted that she make the visit before saying no. Dr. Douglas says:

> So, I went up there and he had the board give me a reception and all this stuff that I wasn't expecting. Then he took me around to the schools and he said you know I'm just so disappointed because the central office is almost all white and he was a white superintendent but he was just one of these good people, and he said there is no way I can run this system with an all-white central office. He said I have got to get some minorities in there.

Dr. Douglas says she wanted to accept the position being offered but was hesitant to because she had two little girls, and was going through a divorce, she just didn't think it was all manageable. However, once the superintendent heard of her dilemma he began to make arrangements for her a place to stay and daycare for her children. His support was as if, "God was saying this is for you," Dr. Douglas recalls. She says she the job was a wonderful experience and that the superintendent continued to make suggestions for her

professional growth. The following is a verbal exchange the superintendent and Dr. Douglas shared because every time he would see her he would say he thought she should get her doctorate:

> I said look now I am a single mother and I don't have time to be going to school. He said, look you are very intelligent but you know there will be jobs that you can't get because you don't have a doctorate degree and because you don't have it then you can't even apply for it but if you got it you could do the job. That man kept on me so that I eventually applied to a doctoral program and got my degree.

Dr. Douglas' relationship with this particular superintendent continues today even though they are both retired. In getting her doctoral degree, Dr. Douglas was able to become the first African American woman to named Assistant State Superintendent, and she remains the only one to date.

Further Analysis of Journeys to the Superintendency

In analyzing the journeys of my last four participants I am once again drawn to the fact that they each grew up in southern rural communities. The Civil Rights Era would once again appear to be the common theme within the lives of these women. Although, Drs. Reed and Markworth did not discuss their family history to any degree they too were brought up with the expectation of completing high school and attending college. The journeys of the four superintendents in this group continue to express the high value placed upon education by their parents during the Civil Rights Era. Through the recollections of the four superintendents it is evident that their parents wanted their daughters to rise above the poverty and biases, prejudices and discrimination that they had endured. The parents and communities of these women provided shelter from the

harsh realities of society by teaching them that they were just as good as any other person in society and that they could be and do whatever they wanted to be with the right education. In essence, these women were taught to be strong and determined women, who as Dr. Gates states, “Knew their identity and true sense of worth.” Therefore, it did not matter what the world thought of them in regards to their race and gender because they were secure in the knowledge and understanding that they were just as good as anyone else. Their knowledge and understanding of this was only heightened by the opportunity of getting a good education.

Although, the enactment of *Brown v. Board of Education* served as the catalyst to bringing the two races (White and Black) together, it was the life lessons prior to integration that allowed each of these women to persevere the racial conflicts of the Civil Rights Era and the social politics that often hide or mask the continued prejudices and discrimination that each of the these women have endured as they journeyed to the superintendency.

Self-recruitment to the position of superintendent was only evident in one of the superintendents from this group. The other three superintendents never aspired to be superintendents and were quite content with being good teachers and teacher leaders. However, because of something someone else saw in them they were given opportunities and experiences that would lead the way to the superintendency. Thus, indirectly nurturing the self-fulfilling prophecy, because once each of the participants realized the superintendency was within their reach little would stop them from obtaining the highest position in the field of public education.

Interestingly, for this group of women three had strong advocates and one had a true mentor/advocate. The mentor/advocate not only shared with Dr. Reed his thoughts regarding positions available, but more importantly he directed her towards the path of recruitment and retention. The advocates encouraged and influenced thinking, but the mentor/advocate provided information as to how, who, what, when, where, and why. In each case the strongest advocates/mentors were White males. This is not to imply that these women were not influenced by strong Black role models, but their role models did not carry the same clout and power to wield the consideration necessary for each of these women to be considered for the superintendency.

As discussed in the literature and seen with the first four superintendents is that each of the women within this group had to climb up the ladder to be assistant principal, principal, central office personnel, assistant superintendent, and finally, superintendent. And in Dr. Reed's case, she actually had to leave a central office position to experience being a high school principal before being considered for superintendent.

I believe from the journeys shared by each of the participants in this study that the common historical threads to their success as leaders and becoming superintendents are the Civil Rights Era, *Brown v. Board of Education* and Black feminism. From their journeys it is without a doubt that each of these women was destined to be successful in whatever field they chose. The impact of race, gender, and social politics during the Civil Rights Era, Brown v Board of Education and Black feminism on the lives of these women served to strengthen their personal resolve to affect society in a powerful and positive manner. It also seems apparent that the self-fulfilling prophecy, faith/fate, and

the role of strong advocates/mentors were necessary and crucial in the lives of these African American women seeking to lead positions in organizations such as the public school superintendency. Once the journeys of the superintendents had been recalled I then proceeded to ask them specific questions regarding recruitment and retention. Their responses and perspectives are contained in chapter five

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS ON PARTICIPANT'S PERSPECTIVES

> Although women are interested and qualified, they encounter constraints that limit their choices and decisions to enter and remain in the superintendency. –Kanya Mahittivanichcha and Andrea Rorrer, (2006, p. 485)

As data has supported, not only do African American women face the challenges of working in a society where racism, sexism, and social politics limit choices and decisions to women in general, but they must also face these "constraints" from the aspect of being Black women. As previously mentioned, the standpoints of the participants in this study are reflective of a shared period in history that characterizes the common challenges of recruitment and retention to the superintendency for many Black women. These challenges have required many African American women to struggle for equal education and preparation for the superintendency and equitable recruitment and retention into the superintendency. Within this chapter, my participants' views about the intersecting influence of race, gender, and social politics will be presented as the final piece of the recruitment and retention puzzle for African American women in the superintendency. To do this I will address the following research question: How do race, gender, and social politics impact the recruitment and retention of African American women to the public school superintendency?

The positionalities of the participants that are revealed in this study support the previous chapter discussions of the historical influences of the Civil Rights Era, and the linking of race, genders, and social politics as they relate to recruitment and retention. The responses from the participants to specific questions regarding recruitment and retention within the public school superintendency clearly speak to the highly visible and politically charged nature of the position. Their responses also echo the sociopolitical challenges of the "isms" as described by Settles (2006). Finally, their responses reflect the continued challenges and barriers that may be experienced by many African American women seeking to succeed in a world that still judges by race, gender, and social politics. Although Chapter 4 details the journey to the superintendency it is also important for African American women superintendents to speak directly to the lessons that can be learned from their experiences regarding the impact of race, gender, and social politics on recruitment and retention, as perceived and discussed in Chapter 2. Therefore, contained within this chapter are the superintendent's recalled experiences and perspectives on race, gender, mentoring, politics, education, moral codes, isolation, faith, and the role of Affirmative Action. Below, I consider recruitment and retention processes and power dynamics as they are relate to my conceptual framework described in Chapter Two. Along the way I highlight some insightful examples that emerged from the superintendents.

Experiences and Perspectives of Superintendents Regarding Recruitment and Retention

As may have been concluded, all of the superintendents agreed that race, gender, and social politics has great barring on whether African American women are recruited and retained in the superintendency. As Dr. Cameron states:

> It is not the actual process of recruitment and retention that are barriers to the superintendency because they are in and of themselves concrete processes (being certified in school administration, applying, interviewing, and etc.). The problem lies in the decisions made by those in power.

In essence, Dr. Cameron is saying that the processes for recruitment and retention are standard procedures. School boards are required to follow state laws for recruitment and retention; and thus, they are legal courses of action. However, she also asserts that the problem arises when those with power make decisions that do not serve all justly or fairly. Thereby implying that even with the enacting of *Brown v. Board of Education*, the 1964 Civil Rights Era, and Affirmative Action those with and in power continue to discriminate.

According to the participants race was first and foremost paramount into whether African American women were recruited and retained as public school superintendents. As Dr. Reed stated:

> I think people have a mental mindset about who Black women are. They expect Black women to look mammy maid if you understand what that might mean. Frumpy, you know. Um, overweight. They think of us as being pack mules and so they they'll throw the work on us, and expect it to be done miraculously. When we come clean, sharp, and well dressed, um in good physical shape they get edgy about that. I don't know what they think it means yet. I haven't figured that out

> you know. However, in my first superintendency I remember thinking that they think I am a machine and I'm not human, cause you know we're animals – we're not human animals – we're to be used and what not.

So much of what Dr. Reed said reverberated Sojourner Truth's question of "Ain't I A Woman," (Collins, 2000, p.14). During the time in history when Sojourner Truth asked the question, we must remember that Black women were considered to beasts of burden. Although the fight to have the same rights afforded to them as White women was won through the works of Black feminists and the Civil Rights Era; it is now 2010 and the same question and sentiment has been carried over generations of African American women who have come so far, and yet know that the journey is ongoing. Dr. Gates says:

> We as African American women should never forget where we came from and not to lose sight of who we are as African American women. Although it may sound harsh or biased, many of us think that when people (employees, board members, community members and etc.) start liking us we really think they like us and what we have to understand it's not about us. It is about what we can do for someone else whether it's being that token, whether, it is being a nice black woman that represents the culture well, it is achieving the goals that they the community wants to be achieved. It is performing the job well, but it's not about you and we have to remember that no matter the success we have one day it's going to fade away and the relationships that you have established within the superintendency will also fade because they are about the position and not you.

Therefore, Dr. Gates suggests it is a mistake to believe that because people within the organization like you and you have the position of superintendent, "you have arrived." As an African American woman in a leadership position such as the superintendent it is beneficial to keep in mind that the decision to hire may very well be based upon the social politics driving the organization. As detailed in Chapter 2, the African American woman is always struggling to prove herself as competent and capable of being an

effective leader. So, even when it appears that the African American woman is respected and liked as the leader, it may really be more about what the position can afford others. Sadly, Gates comments further suggest that for many, once the title and position are gone the African American woman who was once respected and liked becomes just another Black woman.

For many African American women seeking recruitment and retention to the superintendency the reality of race is best described and recalled by Dr. Peters' conversation with a board member,

> He told me, he said you were the best candidate and I couldn't in good conscious not vote for you, but others did not and they did not because of the color of your skin.

Peters' data indicate that even after meeting the job requirements by the state and or local school boards many Black women are passed over or denied further access into the role of leadership because of their race. Once again, supporting the research that speaks to Black women who are often highly qualified needing a powerful mentor/advocate in order to be recruited and retained in the position of school superintendent (Tillman and Cochran, 2000). The example by Dr. Peters reinforces the notion that African American women still struggle with the racial and social preferences for superintendents.

Sometimes silencing for African American women will result in trying to be politically correct but as Dr. Cameron states,

> Sometimes you can't be politically correct you gotta just tell the truth. Many years ago and prior to the whole OJ Simpson mess, OJ and Diana Ross were interviewed by Larry King. Larry King asked them to discuss how the struggle in

> Black America impacted them. And OJ and Diana Ross sat on national television and said that they couldn't speak to the Black experience and struggle. Really? How can you tell me OJ Simpson and Diana Ross as old as they both are —and they are both older than me; and if I know about the Black struggle and have experienced the Black struggle, how in the world can they tell me they don't understand anything about the Black struggle in America, ok. So know that was bologna. It's prevalent and it's real.

The data suggests that often, many African American women shy away from making their race an issue for fear of sounding paranoid, playing the "race card," or being in a state of denial. It is as if the following dialogue is playing in their heads, "How can African American women still be fighting this fight? Surely, there is another reason for why Black women are struggling." And yet as Dr. Cameron implies, every African American woman knows and understands the struggle. Those women who seek recruitment and retention in the public school superintendency must acknowledge the struggle as still real. The soul of "Sisterella" (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003) has to be set free and the mask of compliance and/or convention as discussed in Chapter Two (Greene, 1988) must be fractured.

Gender was another given within the themes represented by the superintendents. Dr. Cameron says, "The major barrier for the first position I held was that there were white males on the board who could not get beyond a Black and then secondly a female." Similarly, Dr. Markworth linked the gender issue with stereotypical beliefs:

> Black women are seen as very dominant and we're supposed to be mothers, cooks, cleaners, Ms. Fixer Uppers, but we're not leaders, so everyone takes advantage of us. We're the mothers of the land for all races.

Dr. Reed echoed the perspectives of Dr. Markworth by saying:

> Not only are we expected to be mammy maids but we are also seen as sapphires (women who holler and scream) thus making us women who will jump all over you. I haven't come across the whys for that kind of thinking but from my own personal experiences some of us (Black women) must play into this kind of thinking. Maybe, it's because there's not enough of us at any one time that look like the rest of them. White women have always been revered, protected, they keep their hair blonde or whatever color it is, they wear red nail polish and you know they got the suit on all the time and they know their place. Nobody's ever protected an African American woman throughout history and then all of a sudden we're telling White people what to do.

Indeed, Dr. Reed evokes the power of specific stereotypes that Collins (2000) discusses in her discussion of Black feminist theories.

Dr. Reed continues by saying:

> I still have the issues of white men who want to challenge me and they never do it overtly but the challenge is always there. They would rather see a White man in front of them talking than a Black woman and I understand that and I'm not going to make it my problem.

Dr. Gates says:

> There's something about the characteristic that you see in a person. Our ethnicity as Black women is something that is apparent the moment we walk in the door. We don't have to open our mouths. We don 't have to say anything about who we are but the minute we walk in the door there are those tapes that start to go off in people's minds about who we are and that makes it difficult. It happens to Caucasian women also, but it's a different tape that goes off. It's a tape of acceptance, it's a tape of somehow you have an inherent ability. Too often the tape that goes off when I walk in the door or an African American female walks in the door is that you have an inherent inability to succeed and your sons and your husband and the males in your family are attached to that same tape, and it becomes a hurdle that you have to overcome before you've said a word and it doesn't matter the audience.

Once again, many African American women are viewed as everything but intelligent women who are highly capable of leading and serving as public school superintendents. The tape that Dr. Gates refers to is in fact the same sentiment believed to be true during the Feminist Movement of the 19th and 20th centuries (see Collins, 2000; Guy-Sheftall, 2000). In essence, data from the superintendents suggest white female privilege which was synonymous with superior character and intellect is still prevalent in today's society. To state Dr. Gates example of the tape in the reverse means that when most White women walk through a door they are automatically seen as having an inherent ability to succeed. In regards to the husbands and the family of White women there is no hurdle because most organizations and communities will help with their success in relocating jobs, finding schools, and generally feeling like a member of the community. Dr. Stokely echoes the research and Dr. Gates by referring to the tape as a "catch 22." She says:

> I think being a woman certainly has it's disadvantages but being an African American woman has more disadvantage in terms of our ability to be retained for a couple of things in terms of we tend not to have the opportunity to build the networks like the "good old boy relationships" because we don't golf or hunt. Maybe we fish, but they build different kinds of relationships than we as females. Accessibility is a huge issue because business of connections, social connections, country club memberships and etc. As African American women, we must try to insert ourselves into the connections which they (White males) have privileged access.

Thus it appears from the perspectives of the superintendents that gender is not the sole determinant of recruitment and retention but rather it is the Black female gender that impacts recruitment and retention. For African American women it is the phenomenon of double jeopardy (race and gender) that impacts recruitment and retention, primarily.

Another common factor that African American women superintendents agreed with was about the social politics of the role. As expressed earlier the position is very political and it becomes social when groups with agendas work to push the actions of the school boards for or against the superintendent. As Dr. Douglas states:

> The difficulty is the politics cause as I have said, it turned me off that superintendents can be turned out of their jobs not they didn't do their jobs but because somebody gets a grudge against them or somebody in the community decides they don't like the superintendent and they get to a board member and then the next thing you know the superintendent's contract is not being renewed and they are being bought out. That's the thing that we can't control and it is the thing that keeps Black females from seeking the position.

Dr. Reed gives another example of the power social politics has on determining the recruitment or retention of African American women superintendents. She says:

> During one school board meeting I mention the fact that people are running around here saying I'm gay and they all start laughing and they said you heard that? I said, yeah I heard it, I mean you know stuff gets back to you; you know. I said so whoever said it really doesn't know me or who I am but she had told it to some influential White people back then. She didn't know me; I had never met this woman in my life. It was this woman's intention to get rid of me. Therefore, I say this because you must pay attention to culture and climate. I study it well because if you don't understand where you're going and who you are dealing with and then you misstep and you'll get swallowed up by some people who just don't want you (an African American female) there.

Dr. Agee sums of the importance of knowing the culture and climate as expressed by Dr. Reed in this way:

> Getting past that first interview is what I believe trips us (African American women) up. I think if you looked back and if there was some way for you to research how many African American females have applied for superintendents positions and looked at how many got to the second interview it would be

> interesting. Now, sure people are going to bring prejudices to the table and there are going to be some people who I don't care how long you live they are never going to want anything to do with you. That's an issue depending on what the community looks like and what their values are. You know there are just some places that we (African American women) just can't go. So, if you have already read this in a situation you just probably don't need to go there, because, then you get hell once you get there.

The expressed thoughts of the superintendents confirm the research presented throughout Chapter Two, by reiterating the strong determinants of race and gender on recruitment and retention despite many African American women having the necessary qualifications.

Perspectives on Mentoring/Networking

Most of the superintendents felt that mentors and establishing networks were crucial to being recruited and retained in the public school superintendency. As taken from their journeys to the superintendency it is apparent that for each of the superintendents there were one or two people that saw the leadership potential within them. If it had not been for the mentors providing opportunities for growth and learning through leadership experiences and giving encouragement for each of these women to seek degrees that would open doors to the superintendency their chosen paths may have been truly different. The power and intervention of the mentors and networks discussed in Chapter 4 led the superintendents to share what they believe to be critical in understanding the importance of mentors and networking. These recommendations are fundamental to Black Feminism because mentoring and networking as African American women was critical to the success and advancement of Black women within society. As Dr. Reed says:

> You have to realize who is important to spend your time with. You must be purposeful about that. Be intentional about who you're spending your time with and know what you hope to gain from spending that time.

Many would agree that the leadership programs they attended gave them educational knowledge to the job of superintendent but as Dr. Stokely says, "We learned through our experience, our associations and mentors." While Dr. Markworth says, "Mentors should not be afraid to share what the reality of the superintendency really is." Dr. Peters sums up mentoring and networking with these thoughts:

> Once I became a superintendent the first African American superintendent in the state mentored me. With the few Black women we had in the position of superintendents we formed a group to mentor each other and to advocate for those who wanted their names in the basket for the superintendency. Although the group was very small and what we did was on a very small scale, I think those are things that we need to do in order to encourage or to get more African American females into the superintendency. It is up to us to encourage others African American women and men to explore the superintendency.

Dr. Cameron's perspective is:

> We need a support base amongst ourselves. We need to support each other and help each other. That's all there is to it. I don't care how many programs you go through or whatever you still got to have that network and support base and there again that's why I made a point to block out this time this morning because I feel like I have got to support you.

Lastly, here is a prime example of networking and advocating from a retired superintendent within the Southeast region of the United States encouraging her fellow peers to give back and to help "uplift as we climb:"

> Hello Everyone, (September 3, 2010)
> The purpose of this e-mail is to ask your assistance on behalf of a student, Anita Brown, who is completing her doctoral studies at UNC-Greensboro. Her dissertation is entitled, The Freedom to Be: African American Women as Public School Superintendents. She is in need of active or retired AA Women Superintendents to interview for dissertation research. With the limited number of AA women superintendents, she is having a major problem with her sample size. Since you understand the challenges of completing a dissertation, I hope you will be willing to assist Anita.

As a result of this superintendent taking the time to advocate on my behalf to the network of superintendents within her circle, I was able to obtain my eight participants for my research study.

Self-recruitment and Self-retention in the superintendency

Self-recruitment and Self-retention in the superintendency is about African American women making a way for themselves in a male dominated position. Dr. Reed says, she purposely made it her business to read and study the resume a Chicago superintendent by name of Ruth B. Love while she was in graduate school. She said she looked at where you have to go in order to get where you want to go. Dr. Reed also advises getting to know superintendents and getting at least one of them to serve as a mentor. African American women should seek out those who they admire and respect, and have had experiences that will provide rich information and serve as a guide to the superintendency, according to Dr. Reed.

Most of the superintendents would agree that you must take risks in order to be a superintendent. As repeated any number of times you must be willing to move or relocate. According to Dr. Markworth, “You just have to put yourself out there.” She says:

> You have to put yourself in the position to be recruited. You have to search websites, talk to folks, and don't be afraid to make those connections. If you are afraid to reach out to folks or if you are afraid to take no for an answer, if you are afraid to be denied, and if you are afraid of being declined then this job is not for you. You have to put yourself out there and make the decision as to where you will go.

In regards to retention Dr. Markworth says that a proven track record will help African American women retain their positions as superintendents. Dr. Gates says:

> I have friends who will clearly say I'm not moving. I'm trying to find something right around geographically that will allow me to stay where I am and not move too far away. In order to become a superintendent many times you will have to relocate and so that's something you have to discuss in your family. You have to build support that's necessary in your family in order to be able to do that.

She also states that because statistically the tenure of an African American woman superintendent is shorter than that of White males; thus, making the decision to move or relocate even harder for Black women. As an assistant superintendent Dr. Gates commuted an hour and ten minutes to and from the county in which she worked for two years. As a superintendent you do not have the option of commuting, because most states require you to live in the districts for which you serve. Dr. Gates also stated the following:

> I think for African American women superintendents the work is so difficult and can be so trying, that when you factor in the lack of longevity, the stress of the work, and the amount of the work for many Black women, when it is all totaled the realities of the position often preclude self-recruitment.

Although, there are many factors as to why African American women choose not to seek the position of school superintendent these same factors can also be contributed to the

retention within the superintendency. However, most of the superintendents have said that it is the relationship with the school board that will ultimately determine retention.

Board relationships

The board of education serves as the superintendent's immediate supervisor, boss, and evaluator. According to Dr. Gates:

> You have to respect them as your supervisor and treat them with regardless of the level of education they have in comparison to yours. You have to treat them with respect and understand that there's value in almost everything that they have to say even if its foolishness and its way off topic more than likely they are representing their constituency and you'd better pay attention to it.

Dr. Agee states:

> You have to understand the political climate within which you work and if you don't read well, I mean read people and situations well, like your board, um the dynamics of the job, the people that are involved in the job at that level, the fact that you have to interact with board members who are not professionals who think they know what happens in a school district because they went to school there or who want or think their job is your job; I think causes many to shy away because they simply are not ready for the job and the kinds of political experiences that comes with it.

Dr. Markworth says it is crucial to serve on different community boards in order for people to get to know your name and what you are about. She also says that serving on boards will allow one to test the limits with diverse groups of people who may have different views and opinions from your own. By serving on several community boards Dr. Markworth states:

> You start to build the "thick skin" needed for the role of superintendent. You begin to learn how to graciously handle when the public disagrees with you,

> criticizes, critiques, and downright insults you, without becoming overly sensitive.

Another piece of the politics is building a relationship with the media. As Dr. Agee states:

> We either need to be able to forge a positive relationship with the media or we need someone on our staff who does for us. They must be someone you can trust to be your mouthpiece and serve as your right hand man or woman. You must forge a relationship of trust with the media because nothing is worse than the media being upset with you the superintendent.

Dr. Agee also says that the media is a huge piece of the relationship puzzle but you must also have good connections to the county commissioners, county finance officer and any other key individuals within the community.

As indicated in previous chapters the school board has the power to hire and fire (Edwards, 2006). Even though the processes for each are concrete in the way they are conducted, the superintendents clearly express that there are interpersonal skills required in order to be successful as a superintendent. Their emphasis on the interpersonal skills relates to the informal education that one cannot learn reading and researching, but must be in fact practiced in authentic situations.

Formal and informal education

Previously I referred to the importance of superintendent's formal and informal education. Once again, the requirements for formal education are guided by individual state and federal guidelines; and, African American women superintendents are often

highly qualified (Tillman and Cochran, 2000). Dr. Douglas sums up the process of formal education by saying:

> African-American women stack up just like everybody else when it comes to preparation, competency, capability, being able to communicate, being able to guide a system, and I think they bring the extra sensitivity to work with kids who are disadvantaged and not just African-Americans.

It can be said that the words expressed by Dr. Douglas mirrors many of the same sentiments of the other participants. It is not that African American women are not prepared formally, but the lack of informal preparation such as developing interpersonal skills to read situations, networking, lack of mentors presents themselves as larger problems related to recruitment and retention.

Personal and moral codes

Each of the superintendents displayed and expressed strong personal and moral codes throughout their discussions. Dr. Reed recalls being given a second contract to a superintendent's position she held but the board that gave her the contract was voted out and then the new board came in with a different agenda. She says:

> They got ignorant and nasty publicly all the time and I found myself thinking I'm not from this. I don't know this. It was street fighting. I'm not from the streets. I don't know how to gutter fight. And then I have a great reputation out there in the United States it's just not this state and I can see past this state. It got to the point as I talked to my mother and my sister I said you know all I have is my reputation. I said my reputation will get me another job. I said I'm not going to stay here and let some ignorant people sully my reputation.

Dr. Agee stated that even though people do not want to acknowledge race as an issue in recruitment and retention to the superintendency and other leadership positions the fact

remains that it is still an issue. However, she also shares the following in regards to how she deals with the issue:

> You don’t whine about it, you just deal with it you know. Whining about it not’s going to make it any better. Making every issue about race or gender makes you look like the weak and whiny. You just deal with it. If, I’m qualified I don’t care what you think that’s your problem not mine and that was really the way I approached it. If you can resolve your issues that’s fine, if you can’t I don’t have to go home with you, so the fact that you don’t like me cause I’m a woman and cause I’m Black I could care less.

These two examples demonstrate the strong personal and moral codes that are indicative of each of the superintendents. These responses also speak to African American women knowing who they are as individuals and leaders. Their words demonstrate the lessons of self-worth that can be attributed to family, mentors, and even ideals espoused in Black feminist theories. Collins (2000) reminds readers that the Black woman’s self-definition is key to empowerment and collective consciousness. She further states, “Black women’s ability to forge these individual, often unarticulated, yet potentially powerful expressions of everyday consciousness into an articulated, self-defined, collective standpoint is key to Black women’s survival (p. 36).

Isolation

Many have heard the expression of being at the top is a lonely place, but few get to truly experience it. However, for the superintendents in this study their expressions of isolation speak to the need for having mentors, networks, and family members to serve as sounding boards and caregivers to the women leaders. Dr. Gates states:

> It's not that you need someone to hear you talk about the job but you need someone to care about you in the evenings when you go home and knowing that you have someone to go home to because if you don't have your family in a community that's not your own or you didn't grown up in the community who do you turn to? And you have to ask yourself "where will my support system be?" in the community.

On another note, Dr. Agee says that the superintendency is not a position where you can have a lot of friends. She stated:

> You have to realize that you are going to be challenged all the time and that you're going to have to constantly be about critiquing yourself all the time. That it's lonely and it has to be because you can't have a whole heck of a lot of friends that you want to share stuff with because you just can't do that. That's just not going to work if you think that's going to work you are sadly mistaken.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, White males often have social organizations, wives, and other community leaders to share their leadership experience with; however, for the African American woman in leadership similar support sources are hard to come by. Terhune (2007) states, "social support systems help in alleviating feelings of isolation and tokenism, which can be experienced by Blacks situated in White environments" (p.550).

Affirmative Action

Although none of the superintendents addressed Affirmative Action as a factor to their recruitment and retention, when asked directly about the role of Affirmative Action in recruitment and retention they all expressed similar thoughts. They all agreed that Affirmative Action is still needed; however, none of them wanted it to directly apply to them being recruited and retained in their respected positions. They instead explained

they wanted to be hired, respected, and retained based on their skills and talents. Thus, mirroring the analogy of the double-edged sword discussed in Chapter Two. On one hand Affirmative Action has the potential to open doors to the superintendency for many African American women, but because it has been misperceived as Marshall (1994) writes as a token gesture, many African American women would rather not be considered for hire under an act that as she further states, "lacks moral legitimacy" (p.173).

Lessons Learned in the Superintendency

The lessons learned by these African American women superintendents are many as they are reflective of their positionality, standpoint, and intersected identities that I have discussed throughout the text. Below are consistent and compiled lessons expressed throughout the conversations shared during the gathering of the data. These lessons may also relate to recommendations for the recruitment and retention of African American women in the public school superintendency.

Lessons Learned about Race and Recruitment and Retention:

- African American women superintendents must carry themselves to a higher standard of excellence in order to dispel the myths that have circulated over generations.
- African American women superintendents must continue to work harder than their peers in order to prove their leadership capabilities, despite their credentials.
- Race is always a factor in the games of social politics.

- Despite credentials carried by an African American woman seeking the superintendency, she benefits more by having a strong white male mentor/advocate.
- African American women must always be cognizant of the power of race and be accepting of it; knowing that "it is what it is."

Lessons Learned about Black Female Gender and on Recruitment and Retention:

- There is a continued lack of access into powerful social and political organizations for many African American women.
- Despite years of progress in racial and gender interactions, stereotypical beliefs and myths regarding Black women still exist within society.
- Research continues to support the belief that there appears to be a dominant ascension order for hiring (e.g. White males, Black males, White females, Black females) within the superintendency.
- Self-recruitment to the superintendency by African American women is crucial to their future recruitment to and retention in the position.
- Hostile school board members continue to impact the recruitment and retention of African American women to the superintendency.

Lessons Learned about Social Politics and Recruitment and Retention:

- Recruitment and retention is often hampered when African American women candidates lack strong political and professional networks.
- Strong White males as mentors and advocates are crucial to the African American woman in the school superintendency.

- The lack of Black women superintendents leads to a lack of strong Black women superintendents that can and will serve as mentors/advocates.

The implications of these lessons relate to the recommendations that I will assert in Chapter Six. In essence, the lessons learned substantiate my belief that the recruitment and retention of African American women to the superintendency may be increased if the research community and schools of education embrace the positionalities and standpoints of African American women.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

> The ability to transform moments of struggle into constructive, positive, and transforming learning situations is a sign of a true leader. (Katira, p. 254, 2003)

The journeys and perspectives shared by each of the superintendents speaks to their common experiences of racism, gender bias, and social politics; but more importantly, their journeys and experiences signify the resiliency that each woman has used to transcend the cultural and societal barriers for herself and others. Although, African American women have known many struggles through desegregation, civil rights and the Black feminist movement they have been able to transform the struggles for themselves and others through education, active and unspoken feminism and transformative leadership. Through acts of transformative leadership many African American women in positions such as the public school superintendency have been able to inspire others and then transcend their own needs in order to give power to all voices regardless of race, class, and gender (Alston 2000, 2004; Horsford and McKenzie, 2008; Tillman, 2004). Many African American women as public school superintendents impact the future on a daily basis within many school districts because they understand that while they are in the role of leadership they are in fact increasing the potential for all within the school districts to transform each life at hand and the community at large; thus often demonstrating transformative leadership.

My final research question to remain asks: In what ways can the recruitment and retention of African American women to the public school superintendency be increased. In this chapter, I consider the findings discussed in chapters four and five to offer some answers.

The journeys of the superintendents revealed the importance of having mentors and/or advocates to guide the recruitment path of African American women seeking the superintendency. Their journeys also reflect the power of faith/fate and the self-fulfilling prophecy in determining whether self-recruitment directed their paths to the superintendency. The lessons learned and shared by the superintendents strongly indicated that education be it schools of education, professional development, and school board workshops are needed to bring awareness to the impact of race, gender, and social politics on the recruitment and retention of African American women to the superintendency. Offering such educational opportunities means leading organizations and people to a possible change in hearts and minds, while enabling educators at all levels to transcend their own self-interests for the best interest of the children being served and others. Overall, I assert that transformative leadership is critical to diffusing the social injustices of discrimination found in educational processes such as recruitment and retention.

Transformative leadership

Transformative leadership is defined as a process that elicits change in the assumptions and attitudes held within an organization or community. Transformative leaders thus work to be the change agents that facilitate meaningful discourse is meant to

give voice to the arguments of social justice and to cause one to question assumptions of race, gender, and politics (Quantz, Rogers, & Dantley, 1991; Quantz et al., 1991). When African American women are hired for, and able to maintain the public school superintendency they in fact are learning, teaching and modeling how to overcome racism, sexism, and oppressive sociopolitics. This is not to say that every African American woman hired as a public school superintendent has the capacity to become a transformative leader within a school district, but rather their mere presence in the position demonstrates their individual ability to transcend the challenges presented throughout this study. For instance, the women in this study overcame many barriers, obstacles, and challenges in order to achieve their respected positions as public school superintendents. It is because of their fight to persevere in an oppressive society and the fight of others before them that they may be seen as change agents. They each in fact through their unspoken feminism teach other African American women the lesson of fighting and persevering in order to achieve equity and equality. Freire (2007) states,

> This lesson and this apprenticeship must come, however, from the oppressed themselves and from those who are truly solidary with them. As individuals or as peoples, by fighting for the restoration of their humanity they will be attempting the restoration of true generosity. Who better prepared than the oppressed to understand the terrible significance of an oppressive society? Who suffer the effects of oppression more than the oppressed? Who can better understand the necessity of liberation? They will not gain this liberation by chance but through the praxis of their quest for it, through their recognition of the necessity to fight for it. And this fight, because of the purpose given it by the oppressed, will actually constitute an act of love opposing the lovelessness which lies at the heart of the oppressors' violence, lovelessness even with clothed in false generosity. (p. 45)

Freire (2007) can be linked to many of the superintendent's responses to "Why do this job?" and they simply stated, "We as African American women must be at the table." In essence they were speaking to the fact that there are decisions that have and are being made that affect our Black children as well as all children in their efforts to be viable and successful contributors within society. All of the superintendents that participated in this study are in fact attempting to restore what appears to be the continued loss of humanity that breeches the equity and equality of living and learning within our society through their daily work and presence as superintendents/transformative leaders.

Links to the Black Feminist Movement

The superintendents' efforts evoke many of the ideals and goals of the Black Feminist Movement, as described in chapter two, such as gaining social equity, working for the benefit of all children, and to further benefit the Black race as a whole (Collins, 2000; Guy-Sheftall, 2000; hooks, 1981; King, 1998). For example, there are many recognizable Black feminist leaders who have sought to effect positive change, but Ella Baker stands out as one of the unsung heroes of the Civil Rights Era whose words and actions align with those shared by the superintendents in this study. Ella Baker is seen as a champion of human rights and was quoted as saying,

> In order for us as poor and oppressed people to become a part of a society that is meaningful, the system under which we now exist has to be radically changed. This means that we are going to have to learn to think in radical terms. I use the term radical in its original meaning—getting down to and understanding the root cause. It means facing a system that does not lend itself to your needs and devising means by which you change that system. (Ransby, 2003, p. 1)

Baker's "getting down to and understanding the root cause", seems to speak to transformative leadership. She also stated that, "Oppressed people, whatever their level of formal education, have the ability to understand and interpret the world around them, to see the world for what it is, and move to transform it" (p. 7). Every day that the African American women participants in this study work in the position of public school superintendent they are working to help others within their organizations and communities see the world as it is and empowering them to leaders for change within society.

The legacy of desegregation, civil rights and the Black Feminist Movement eras come together as the connective thread for the African American women school superintendents in this study. African American women in the role of public superintendent may not be consciously aware of their activism – or maybe they just do not speak of their leadership and persistence in such a way – but they in fact are the movers and shakers within a society built on oppression. Freire (1993) states, "It is only the oppressed who, by freeing themselves, can free their oppressors;" and, "Through the praxis (they) commit themselves to its transformation" (p.56). By African American women serving as public school superintendents, the negative myths and misperceptions regarding African American women may be replaced with "The ability of the leader to reach the souls of others in a fashion which raises human consciousness, builds meanings and inspires human intent that is the source of [transformative] power" (Bennis, 1984, p. 70). Therefore, the presence of African American women in the public school superintendency is not just to better the school systems with diversity but also to give

credence to the power of the African American woman to transform existing social relations (Quantz, et al., 1991). Drs. Peters, Cameron, Agee, Stokely, Reed, Markworth, Gates, and Douglas have given credence to their power and ability to transform their school districts, simply by their presence and commitments to equity and by maintaining their positions and identities as African American women public school superintendents.

Transformative leadership according to Quantz et al. (1991), “Must be a political and moral act of courage that works to empower followers to become leaders” (p. 97). Therefore, African American women who serve as transformative leaders in K-12 public schools continue to demonstrate mothering practices or unspoken feminism as they are granted status and power to promote educational practices which will benefit all children. African American women in the public school superintendency who in engage in transformative leadership may often feel responsible for the success of their students within the districts they lead. Their leadership is often characterized as authentic, grounded in protecting and nurturing all students; particularly African American students (Tillman, 2004). As public school superintendents, African American women can and do shape policy and procedures that ultimately lead to student success. Tillman (2004) suggests that leadership and decisions made may be tied to same-race affiliation, shared cultural identity, and status as an African American woman administrator.

Recruitment, Retention, and Success in the Superintendency

Once again, the superintendents discussed many possible reasons for the lack of recruitment, retention and success in the superintendency for African American women.

Their insights strike me as lessons that can learned by others to better increase the numbers of African American women in the superintendency.

As mentioned previously, white males are routinely groomed and sought to fill superintendent vacancies. By some estimates, men continue to be more than 40 times more likely to advance from teaching to the superintendency (Skrla, 1999). Although research may not be able to truly identify reasons for the low numbers of women in the superintendency, the research does indicate that school boards, search consultants and hiring agencies, as well as the candidates themselves strongly examine the cultural values expressed during recruitment and retention processes as shared by Dr. Reed in chapter five when she recounted her superintendent job search. Dr. Reed shared, “by now I’ve been on the website to find out something about it and called my friend to get more information. The faces of the community were Jewish and White. I didn’t see any colored church people.” Dr. Reed’s statement seemed to indicate that the cultural value of sameness –whether it relate to race or religion –was a norm for the community and/or district; thus, making the interview process for a lone Black female interesting at best. However, with society becoming more diverse the need for acknowledging the role of race, gender, and social politics on recruitment and retention from the standpoints of African American women becomes paramount. As Dr. Cameron discussed in chapter five, the issues of race and gender have been marginalized because of society expecting one to be politically correct. However, Dr. Cameron also said the truth about the Black struggle has to be told because in her words, “It’s prevalent and it’s real.” Similarly, Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010) state:

> To ignore aspects of identity as unimportant is to tacitly privilege the leadership behavior of the dominant group in the organization under study most commonly White men from North American and Western Europe. Moreover, because organizations are by nature hierarchical and leadership by definition is the accumulation and exercise of power and authority, to ignore aspects of identity is to ignore the unequal manner in which hierarchies and systems of power provide opportunities for leadership. Status and power influence leader emergence and definitions of leader effectiveness. (p. 178)

Moreover, if the standpoints of African American women are never heard or validated and an appreciation for their diverse identities is never developed then, how can it be assumed that we are meeting the needs of our ever more diverse school districts? I have learned from the eight participants in the study that our presence as African American women, positions (educationally, socially, politically, and culturally) are critical to transforming the male dominance found within the superintendency.

Historically, research has had more of a single focus on gender, race, or culture in regards to career advancement in leadership positions (see Dana and Bourisaw, 2006, or Tallerico, 2000); but for women of color research must examine multiple and intersected identities so that barriers and challenges of African American women can be better understood. Diverse barriers and challenges that may impede the recruitment process for women are: the location of the job, the lack of mobility, interviewing and selection, and gender-structured systems (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). However, for African American women and women of color the disadvantages range from leadership styles that appear to be masculine and assertive, to the "multiple aspects of identity that elicit stereotypes—for example, gender, race, sexual orientation, and ethnicity" (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010, p. 177). These points link back to the relevance of Black women's positionality and the

intersection of their identities as described in Black Feminist Theory. As discussed in chapter two, Black Feminist Theory according to Guy-Sheftall (2000) "recognizes this dual identity presents challenges, needs, and concerns unlike those faced by African American men and White women" (p.347); therefore, more research in this is needed area.

Again, one of the greatest strategies for recruitment and retention is mentoring. "Without assistance and support from others, the systemic barriers prevent some of the population from reaching their reasonable goals and injustice is the result," (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006, p. 181). To date, little research has been done to determine the affect mentors have on African American women self-recruitment and self-retention to the public school superintendency. According to Crawford and Smith (2005), "Mentoring has been identified as a factor leading to upward mobility in employment, success in education, and personal development" (p.52). Although Crawford and Smith (2005) speak to mentoring in institutions of higher education, the barriers they identify can also be attributed to African American women in the public school superintendency because the superintendents within this study acknowledged they too face loneliness, isolation, race and gender-based discrimination. Indeed, for too many African American women superintendents, mentors tend to come from family, close friends and former teachers or principals, rarely does the mentoring come from current or retired African American women superintendents. One in part, because of the lack of numbers, and secondly, because once African American women assume the superintendent's position they are

often too busy trying to survive the job itself to provide mentoring to someone just thinking about the role.

The need to confide in someone and to discuss challenges is great, yet most administrators struggle to find that someone; hence the need for mentors. As a beginning superintendent in a school district one quickly learns that you have no peers within the district, this means you must look to other district superintendents or retired superintendents to find the support needed to guide you through what is often viewed as stressful and overwhelming at best. From my research and conversations with the superintendents, many retired and fellow superintendents are White males who may not be willing to serve as mentors for many reasons. On the other hand, there are many White males who are willing to be mentors for newly assigned superintendents regardless of gender or racial background, but in many cases they are not asked. Therefore, it is imperative to remember those who have served in the positions and to seek their wisdom and knowledge.

Also, I assert that the burden of preparing, mentoring, and advocating for pre-service African American women superintendents and/or newly appointed superintendents also rest with institutions of higher learning. University colleges, schools, and departments of education have played a significant role in perpetuating the dominance of White men and have generally failed to provide adequate support for diversity in professional preparation programs (Talbert-Johnson & Tillman, 1999). University programs must not only provide knowledge through coursework and internships based on white male experiences, but must incorporate women and minority

women leadership styles as forms of knowledge in order to better prepare women. This means more research must be focused on all races and cultural groups of women in the superintendency.

Mentors can and should be established while the student is still fulfilling program requirements. As stated by Tillman & Cochran (2000), White men continue to dominant university faculty and administrative ranks and serve as gatekeepers for recruitment and retention of students and faculty members (p. 54). They should be advocating for their mentees in superintendent positions, introducing them to well-connected organizations, providing organizational insight, and socialization.

Another key strategy for more equitable recruitment and retention is to examine the work policies of superintendents; most likely this examination will indicate that the policies are centered around and best serve men as superintendents. For instance, recruitment and retention policies could specify the need for financial incentives tailored to African American women and other minority women. As Mahitivanichcha & Rorrer (2006) explain,

> further research on the innovative redesign of work that allows flexible work options without career-status or advancement penalties is imperative to provide guidance for practice and policy that will advance women in the superintendency, (p. 507).

Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010) state, “Gender and education parity in pay discrimination illustrates another important reason to consider multiple identities in organization research” (p. 176). Acknowledgment that African American women and other women of color experience discrimination, because of their multiple identities and

complex positionalities would support the argument for further research; while also giving voice to these women.

All of these strategies when considered may help to increase the recruitment, retention and success of future superintendents. It goes without saying that school boards must hire highly qualified candidates to the position of superintendent, but it must be stressed that as the faces of our society continues to evolve into a more diverse population, so does the face of the superintendency need to evolve. Superintendents must be ready to handle the political, educational, and managerial leadership roles of the position, noting that these broad headings only touch the surface of what a superintendent is expected to do. Socialization into the informal world of organizations, networking, job insight and opportunities is necessary and best served and learned through a trusted mentor.

Most importantly, in order for future superintendents to be successful they must know themselves. They must be guided by eleven moral characteristics as defined by Brubaker and Coble (2005): honesty, integrity, promise-keeping, loyalty, fairness, concern for others, respect for others, law abidingness, pursuit of excellence, personal accountability, and the spiritual journey. These moral characteristics are what he calls an individual's "moral compass" and these characteristics align with the moral codes and value the superintendents' data revealed in chapters five and six. For instance, Brubaker and Coble (2005) states:

> Tapping the power of your moral compass will be a way of guaranteeing that you are being true to yourself and people you lead. Using this power means that you must act. You can talk the talk and you can commit volumes of your philosophy

> to writing, but unless you live out what you believe, you are a fake. Don't ever cross, "the line" to keep a job, get a promotion, or advance selfish personal interests of any kind. Most of the time, this type of behavior will eventually catch up with you, and your career will stall or stop. If you are tempted to cross the line, it is time to do more self-examination. Take an inventory of the standards that you are employing in your decision-making. Understand what is going on with you that would cause you to make decisions that would not contribute to the welfare of your employees, customers, or clients. You, like the rest of us, will tend to judge yourself by recall of your most noble or virtuous behavior. The rest of the world will judge you on the worst thing that you did most recently. Make sure that your moral compass points "true north." (182)

The journeys and experiences recalled by the superintendents reflect the honesty, integrity, faith, and moral values that have sustained and driven their every action to be transformational leaders. It is these exhibited qualities that inspire change, confidence, and optimism within an organization; in essence they each have "walked the talk and talked the walk" as expressed by Dr. Peters. There is nothing they would ask of their organizations that they have not asked of themselves.

Indeed, the superintendency has evolved into a role that encompasses all aspects of society. The political, educational, and managerial responsibilities requires leaders who will work to serve with integrity, clarity of vision, respectful application and understanding of the laws in which they are obligated to abide by, and who will work to empower all to reach their highest academic and leadership potential. It has become a role that is shared with colleagues and peers, as well as the community at large. The superintendency is a unique job, because it requires superintendents who are people leaders, listeners and good communicators. They must be committed to effective change, the mission, and what is in the best interest of all students. The landscape of the

superintendency is rich with power and authority for those who seek it, but for those who are wise the landscape offers endless possibilities for growth and success.

The growth and success of African American women as public school superintendents is once again dependent upon whether they are truly freed from the masks that often prevent the intersection and acceptance of race, gender, and social politics in all of its complexities within their daily lives. If recruitment and retention of African American women to the public school superintendency is to be increased, then the challenges and barriers presented through race, gender, and social politics must continue to be explored.

Conclusion

From the African American women superintendents in this study, we can learn the power of reaching and achieving your highest potential as a human being through: positive thinking; being visionary and strategic in our thinking, planning, and acting; inspiring trust, and gaining commitment from others we lead and serve. Although they all shared the challenges of race, gender, and social politics on their individual recruitment and retention, those challenges did not deter or sway them from becoming "forces of power." Most importantly they never allowed someone else's problems of race, gender, and the playing of negative social politics to determine their self-worth as African American women. Their journeys and perspectives are a testimony to the many victories and successes they have each experienced personally and as public school superintendents.

The freedom to be an African American woman recruited and retained in the public school superintendency has historically been silenced. The voices of many African American women superintendents have been assigned to the voices of White women and African American men. Rarely are the voices of African American women superintendents revealed to solely address the issues and challenges of recruitment and retention faced by African American women to the public school superintendency. Neither, has credence or validation been given to the impact of race, gender, and social politics on the recruitment and retention process of African American women in the public school superintendency. Finally, the fact that I am an African American woman conducting this research, and that the participants in my research have all been African American women, I hope to bring about the opportunity for education and cultural knowledge as my participants have shared their experiences and wisdom surrounding the impact of race, gender, and the social politics of recruitment and retention of African American women in the public school superintendency and “the freedom to be.”

Thus, when African American women serve as public school superintendents they are participating in something larger than them and are inviting others to participate; which is the heart of transformative leadership. Capparell (2007) states:

> When looking at discrimination, our society has come to rely on a useful cliché: We’ve come a long way, but we still have a long way to go. It’s critical that we pause sometimes to get an honest measure of the distance traveled, to refocus on the goal of fairness and equality, and to recommit to making that end a reality. (p. xvii)

To this end, The Freedom to Be: African American Women as Public School Superintendents study is an effort to refocus and bring a more definitive look at the complex impact of the Black feminist movement, desegregation, and civil rights movement on the diverse and multiple identities experienced by African American women seeking recruitment and retention to the public school superintendency. We as African American women must continue to transform the world of others so that we may continue to transform our own lives; thus seeking the road less travel

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APPENDIX A

REVIEW OF PROFESSIONAL VITAS

1. Name and pseudo name interviewee wishes to be identified by in the research
2. Age
3. Where degrees were earned
4. Length of years in education
5. Total years in administration
6. Number of years as a public school superintendent
7. Number of districts serving as public school superintendent
8. Organization affiliation
9. Community service
10. Awards and Honors

APPENDIX B

FACE-TO-FACE INTERVIEW (1)

What was your journey to the public school superintendency?

APPENDIX C

FACE-TO-FACE INTERVIEW (2)

Education

1. How did your leadership program prepare you as an African American woman to assume the role of public school superintendent?
2. How can African American women prepare themselves to be recruited and retained as public school superintendents?

Gender and Race

3. How does being an African American woman affect the recruitment and retention processes within the public school superintendency and does affirmative action affect the processes?

4. How has district processes and policies affected your recruitment and retention to the public school superintendency?

Key Recruitment

5. Describe the recruitment process for your current position; including barriers and/or challenges.
6. How can the recruitment process for African American women to the public school superintendency be improved?

Key Retention

7. Describe the retention process for your current position; including barriers and/or challenges.
8. How can the retention process for African American women to the public school superintendency be improved?

Mentor and Family Impact

9. Did mentors play a role in your decision to be recruited and retained as a public school superintendent, if so, explain how they served in your decision to be recruited and retained as a public school superintendent.
10. Did your family play a role in your decision to be recruited or retained as a public school superintendent, if so, explain how they served in your decision to be recruited or retained as a public school superintendent?