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The purpose of this dissertation is to examine the absence of disadvantaged black males in higher education and reduce their increasing presence in prison, the historical and cultural factors that contribute to that absence, as well as research that explores those factors. Then, using theory and research on literacy and difference and interviews with some black male, it will offer some suggestions for pedagogical initiatives in institutions to alter the educators' perception of and service to black male students. By developing programs, workshops and reorganizing curriculum design specifically to encompass the creation of the inner-city black males, educators would hope to empower them in higher education.

Many times throughout history, the black male voice has been admonished for being too sexual, too violent, or too real. Each time academia has acknowledged the presence of black males; it has studied and examined their voices and images. However, of recent, studies show that black men are the least population to graduate from these institutions with college degrees. Many researchers and educators have questioned examined the possible factors that lead to black males inability to attain a degree—the influence of street life, the social mistreatment of them in the classroom, their ideals of manhood. Whatever the cause, the alarm has sounded.

Sustainability of black male students begins with presence, and development and acknowledgement of voice strengthens presence. It has been many years since the black male voices of the Harlem Renaissance and the emergence of internationally acclaimed black male artists such as Dubois, McKay, Hughes, Cullen, and Wright expressed their experiences in America. Just as Langston Hughes poems, good rap as good poetry, seeks to “explain and illuminate the Negro condition in America” (721). Rap is one of the new male voices and does more “than reveal the pain of poverty”; it tells the story of some experiences that black people, the black male, inner-city dwellers, and the impoverished have experienced in America. Many of the already mentioned authors are now not only accepted as part of the canon, but also heralded for their creative expressions in the throes of oppression. By analyzing *what* is being said and *why* it is being said educators are creating programs and courses to encourage disadvantaged black male students to critically think about their community, life circumstances, and their place in society, thus giving them a voice in society and academia while broadening their experiences.

KEEPIN' IT REAL: THE BLACK MALE'S (DIS) ABILITY TO ACHIEVE IN  
HIGHER EDUCATION

by

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Approved by

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To Melvin and Johnnie Mae Phillips, without whom there would have been no journey.

Thank you for giving me your light and the confidence to persevere.

APPROVAL PAGE

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## INTRODUCTION

I entered graduate school to study for my Master's in the summer of 1993. I was freshly out of a college relationship and needing a space to relax. I needed to evaluate my personal space, my life as a young black female scholar. The last thought in my mind was starting another relationship. For the first two years of my studies, because my previous background was mathematics and elementary education, I did nothing but study. As English knowledge began to filter through my schema, I began to look at the people in my graduate department. I was finally ready to date again, only to my disappointment; there were no black men in the English graduate department. There were White men, no Asian men, one Latino man who was gay, one African man who was married, and plenty of women, lesbian and heterosexuals. No black men. I wondered, "Where have all the black men gone?"

Now, years later as a college and adult literacy instructor and once again a graduate student pursuing my doctorate, I notice the absence of black men in higher education. I stand in front of my college class facilitating a discussion on Ralph Ellison's "Battle Royal" and I realize that I am preaching to the offspring of the oppressors. I do not believe white students understand what Ellison's issues are. I am alone in my battle for the dignity of black men and the black race as I explain the racial derision that explodes from Ellison's pre-civil rights scene of young black boys made to fight each

other and stare at a naked White women in the center of jeering White men. Sadly, the absence of black men is not a problem in my adult high school classroom. In fact, the classes in the literacy program teem with black men who seem to smoke marijuana, have behavioral problems, low-skilled reading and writing, an inability to express themselves verbally, and a probation officer looming over their existence. The black men who complete their GED or high school diploma usually earn certification in a trade or enter the menial labor force. I am concerned with this waning presence of black men in higher education and the increasing presence of them in the prison system. I am concerned with the decreasing success rate of black men at the undergraduate and graduate levels.

My brother who practices intellectual agility through reading any and every text he encounters does not have a college degree. He entered college and the work force simultaneously in the seventies. Shortly after this, he became a husband and a stepfather. Of course, work became the more important of the two seeing that he had to support a family. Thirty years later, he applauds his three sisters for completing college and earning Master's degrees; however, his own accomplishment of raising three black boys to manhood in America, in his eyes, is nothing to laud. We, his three sisters, remind him that one of the most powerful achievements he has to this date are: raising three sons who have never been arrested or chided by the legal system, having two sons graduate from high school, one of whom attends college, and another attending high school. All of his sons are presently childless, drug free, and caring young men. My brother; however, has crashed into what white racist Americans would consider the laziness and unaccomplished black man—himself. My brother is neither lazy nor unaccomplished.

His accomplishments are not defined as a masculine task by white American ideals. He is a great father and role model to young black boys. Nevertheless, because he did not succeed at what white American men have set as an indicator of masculine strength, namely being the breadwinner for the family and a business mogul, he feels unaccomplished.

In a culture where education is primarily based on the European-American influence, it is difficult for varying cultures to give presence to their own voice in America, especially the African-American male whose history of captivity and oppression is a vital part of the American composite. According to Karen Arenson, researchers believe “obstacles keeping black men from earning college degrees include poor education before college, the low expectations that teachers and others have for them, a lack of black men as role models, their dropout rate from high school and their own low aspirations” (1), “a lack of financial aid, socio-cultural challenges, and institutional incompatibility” (Spradley). I will add the obdurate racial and gender perspective and methodology of American education, specifically in curriculum development and acceptability which makes learning in American colleges culturally and gender biased thus inaccessible to African-American male students. In order for educators to encourage black male students to graduate from college, we must legitimize their perspectives as not divested from the dominant culture but as a vital part of American culture.

Paulo Freire in *Reading the Word and the World*, recognizes that the dominant culture must change in order for other cultures to have power. Freire states that any time

language is debated it ushers in “the reorganization of cultural hegemony” (150). Rap, as representation of the popular black male voice, changes the positioning of language in the dominant culture. The rise of rap questions the language of power as an instructional tool. Although speaking of African culture, Freire’s ideals apply to any culture. He states that the language of power in different cultures “provides access to positions of political and economic power for the high echelon” of that culture;

it screens out the majority of the masses, who fail to learn [the dominant language] well enough to acquire the necessary literacy level for social, economic, and political advancement. By offering a literacy program conducted in the language of the [dominant culture] with the aim of [controlling and civilizing the masses],...educators have, in fact, developed new manipulative strategies that support the maintenance of ...cultural dominance. (105)

Teaching in the dominant language only serves those who can learn it well enough for political and economic advancement; however, this strategy only maintains the superiority of the dominant language and culture. It does not give the masses, in this case young black males, equal access to the power structure. Freire continues that in order to reach the masses it is necessary to teach in their native tongue. In his studies, he found “that students learn to read faster and with better comprehension when taught in their native tongue. The immediate recognition of familiar words and experiences enhances the development of a positive self-concept in children who are somewhat insecure about the status of their language and culture”. By encouraging black male students to express their experience of the world, educators will validate the black male’s desire to name the

world by improving a feeling of entitlement resulting in more educational degrees and higher economic control for the black male that directly lessens the constant rise of the undereducated, lower-economic black male presence in the prison system.

This study will examine the absence of black males in higher education, the historical and cultural factors that contribute to that absence, as well as research that explores those factors. Then, using theory and research on literacy and difference, it will offer some suggestions for pedagogical initiatives in institutions to alter the educators' perception of and service to black male students, by developing programs, workshops and reorganizing curriculum design specifically to encompass the creation of the inner-city black male and to empower him in higher education. The celebration or "discovery" of the black male voice ushers into academia the presence of the black male. Each time history has acknowledged the presence of the black male, academia has studied and examined his voice and him. However, recently, academia seems to reject everything of the black male because of the connotation of the black male persona associated with rap music and the hip-hop culture. Many times throughout history, society admonished the black male voice for being too sexual, too violent, or too real. Part of the work of this project is to examine academia's perception, acceptance, and commodification of the black male voice and its impact on the black male students' success rate in college.

In chapter one, "Where have all the black Men gone," I will address the cultural and social impact of fewer black men graduating from college. I will present the burgeoning discrepancy between the percentage of black males graduating from college and the percentage of all other college graduates. I will also present the reasons that black

men fail or succeed in American colleges as told through the voices of various black males who graduated from, never attended, or withdrew from college.

Chapter two explores compositional theory and reader-response theory that encourage instructors to involve the experience of the student in course curriculum development. This technique would influence black males toward presence in freshman English curriculum. Involving the black male in the composition curriculum would not only give them presence in academia but also validate their voice and experience and introduce them to experiences of others.

Chapter three focuses on the masculinity of the black male, which will simply be termed black masculinity. I will discuss how black masculinity plays out in the community and in the development of voice in academia. I will examine the effects of black masculinity on the community and academia, more specifically--how black masculinity perpetuates black males' success in the community and their failure in college.

Chapter four expounds on the tenets of classical and modern rhetoric that are present in the art of rap. As the re-manifestation of the plight of the inner-city black male voice, rap follows the tenets of classical and modern rhetoric. Academia has a history of rebuking the marginalized only to later embrace their message and stylistic progress. I find that most people's comments regarding rap are reactionary/reader-response and not critical; it is necessary that we analyze the message and the words themselves. My colleague, Michelle Jackson, and I will also look at the possibilities of implementation of

and the way a modified service learning process can influence the sustainability of the black male in college.

Finally, chapter five will offer some solutions as well as chronicle how some academic programs are responding to the call of black male students in college. I will examine the outcomes of courses, academic programs, and community organizations specifically designed to address and encourage black men in college. I will examine the success of these programs geared towards the empowerment of young black men.

Sustainability of black male students begins with presence, and development and acknowledgement of voice strengthens presence. It has been many years since the black male voices of the Harlem Renaissance and the emergence of internationally acclaimed black male artists such as Dubois, McKay, Hughes, Cullen, and Wright expressed their experiences in America. According to Robert Di Yanni's literature anthology, Langston Hughes' poems seek to "explain and illuminate the Negro condition in America," I believe, just as conscious rap (721). Hughes' poems sought to offer "a transcription of urban life through a portrayal of the speech, habits, attitudes, and feelings of an oppressed people." Rap does more "than reveal the pain of poverty"; it tells the story of some experiences that black people, black males, inner-city dwellers, and the impoverished have experienced in America. Many of the already mentioned authors are now not only accepted as part of the canon, but also heralded for their creative expressions in the throes of oppression. It would seem that colleges would be all accepting because of these multicultural additions to the canon; however, hooks states, "[p]eople have this fantasy...of colleges being liberatory institutions, when in fact they're so much like every

other institution in our culture in terms of *repression* and *containment*” (260), and like society, have shunned rap, the urban black male creation. Although I do not adhere to the violence, crime, and misogynistic views that explode from the videos and lyrics of many rap artists, I also do not adhere to the notion that some people be ignored or quieted while other aggressive artists speak freely and vulgarly. It bewilders me as to why academia admonishes the new voices of urban black males in the form of rap since in the past it has championed the creative expression of victims of both America’s misogynistic past and its racist vilification of blacks from slavery to the Civil Rights Movement.

College composition classes are the place that teachers and students, particularly black males, might discourse about rap to find a connection with other texts. It is better and necessary to analyze *what* is being said and *why* it is being said than to criticize without thinking critically about rap. By reading and writing about the connection between texts and the students’ lives, educators can assist black male students, all students, in finding a connection that would allow them to find relevance in the literature and in their own pursuit of education. This process would encourage black males to express their experiences and maintain their identities while validating their presence and voice in composition classes and ultimately society. Black men will start to feel empowered and part of the community as stated by Interviewer O:

My decision to attend college has affected my life as a black man in college because I actually come into contact with white people. They are my peer group now along with black/latinos. I realized that drugs and gangs are not normal to have through out a neighborhood. I also got a chance to experience a different culture.

How might we as educators encourage students and the community to think critically, to enter liberatory education if we react and attack without first believing and understanding? If situated knowledge is truly the present focus of the academic force, then we must critically examine rap, like other texts, as one powerful way to invite students to be critically engaged in discovering the rhetoric of texts and to encourage the voice and presence of the urban black male in college.

## **CHAPTER I**

### **WHAT DO WE DO ABOUT THE BLACK MAN PROBLEM?**

#### **Overview**

In this chapter, I discuss the implications of education for the black population after slavery and the prominent black leaders that developed strategies to educate the black male at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. I will also examine the now substantial disparity between the number of college age black men in prison as opposed to attending college and its impact on the black family structure and economics, the black community and black leadership. Finally, I compile the thoughts of some college age black men regarding the role and experiences of black men in the educational system in America in order to provide an illustration of the problem educators encounter as they hope to invite and retain black males in educational environments.

#### **Background**

January 1, 1863, the day of the Emancipation Proclamation, put forth by Abraham Lincoln, along with the end of the Civil War signaled the start of the “Negro Problem<sup>1</sup>.” After the slaves were freed, the battle and concern of not only the former white slave owners but also of the more progressive former black slaves was: what is society to do with millions of undereducated and uneducated black people? During slavery, some white mistresses had taught their slaves to read and write<sup>2</sup>. However, the aftermath of the proclamation ushered in a mass of black people ineffective as citizens without the

capability to obtain capital and land because of their lack of literacy. Freed slaves could afford neither food nor shelter. The acquisition of these things eluded most freedmen for they had nowhere to go- no land, no home and no capital for gaining provisions for themselves or their families. The freed slaves needed to gain access to work and capital. Pierce of Boston (no first name) established the Freedmen's Bureau in 1861, at the request of U.S. Treasury Secretary Salmon Portland Chase, to "grapple with [the] vast problems of race and social condition" of the ever-growing populace of freed slaves with no money and no work at many fortresses answering the military call. In his important work on the history of the black population in America immediately after the Civil War in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), Dubois champions one success of the Freedmen's Bureau that resulted from the act of 1866, "the sale of Confederate public property for Negro schools" (68). The Freedmen's Bureau established free elementary education for blacks and "the idea of free elementary education among all classes in the South" (DuBois 71). bell hooks, contemporary feminist and race theorist, echoes Dubois in *We Real Cool*: "In the late nineteenth century and early part of the twentieth, any black male seeking to move from bondage to freedom looked to education as a way out" (34). Education for the black person after emancipation was understood as a way to transcend the poverty, depravity, and self-loathing felt because of the effects of slavery and racism. Thus, there was a need for community development and leadership in the black community. From this struggle, various prominent black male figures emerged.

Of the many prominent black men to emerge as leaders after the emancipation were Booker T. Washington and his successor W. E. B. DuBois. Washington believed

that a black person could elevate himself through hard work, by gaining an “industrial education, and accumulation of wealth, and the conciliation of the south” (DuBois 88). Washington wanted black men to advance themselves predominantly in agricultural and industrial education. Washington believed in separatism and a continuance of former slaves to use their learned skills to build the black community. His ideas maintained a familiar interaction amongst black and white people, and many condoned his ideas. DuBois’ succession of Washington continued the belief that in order for the black man “to attain his place in the world, he must be himself, and not another” (DuBois 49). DuBois believed that one must return to his historical consciousness in order to return to his true self by acquiring a liberal arts education and agitating racial equality laws.

During Reconstruction, educating the population of black males was necessary for the survival of the masses of former slaves. Many black men stepped forward to encourage black men to seek an education. Amongst the many prominent black male leaders were W. E. B. DuBois and Booker T. Washington who both fueled possibly the most notorious black leadership conflict of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Both men promoted the idea of positive self-image and education to advance the black male and black race after the Emancipation Proclamation. Although, at times, they seemed on opposite ends of the educational spectrum, one promoting liberal arts education and the other industrial education, they both fought for racial equality for the black race.

Booker T. Washington was born a slave in 1856 and raised in meager circumstances on a small farm and worked in a salt furnace and coal mine. He worked his way through Hampton Institute in Virginia by doing janitorial work to pay for his

tuition, room and board, books and clothing. His notorious speech, the “Atlanta Compromise Address” (1895) is an excellent example of his advancement strategy for black men to gain racial equality. In his speech, he encourages white politicians to support black men’s endeavors in trade and farming, for Washington believed that an impractical education was unnecessary for the black race since they did not possess land and money. For example, if a family is in financial distress and possesses a sewing machine, that sewing machine should bring them some profit through either selling the machine or using the machine to sew products. Having it there for the sole purpose of ownership, as a sign of wealth, was useless. Washington believed in practicality. He noted in his speech that white politicians should hire and provide education and jobs for black men because the black race in return would relinquish their fight for social equality and civil rights. Washington believed that if the black race gained money and land, it would prove to the white race that they were active civil members of the society, and then they would earn social equality and civil rights.

In his speech, he asserts, “The wisest among my race understand that the agitation of questions of social equality is the extremest (sic) folly, and that progress in the enjoyment of all the privileges that will come to us must be the result of severe and constant struggle rather than of artificial forcing” (Harlan 584). He believed that after the black race established itself economically and proved itself to the white population, white politicians would give blacks their civil rights and honor. Washington believed if the black race proved its usefulness for the white race that they would reward the blacks by granting them citizenship in society. Washington encouraged blacks to continue their

skilled manual labor jobs, woodworking, and house cleaning. He encouraged the black race to build homes and schools, to buy land, to be independent. Washington believed that blacks and whites should be socially “as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress” (Harlan 584).

DuBois, on the other hand, did not experience slavery. His family had not encountered slavery for more than a hundred years. He was born in 1868 into a middle class family in Massachusetts, well away from the harsh racist southern states of Washington’s youth. DuBois was educated at Fisk University (1885-1888) and then earned a PhD from Harvard University (1895) and attended the University of Berlin. A professor of economics and history at Atlanta University, DuBois did a series of sociological studies regarding the conditions of the blacks in the south during the time Washington developed his program of industrial education. At first, DuBois supported many of Washington’s strategies; however, he noticed that these strategies did nothing to better the position of blacks in society. In fact, DuBois believed that the strategies tacitly encouraged the alleged inferiority of the black culture. DuBois noted three trends that resulted from Washington’s program: 1) the disfranchisement of the black culture, 2) the legal creation of a distinct status of civil inferiority for blacks, and 3) steady withdrawals of aid from institutions for the higher training of blacks. Many white politicians as well as black supporters who believed in Washington’s industrial education programs withdrew all support from higher education to either support Washington’s program or no educational plan for blacks all together.

DuBois' method to accomplish racial equality was through education in the liberal arts. He believed that persistent agitation, political action, and a liberal arts education would be the means to achieve full citizenship rights for blacks. His philosophy of the "Talented Tenth" was that they would develop "the Best of [the black] race that they may guide the Mass away from the contamination and death of the Worst, in their own and other races" (DuBois 74). DuBois believed that the college-educated elite would chart, through their knowledge, the way for economic and cultural elevation for the black masses. Black leadership should come from college-trained backgrounds. However, he understood that the mass of black youths should be encouraged towards industrial education.

Although DuBois and Washington had different and conflicting methods for accomplishing racial equality, they shared many common beliefs. DuBois and Washington both blamed the black culture for its own conditions. They emphasized self-help and moral improvement rather than rights, placed economic advancement before universal manhood suffrage, encouraged acceptance of franchise restrictions based on education and property qualifications but not on race, believed in racial solidarity and economic cooperation, or Black Nationalism, encouraged the development of black businesses, and agreed the black masses should receive industrial training. In their struggle for racial equality, Washington and DuBois understood the freed slaves' difficulty in finding their place in America. How were former slaves going to survive soon after the demise of America's most ambitious, most devastating, and most effective business venture?

The success of slavery might be largely due to its brainwashing inferiority effects on the captured Africans and slaves through generations. The long lasting effects of racial inferiority, as imposed by the dominant culture, are evident in Dr. Kenneth Clark's doll experiment used as evidence in the 1975 *Brown v. Board of Education* case. Dr. Clark asked black children to choose the good doll and then the bad doll, of which most chose the white and then black dolls respectively. He concluded from his studies, "that the Negro child accepts as early as six, seven, or eight the negative stereotypes about his group" (Beggs 4). The hegemonic culture, those who impose their everyday practices and common beliefs as a means of domination, somehow, not only convinced themselves of their alleged ordained position as the master but they were also able to convince others of their greatness. The bible was used as a great source to encourage slave masters' beliefs amongst the slaves. For example, Ephesians 6:5 states, "Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you obey Christ." Here the scriptures encouraged slaves to obey their masters as they would Christ. After enforcing a great religious movement to have the slaves read and adhere to the bible, such words were instilled in the slaves' way of living. Thus, the masters believed they respected the word and would be good docile slaves.

### **Black Males in Prison Outnumber Black Males in College**

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many black male writers recognized the need for the education of black males. One of the most influential black writers for the black revolution, Richard Wright sought education—reading and writing—as a mechanism to overcome his experience of poverty and racism. In bell hooks' *We Real Cool*, she notes,

“Richard Wright recalls that reading books gave him a vision of a different life, that by imagining himself as a writer ‘he kept hope alive’” (35). For Wright, as for other black male writers, reading—attaining an education—about other ways of life and environments transformed the reality of his life into something great and different. Education allowed Wright to soar beyond his struggles; he believed that he would overcome hardships that perhaps he, as a poor black boy in Chicago during the racist environment of the early 1900’s, might escape to some place better. Not only did he see himself as a reader but also as a writer. As a black male writer, Wright knew that he, along with other black writers, could write a more positive, more true to life image of the black male and himself. Wright believed, “The images, symbols, products, creations, promotions, and authorities of white America, taught [him] to hate [himself]” (hooks 36). Wright knew that to write himself would be an act of self love, not an act of hate. Encouraging more black males to read and write might afford black males to continue their education to love themselves. Representation of themselves in print would encourage a more positive image and presence of black men to the world. Wright implies that when one sees himself in a book, he perceives his own presence or sees himself as important.

There is a widening discrepancy between the percentage of black men graduating from college and the percentage of all other college graduates. This widening discrepancy is a return to the “Negro Problem” at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Washington’s and DuBois’ methods to educate the masses of former slaves are very applicable now for young black men who need guidance. These young black men need Washington to

encourage them to gain an “industrial education and...wealth” (DuBois 88) and DuBois would encourage them to pursue a liberal arts education to be “the Best of [the black] race” (DuBois 74). Their presence in the 1900’s encouraged many black men towards educational and economic success. The lack of presence of black men in academia that Wright spoke of in his own education still exist as a factor for few black male college graduates. According to the research of Karen W. Arenson, although the numbers have increased of black men from ages 25 years old and over enrolling in college from 143,000 (1990) to 267,000 (1995) to 335,000 (2000) according to the 2001 U. S. Census Bureau, many black men do not graduate. For example, in 1996, 35 percent of the Black men who entered NCAA Division I colleges... graduated within six years, compared with 59 percent of the white men, 46 percent of the Hispanic men, 41 percent of the American Indian men and 45 percent of the black women who entered the same year (1). The remaining Black men either withdrew from classes or reduced themselves to less than half-time students.

One could argue that perhaps during economic distress the number of black male students not getting higher degrees are working more hours or starting their own businesses to gain financial status. Historically, during times of economic distress, black and white men do leave school and their families to find work to provide for their families. For example, historian Joyce Brown, asserts that in Long Island, New York during the Great Depression of 1929, “most of the migrants were southern blacks who followed the picking season north and return to their permanent homes in the South in late fall to repeat the cycle” (1). These men left their homes and families to survive, to

find work to support their families. However, unfortunately, now young men more often are in prison than in the workplace. The number of Black men in prison is staggering in comparison to college enrollment. According to the Common Sense for Drug Policy,

Of the 265,100 state prison inmates serving time for drug offenses in 2002, 126,000 (47.53%) were black... [a]mong the more than 2.1 million offenders incarcerated on June 30, 2004, an estimated 576,600 were black males between ages 20 to 39"; ...and [a]mong males ages 25 to 29, 12.6 % of black were in prison or jail. ("Race")

These numbers for black men far outnumber that of Hispanics and white men incarcerated and are out of proportion to the percentage of black men in the population at large. According to the U.S. Department of Justice: "At year end 2004 there were 3,218 black men sentenced prison inmates per 100,000 black male's in United States, compared to 1,220 Hispanic male inmates per 100,000 Hispanic males and 463 white male inmates per 100,000 white males." In 2000, there was a "boom in prison construction and an increase in the number of people being incarcerated for non-violent crimes, there were 791,600 black men in American prisons and county jails, and only 603,032 enrolled in colleges and universities" ("Race").

The National need for more prisons as opposed to more schools reverberates in the national spending choice. In the past 20 years "[s]pending on prisons has increased from 2.1% of the national budget to 6.3%... while higher education spending has fallen from 8% to 4.3%" ("Race"). Statistics show the total number of people in jail during the same period rose from 502,000 to 2.1 million, while numbers in college increased

from 12.1 million to 14.8 million. If black men continue to fail at attaining higher education degrees, evidence in research shows a devastating impact on the black family, black employment, black economy, and the presence of black politicians.

These statistics should cause an alarm to sound not only in the black American communities, but also in all American communities. Have we not seen in history what happens to an isolated, insulated community when they lack educational progress in America? The Native American community is America's most oppressed people, for they still suffer the restriction and legal sanctions of the trust agreement of the U.S. government:

According to the 2000 Census, there were 4.1 million American Indians, including Alaska Natives. Native Americans remain the poorest minority group in America. The poverty rate among Indian people is 25.9%, compared to the national rate of 11.3%. Associated with this poverty are poor health conditions, lack of affordable and decent housing, substandard education, a critical lack of jobs, and a host of other barriers that keep most Native American communities isolated and economically distressed. ("Native")

Some studies report that these conditions associated with economically distressed Native Americans also ail many black communities. The isolation of Native Americans from that of mainstream America resembles the isolation of poor communities and black communities from those of wealthy and white communities. Separation amongst white and black communities during Jim Crow Laws<sup>3</sup> supposedly ended with the groundbreaking case of Brown vs. Board of Education. But, after the hard work of the

lawyers that won this case, black men today do not reap the benefits of nor do they seem to fight for them in education.

David Hefner, in his article, “Where the Boys Aren’t: the Decline of Black Males in Colleges and Universities has Sociologists and Educators Concerned about the Future of the African American Community,” relays some social indicators of few black men earning college degrees:

Today, as the country celebrates the 50th anniversary of Brown v. Board of Education, the case that ended legal segregation in American public schools, young Black men are, by most social indicators, unraveling at the seams. More are being incarcerated, more are rejecting fatherhood, more are dropping out of high school and fewer are going to college. And, in nearly half of Black households today, the responsibility of provider and protector has shifted to Black women. (2)

One very applicable point of the U.S. Supreme Court document Brown v. Board of Education, 347U.S. 483, was “Segregation of children in public schools solely on the basis of race deprives children of the minority group of equal educational opportunities, even though the physical facilities and other ‘tangible’ factors may be equal” (2).

Although black men have the same tangible resources as men of other races and black women, education is still inequitable and certain opportunities are not afforded them.

These opportunities are in the form of job placement and economic advancement.

Jonathan Jacobson, Cara Olsen, Jennifer King Rice, Stephen Sweetland, and John Ralph assert,

Studies have revealed a strong relationship between differences in prior educational achievement and Black-White disparities in college attendance and earnings. With Black-White disparities remaining in both educational and economic outcomes, it is important to understand the relationship between educational achievement during elementary and secondary and subsequent academic and labor market performance. (2)

Lower education results in lower paying jobs, which results in an inability to provide for a family.

Undereducated black men beset with the decision of earning legal or illegal money often opt for the latter. Economist and researcher, Sheri M. Whitley believes, “Undereducated and without jobs that pay meaningful wages, many black men are unable to support their families, which they often abandon. Their children grow up without the benefit of a father...continuing the cycle of poverty” (1). When undereducated men have families, it results in some families living below the poverty line. Jobs available to undereducated people are often limited to food services, cleaning services, and other labor-intensive jobs that require on-job training, without any educational prerequisite. Low-skilled jobs are not stable because job turn around is quick. One study states, “Many college noncompleters do poorly in the labor market[s]” (“*Outcomes*” 1) that “have turned their backs on low-skilled workers, especially men” (Whitley 1). This decline has both social and cultural impact for the black populace.

Some black men who do not graduate from college are often unable to acquire legitimate jobs that offer high wages because their lack of academic preparation has reduced their marketability and limited their choices. Selling illegal drugs, known as

slinging on the street, often seems to them their only option for survival. Many black men end up in prison for selling drugs while trying to support a family or live beyond their means. Every man wants to be as they say “about the Benjamins” – money conscious and wealthy. In *A Raisin in the Sun*, Lorraine Hansberry’s play about the difficulties of a black family to make economic progress in 1950’s America, the protagonist, Walter Lee Younger states, “I want me some yachts some day. Yes I want hang some real pearls ‘round my wife’s neck. Ain’t she supposed to wear no pearls?” (137). He exhibits his desire to not only support his family but also to provide luxury for his wife. Historically, a lack of education along side racial discrimination creates circumstances in which black men, like Younger, are forced to work low waged, labor jobs. In the pre-Civil Rights era, many black people believed education “was not only worth dying for, but was the Golden Fleece that best combated the vestiges of enslavement” (Hefner 2). Education not only meant gaining knowledge and skills to attain a job and seek higher living, but also to move from slave status to citizenship as DuBois and Washington desired for the black race after Emancipation. Education meant the opportunity to gain the American Dream. For black people, education, as exhibited by the *Brown v. Board of Education*, was worth dying for because their lack of education prohibited and threatened not just the advancement of the black race but its survival. So earning an education was a matter of life or death for the black race from Reconstruction to the Civil Rights Movement. It seems that this “Do or Die” mentality is a slow trickle down of Che Guevara’s saying “it’s better to die standing up than to live on your knees”, and today many young black men may justify committing crimes as a way of defying the

white establishment. They believe they must, for example, sell drugs or die in the harsh streets. Nevertheless, the prison statistics show that they pay the tremendous price of freedom for their illegal acts.

Many of the undereducated men who are imprisoned perhaps were raised in communities that are poor and predominantly black. It has been a national struggle since Reconstruction to educate the black population and encourage economic development in black communities. Poor areas suffer much decline because of a concentration of crime, low waged jobs, and drug use and sell, which are all detrimental to society. What legitimate jobs exist in the 'hood? In poor and black communities in various cities in the United States, there are few jobs that do not require technical or skill-based training or some education. However, educational achievement is not the only indicative of employment differences between black and white people:

Differences in educational achievement can predict only a portion of Black –White differences in employment and men's earnings, other factors must contribute to racial disparities in these outcomes. Possible reasons for the remainder of these gaps include a relative shortage of jobs in areas where Blacks live, fewer job networks for Blacks, and the existence of labor market discrimination against Blacks. Unmeasured skill differences between labor force participants of different racial backgrounds may also contribute to the remaining Black-White disparities in employment and men's earnings. (Jacobson et al.)

Unemployment for black men may not be simply a lack of education. Due to the consistent population growth yet the lack of wealth in these communities, businesses usually find it difficult to earn profit. In many depressed neighborhoods fast-food

restaurants and convenient stores are few and cannot hire the entire population that needs employment. Often businesses that open in these types of lower-economic neighborhoods close their doors shortly after opening because they cannot make a profit (Jacobson et al). Limited job availability in poor communities contributes to the high number of unemployment for black men in the communities.

Similarly to the results of unemployed black men, when black men with families end up in jail it not only puts pressure on the woman to take on both roles –father and mother- but it also creates in the child’s mind that the father does not care. When fathers are absent from the lives of their children, the instability of the slave family<sup>6</sup> is reenacted. “Prominent black lawyers like Johnnie Cochran and Harvard law Professor Charles Ogletree continue to blame fatherlessness in black families on the lingering ill effects of slavery” (*Citizen 2*). It seems that many black men instead of acquiring an education to pursue a higher wage job to support themselves and their families, many make quick illegal money and eventually they go off to prison like others go off to the reserves; a life of crime recruits and entices them. Somehow, historical wires are crossed in our black men where they believe going to jail is protesting “The Man.”

### **Missed Perception of the American Dream**

One of my young black male students told me that he went to prison just like Martin Luther King Jr. When asked to explain how his going to jail for possession of marijuana compared to Martin Luther King Jr’s going to prison for racial equality, he responded, “I was fighting for my rights to live my life like a man like Martin.” I was shocked first to hear him address Dr. King by his first name so casually, and then I was

obliterated by his audacity to compare transport of an illegal substance that is ruining the lower socio-economic environment and probably his own neighborhood to Dr. King's fight for the civil rights and integrity of a people. I sat there and stared at the young man with blame and shame, for my generation had not taught him well. My generation, Generation X—the babies with the rose colored glasses who were born and raised in the afterglow of the Civil Rights Movement--taught him only to fight and defy oppression. We never defined the oppression worth fighting and the methodology. We did not teach the younger generation from a historical perspective to honor the freedom soldiers before us. Instead we taught them slogans of freedom fighters such as Malcolm X's, "An eye for an eye" and "The price of freedom is death." Our abridged versions of African-American history were not conducive to critical thinking and now are often used as anthems for criminal behavior or minimal citizen involvement. Gang banging and selling drugs traps many black men in their neighborhoods, in their environments and in their behaviors away from mainstream society. They return from prison to the streets because criminal behavior is often their only conditioning for survival. They understand that most businesses will not hire ex-convicts. Their hopes for the American dream are dashed.

Black men who receive rehabilitation in prison expect acceptance into American society once they return. However, America does not easily accept ex-convicts, especially black ex-convicts, into its mainstream. Instead, these men face rejection; society frowns at them. They receive no rewards for "rehabilitation" inside the prison system, so they often end up back on the streets. Although the street is more dangerous, it is much kinder to the ex-convict because his skills are accepted and necessary for street

credibility. His skills allow him to make tax-free money that is more than minimum wage. Because prison is a schoolhouse for crime, the ex-con believes that he emerges with more skills to outsmart the government and acquire the American dream by his own design. After all, planting the seed for wealth and making it grow through one's own blood and sweat is the American way. For example, the most formidable family considered the royalty of America—the Kennedy's--gained wealth through hooch money, scorch money, money earned by the father Kennedy while selling illegal liquor during the prohibition days<sup>4</sup>. Like the members of these other groups, poor men, black men, dream of rising from rags to riches, so they continue to make money any way possible.

When few black men graduate from college and choose a life of crime, it causes an imbalance within the culture, particularly with educated black women and it upsets the family structure. Where do educated black women find a husband? According to researchers, Margaret M. Porter and Arline L. Bousaft, the number of educated black women outnumber that of educated black men:

Fewer Black men than Black women are receiving college degrees (Yeakey & Bennett, 1990). At both predominantly White and traditionally Black college and university campuses, far more Black women than Black men are in attendance (Washington & Newman, 1991). Black women are also earning more advanced degrees. From 1982 to 1992, the number of Black men earning doctorates declined by 20%; by 1992, Black women outnumbered them 565 to 386 (Manegold, 1993). (1)

Here, black women not only earn college degrees more than black men, but also earn degrees beyond bachelor's degrees. When the educated black woman wants to wed and have children, she must then date men of other races, date women, or choose to be alone.

However, none of this solves her preference for the black man. As a remedy, some black women will choose to date black men in the prison system. This causes a class imbalance between highly educated women and men with little to no secondary education, which in turn, causes a direct imbalance inside of the household. Educated black women usually seek educated black men, and when there are few educated black men, it reduces the educated black women's chances of equal economic support in a relationship. Nevertheless, it also puts a strain on the interaction between them in the relationship that is beyond the availability of black men. In addition to black women's frustration about availability, "hostility between Black men and Black women has increased because Black men are 'losing educational and economic ground'" (Porter & Bonsaft 31). Often educated wives make more money than their uneducated husbands do. This financial imbalance makes apparent the husbands' inability to provide for his family, which in turn questions his masculinity. Furthermore, "Black men's sometimes aggressive and violent behavior toward Black women stems from their attempts to adopt White men's role; thus, the reality that Black men have as yet been unable to assume the level of participation in society enjoyed by White men exacerbates Black male/female tension" (Porter 1). Historically and traditionally, the man was to provide financially for the family, however, with the increase of working women and single parent homes, financial responsibility shifted from the man and onto the woman.

American society continues to wrestle with the myth of patriarchy, that of the man being the sole financial provider, protector and guide of the family. However, with a lack of education and substantial job and monetary support, many "Black men cannot serve as

protectors of Black women [which] is particularly disturbing to professional and educated Black women. Hare (1979) claims that slavery and racial oppression have led to distrust, envy, and disloyalty between Black men and Black women” (Porter 1). The inability of black men to protect their families from the white culture has caused a fissure between black men and black women. In the new family model, educated, independent woman earning a large paycheck upsets household relational dynamics. According to Marie Hartwell-Walker,

some researchers have found that once a wife’s income is actually greater than her husband’s, he tends to be less and less involved at home and that couples are more likely to reassert traditional roles if the balance between earning power is tipped too much toward the woman. Perhaps women still need to think that they can rely on men to take care of them. Perhaps men need to feel that they are still the “head of household” to feel like a man. (1)

The fragile male ego finds it difficult to follow the rule of the woman knowing that she makes the money of the house. Many men will not live with women as head of the household unless men become feminists.

Traditionally the woman and family follow the success of the man. My brother is an example of the conflict and feeling of failure described by many black men and many black male writers. Unlike this model, my brother has accepted with a little resistance, the excelling of my sister-in-law in the business world. My brother was laid off due to continual back and anxiety problems in his early thirties. As his anxiety increased, he found it difficult to go outside. During his time of injury, his wife excelled at her job. She took courses that would allow her to make more money so that she might

compensate for the reduction in household income, for my brother's anxiety attacks did not qualify him to receive continuous worker's compensation pay. After he lost his job and his benefits, he no longer felt useful as the man of the house. He began to get depressed although he was still a great father to his three sons. He began having visions of killing and raping men and women of any cultures. He began to express a violent nature towards people, more specifically black women. I believe his behavior was not that of a true crime but rather a vision, a desire to control his environment<sup>5</sup>. I know he felt out of control and used, abused, perhaps even emasculated. He felt victimized by his job, the doctors and his wife. The lower his self-esteem the higher his feeling of victimization, the more he lashed out with violent comments. He made continual comments about society, men, women, even his wife taking away his manhood. In conversations with me he made comments such, as "black women don't really help black men. The black man is in jail because of the black woman. He goes out and commits a crime because she wants this or that. The black man goes out and sells drugs so he can give her the things she wants." His words expressed what I believe many black men feel and experience in America. He felt violent towards all things adverse and rejecting that prevents him from investing in the American dream. My brother's desire to rape and do violence to men and women was a lashing out towards society. He believed the illusion of the American dream and it failed him because he had not taken a promotion that he was offered a year prior to his back injury. In retrospect, he realizes that had he taken the promotion he might have avoided the back injury and losing his job.

My brother, like many black men, prides himself for overcoming the circumstantial limitations created by racist white America. He wants to be in the fight for the cause but he does not want to be the cause. His fight for a position or presence in America is the same battle that his black ancestors fought. Presence of and respect for the black man in America were the struggles of Martin Luther King and Malcolm X and many more black leaders. Perhaps black men receive honor when in good company with civil right fighters who encouraged them to battle against the hegemonic culture. Black men perhaps misconstrue a good battle because of their lack of direction, purpose, and discipline.

### **Voices of Black Men**

There are many reasons black men have chosen to attend or not to attend college, but no one can tell us better than they can in their own words. I wanted to hear what college age black men had to say about black men and college. I wanted to know how they feel about the information that is being said about them. I wanted to know if what we, as academics and researchers, how we perceive them, is it correct. I developed a questionnaire composed of 17 questions (see appendix ). The context of the questionnaire was issues of manhood, education, career choice, family structure, and community/family and street influence. My friends, family, colleagues and I gave questionnaires to black men in Charlotte and New York City at businesses, in college and literacy classrooms, and in our neighborhoods. I asked twelve black men, by phone and through written survey, how they feel about college and black men. The black men ranged from ages 17- 40 years. I chose this large age range because I wanted to know if

their responses or experiences would be similar across generations. Six were raised in a city; four were raised in the suburbs; and two were raised in both during phases of their lives. Many were raised with very little male input, of which some was negative. Four out of ten young men were raised with both parents and a positive role model. Although the questionnaire consisted of seventeen questions, below I have compiled the young men's answers to three questions that I perceived as the focus of their concerns and key to this study.

Why do so many black men turn to the street?

They answered that black men turn to the street because some are “dumb”; they commit senseless crimes and behave in ways that will result in arrest and jail time. Some young men choose not to ignore the strong lure of the streets. This they attributed many factors: black men in poverty often turn to drug dealing to help support the family or to simply attain material goods and street status that they would not otherwise be able to gain. In addition, young black men sometimes need a form of male camaraderie or love due to a lack of familial connections and guidance. According to Interviewee O, “black men think it is normal to be involved in the streets life” (sic). Street life is all that some young black men have known—they were born into struggling in the neighborhood, so they have survival skills for those conditions, but some young black men want to enter the street life because it is popular culture to have street credibility. Interviewee M believes, “Black men turn to the streets for money, street fame, cars, jewelry, fine clothes, basically to draw in the fine young women. It seems easier than what society offers us” (sic). Street life is easier for many black males who do not pursue an education because

it becomes an option for survival. Many black men feel that mainstream requires higher skill levels than street activity. Those mainstream skills require black men to learn which takes time away from earning money, so street life is a quicker route.

Why do you think so many black men are in jail?

The young men had a few common stereotypical retorts for the reason black men are in jail: “cause white men want us to be there he’s sell us gun and drug and when we use them we go to jail” (sic, Interview D). “It is a conspiracy to lock all the black men up for any reason to show they don’t have no power and to bring slavery back” (sic, Interview O), and “for senseless crimes and unfair justice systems” (Interview P). These black males believe the government—who they call “the white man”—is to blame for the magnitude of imprisoned black men. Yet, some responses did find black males responsible for their actions and consequences. Three black males believe that black men are imprisoned because: “we are misguided. Each generation...believe that jail is our way to manhood. Another reason is because of our inability to make the right choices when amongst friends” (Interview M); “no respect for life (murder) and not responsible (selling drugs)” (Interview V); and “Youth get caught up in [street] life, go to jail, fail to get rehabilitated, come out to the exact same thing, and go back to jail. It’s a vicious cycle” (Interview U). Responsibility for the numerous black men in prison fell almost equally on both the policing system and the individual. The interviewed black men believed that those men who commit crimes must be responsible for their actions, just as much as the penal system should treat black men with respect and equal to white men.

What might influence black men to succeed through college?

Many interviewees felt that if other older black men stepped up as positive role models instead of encouraging young black men to become OG's (original gangstas) by selling drugs, committing petty crimes, or joining gangs, young black men might listen and not end up dead or in prison. Perhaps more black males would enter and succeed at college "if more black men stopped bragging about the streets, what they went to jail for, and how many girls they slept with and started talking about how college hopefully changed their lives" (Interviews). Other factors had to do with the college system. Four interviewees mentioned that more money in way of scholarships and grants, more family and community activity "I feel strong Black mentors and good professors would help in black men being successful in college. Also if Black men would start study groups and support groups when we run into situations that are a little challenging. Last not to be afraid of a challenge" (sic, Interview M). According to interview O the black community "should be centers where black men who are thinking about not going to college or dropping out of college could go to get stay motivated to stay in college. They should also get a real life approach about what their life might be without college." All in all the voices of these young black men exposed the feeling of being left behind and that to rectify this emerging problem the neighboring community, family, and the college system should collaborate their efforts to serve the black male student.

My study focuses on black males who completed high school but have a tendency to commit illegal acts that may result in imprisonment. These young black men are intelligent graduates of high school, but for some reason or another have "fallen through

the cracks.” It is my desire to look at those cracks. Why and how is it possible that young black males can graduate high school but fail to enter college or fail to complete college? What is it about educational institutions that challenge their identity? What is it about their identity that challenges educational institutions? Do they find the work difficult or unnecessary to their survival? Do educational institutions seek to develop curriculum that involves the black male?

I will focus on those young black males who feel disfranchised by American society. In American prisons, black males of college age outnumber imprisoned males of any other culture. This is a concern for the survival and progression of the black race. However, it should also concern all American cultures, for black males are at risk of becoming the only group to lose mass political power due to a multitude of felonies. In America, still a patriarchal society, the movement and establishment of the male of the species measure progression. When black American males feel inferior, it reflects on the entire black race. Their lack of progress results in lower socioeconomics for the black family. Their inability to gain legitimate jobs causes much strain on the family structure because it creates an imbalance between male-female relationship dynamics. In cases with children, joblessness and imprisonment of black males also result in child abandonment, which of course creates the cycle of psychological, economical, and political demise. Until feminists and progressive thinkers alter patriarchal structures, we must continuously deal with the problem of black males’ anger and frustration at powerlessness.

In order for many black males to develop self and social empowerment, Freire asserts,

human beings (as both teachers *and* students) within particular social and cultural formations are the starting point for analyzing not only how they actively construct their own experiences within ongoing relations of power, but also how the social construction of such experiences provide them with the opportunity to give meaning and expression to their own needs and voices. (7)

People must analyze how they live their lives inside power dynamics and how they defined and express their needs and voices. This has profound implications for the behaviors and accomplishments of young black males. Teachers and students have the opportunity now to analyze how many disenfranchised black men construct their experiences and what better way to start discussion than through rap music, “through their own language...they will be able to reconstruct their history and their culture,” which tells us the meaning and expression of their lives in their own voices (151).

Rap music is the perfect medium for the urban black males’ voice. It disperses their thoughts to a large audience and encourages discourse from other rappers. It offers figurative language and anecdotes that tell of cultural experiences that are outside and often under the radar of mainstream American culture. Freire believes, “Language ...constitutes both a terrain of domination and field of possibility...both hegemonic and counter hegemonic [are] instrumental in both silencing the voices of the oppressed and in legitimating oppressive social relations” (8). By this Freire means, that language can simultaneously have power over you and for you; it both includes and excludes. In his

dichotomy, young black males' use of certain language, particularly the language of the rap culture, which glorifies much violence, drug use, and misogyny, marks their inclusion with a group rebelling the mainstream and exclusion from the mainstream. The intrusion of rap in the mainstream has caused an uproar that signifies the desire of black males to enter mainstream culture through their own "existence...of [the] historically constructed practice" of storytelling (7). Rap is evidence that black men who are outside of mainstream society want to maintain their identities as they enter and commune with the mainstream. Rap asserts their voices and presence in a society that otherwise has rendered them invisible or negative. The presence and analyzing of rap will open a discourse, if educators take on this opportunity, between those black men and academics. These experiences transform and broaden both, young black men and the mainstream.

### **Summary**

This chapter discussed the historical value of education for the newly emancipated slaves and how the emergence of black leaders, such as Washington and DuBois, paved the way with strategies to educate the black culture in an attempt to gain citizenship in America. It also examined how a lack of education of black males will negatively affect the family, community, leadership, and economics of the black culture. Finally, I gave a voice to this struggle by transcribing the concerns of twelve black men regarding their own beliefs about and experiences within America's educational system. These men offer reasons as to why many black men often flee academia to become a vital, terrifying, statistic in street life.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

#### **Overview**

In this chapter, I will either examine some theorists who argue that the success of the student in the composition class depends either on the curriculum students experientially or culturally identify with or from the way, the student is able to negotiate academic and home language. Just as instructors need a way to connect with and draw in the experiences of basic writers, both the black male and the educator must move towards one another to negotiate their terms so as to find a way to sustain more black male college students. Many disfranchised black men flee academia when they feel uncomfortable. They stop moving towards academic success because often they feel that it is a “white” thing and that they will somehow lose their culture, their credibility and their identity as a struggling black man. What is it about academic institutions that encourage black males to feel uncomfortable and flee it? The composition classroom is a microcosm for the academic institution because the course is required as a basic skills course for college progression.

## **Seeking Presence of Black Males in Composition Courses**

When many students enter freshman composition courses, often they feel, as I did in my freshman composition course in undergraduate school, that the literature and writing will be boring and disconnected from them. Black students not only experience this feeling of potential boredom and lack of experiential connection but also a lack of cultural connection. Black students look over the syllabus as the teacher reads, and they do not see themselves in the curriculum that they will study; black students do not see any texts that represent them. Historically, there is no long list of worthy black scholars required for the freshman composition syllabus. Basic composition focuses on critical thinking and writing by using literature, that academia denotes as the canon. This list in the past was wholly comprised of white American and European literature. There were few texts listed, if any, that focused on the positive progression of the black culture. Now various literatures by Frederick Douglass, James Baldwin, W.E. B. DuBois, Booker T. Washington and Langston Hughes, just to mention a few notably produced scholarly writers speckle the canon list. Many composition readers have texts by modern black writers in them, yet many teachers resist using them and instead continue to honor classical literature.

The aforementioned timeless classics consist of antiquated scenarios for the modern black student. In order to find representation of the contemporary black culture, the black student must venture to take a special course in black studies or African American literature. I can recall having many confusing feelings when an antiquated topic relating to American slavery, segregation, and freedom entered freshman

composition discussion. I sometimes felt that my white classmates and the instructor would see me as defender of all things black and poor, or I felt an imperative to respond. When I commented, perhaps classmates deemed me as a good sport or an angry Negro hating, blaming all white people for the outcome of the black race, depending on the slant of my comment. If I chose not to answer, I thought perhaps my classmates might believe that I was detached from my own black culture and possibly on the side of white liberals. As a black woman, with less the fragile ego of a man, I have suffered such uncertainty about my status in the composition course

Disfranchised black male students who feel ambiguous about their presence in the composition classroom might resist any knowledge that does not involve their culture or their interests; experiences that do not involve them seem to insult or nullify their identity. Freire believes, when students practice “social construction” of their own experiences, it provides “them with the opportunity to give meaning and expression to their own needs and voices,” which would then allow students to feel their identities are present in the classroom (7). In order to connect with and encourage students to participate, educators must encourage students to find relevance to their own lives in the literature. Students will feel valued as active members of the community. When their experiences are shunned it is a direct dismissal of their live experiences.

During my college years, I witnessed a small community of black male students retreat from courses to congregate in the social areas on campus. They often bragged about missing “B-S classes.” They released a barrage of information denoting the classroom events and topics as being for the white man or for a punk (someone socially

weak) and not for him, a black man. The black male students' refusal to learn in the "white man's" institution mirrors the institution's resistance to modify course curriculum to accommodate and include the black male presence. Education cannot occur when both sides resist compromise.

For the past 20 years, academia has pushed for the honoring of the mother tongue in all cultural languages. Academia is at war with itself as to whether students should use their own voice or imitate the language of the academics to express their struggles. This bataille des deux erupted with the Harlem Renaissance and again with the feminist movement. Both of these historical struggles entail the marginalized need to speak and to have presence. Expression validates the voice of the "other." It continues in contemporary academic institutions where non-whites read academic discourse as "white" and always privileged.

Many modern theorists believe that the best way for students who feel disfranchised and suffer a lack of educational exposure to succeed in education is to write and read themselves. It makes sense that students excel when they read work about possible shared experiences. Generally, this means for the Black male students that teachers should place literature on the syllabus that might address some of their connected knowledge, thus perhaps encouraging the black male voice into the discourse of the class, which would validate their voice. Teachers should allow and encourage students to write from their own perspectives and read works that relate to the student. A few theorists who condone this approach are Lisa Delpit, Geneva Smitherman, Louise Rosenblatt, and Mina Shaughnessy. In *The Skin that We Speak* and *Other People's*

*Children*, Lisa Delpit describes how language that intertwines with African-American identity has so many social implications. Smitherman in *Talkin that Talk* chronicles BVE as a dialect that those of the black culture inherited from their African origins and is a vital living part of African American life. Louise Rosenblatt in *Situated Knowledge* discusses the importance of allowing students first to write from their own knowledge and experiences and then later moving them beyond themselves to make a connection with the world. Mina Shaughnessy in *Errors and Expectation* speaks about teachers redefining the concept of error in the writings of the basic writers. Then in “Diving In: An Introduction to Basic Writing,” she discusses stages of emotion that teachers might experience if they professionally modify themselves to understand and connect with remedial writing students.

### **Historical Battle to Educate Black Males**

Throughout history there have been a great many people looking to give presence to the black male and educate the black race in America during and after slavery. Many slave masters encouraged biblical literacy during the religious movements of slavery. They wanted their slaves to control their own urges as opposed to being whipped, which damaged slaves and made them less marketable. They wanted slaves to look to heaven for their good behavior and to hell for their bad behavior; this way slaves suppressed their own urges to revolt. A good slave was a docile, malleable slave. Then of course, we encountered the slave abolitionists who believed illiteracy amongst slaves to be abhorrence. The benevolent slave master was considered a gentle but firm master to allow his slaves, although slight, an education, medical, and to travel between

plantations. The desire to teach the black male slave of course did nothing to quell the negative images of black males in society. The white culture still considered the black male less than human. The effect of white cultures' diminishing of African American humanity has to instill in many blacks what Dubois called "double consciousness."

The greatest concern of DuBois and Washington was the effect of racial inequality and perception on the black race, which DuBois coined as "double consciousness" (DuBois 3). Double consciousness is the mechanism by which the black race developed a perception of itself through its own eyes and the eyes of white society. DuBois explains the twoness divided by the veil:

...the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in his American world, --a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the type of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One even feels his twoness, -- an American, a negro, two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideal in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (3)

Both Dubois and Washington struggled with trying to overcome or negotiate the veil for the black males during the emancipation and reconstruction period. This veil allows blacks to pass amongst different cultural behaviors because of the historical consequences of seeming radical or rebellious, which could result in mass murdering of blacks by white supremist. Washington actually encourages blacks not to socially interact with whites and continue servicing and appeasing whites while blacks build up their

finances. He does not wish for the black male to cross the color line, to pass through the veil. Implicit in his industrial program is a belief that remaining behind the veil will result in the hegemonic white culture eventually giving the black culture their civil rights. In contrast, DuBois declares that it is impossible for black males to remain behind the veil. The idea of the black male living a double life—one inside of his community of which he feels comfort and natural and worthy, and the other in the face of white society—is witness to the present day struggle in identity. Historically, white supremacists have used many epithets that are a historical battle of the black leaders to dispel any myths surrounding such phrases to describe the African American since slavery. Therefore, the gaze of the white culture is always a concern for the black culture when regarding any public behavior. DuBois finds it a travesty that the black culture must exist with this duality, this twoness. This makes it difficult for the black race to understand the composite of its own culture. This twoness causes an inability for the black race to create its own measuring tools to evaluate when and if they arrive to a space of validating a positive self-image. The validated measurement is now always a mechanism created by the white establishment. Thus, the black race must adapt itself to social standards of the hegemonic culture. The black culture must always measure their growth, change, failures and successes by that of the white culture.

Historically, through denial of both educational and work opportunities in American culture, society has implicitly signaled to black males that they are uneducable. Tacitly in social images and to certain black males, they could not fit into the behavior

and language of white males because black males due to the physical labor of slavery are considered more physical than intellectual.

Language is an indicator of knowledge and experience. When the captured Africans first encountered black slaves who could not understand them yet were able to communicate with the white masters, they were confused. The white masters believed language acquisition was the first indicator of docility and civility of the barbaric African. Yet the slave managed to learn the oppressor's tongue and maintain some African language roots. Because of the dangers involved in the master noticing these practices, the African slave hid their native language and practices. Historically the twoness that the slave developed allowed him to survive. Scholars note, "Language has always served as a vehicle of communication among slaves and also [is] used by the plantation masters to talk to their servants" (Account 2). Therefore, this language twoness was a necessary to retain some cultural identity and familiarity that allowed the slaves to remember and reminisce about home and loved ones. Thus, the pattern of twoness remains in black culture today. The creation and perpetuation of home language allows the individual to find strength in connection with people of similar experiences.

### **Learning Black and Speaking Black**

In *The Skin that We Speak*, scholar of the dynamics between race and education, Lisa Delpit, speaks to the idea of comfort language and educational success. Upon transferring her daughter from a predominantly white school to a predominantly black school, she notices that her daughter's speech changes. She becomes confused as to why her daughter chooses a slang dialect over standard dialects. Delpit comments on how she

believes that her child is picking up language that is bad for her progression. As her daughter's language moves from Standard English to that of black dialect, Delpit becomes concerned with her daughter's possible loss of access to the language of power. She questions her daughter's ability to define herself and her place in society if she uses the black dialect, which is deemed powerless and negative by society:

I have come to understand that power plays a critical role in our society and in our educational system. The worldviews of those with privileged positions are taken as the only reality, while the worldviews of those less powerful are dismissed as inconsequential. Indeed, in the educational institutions of this country, the possibilities for poor people and for people of color to define themselves, to determine the self each should be, involve a power that lies outside of the self.  
(*Other XV*)

She is afraid that her daughter will maintain the language that is not of power, one that will not allow her entrance into the power structure, one that will render her voiceless in society. Delpit is painfully aware of "Educational scholars" speculating "children's inferior language was the cause of their learning problem" (*Other XIX*). Often, she finds herself correcting her child hoping that she can counteract the language that she feels would hold her daughter back in society. She transferred her daughter to a school with predominantly black students and teachers with concerns about her emotional health from being one of few black students in a predominantly white school; "[a]lthough the instruction was excellent, she seemed to be sinking into some sort of emotional abyss" (34). Delpit worried about the exclusion her daughter suffered as the only black girl in her class. Once she transferred to a school with more black girls, she became more

emotionally open “as she developed new friends, her self-esteem soared and once more she became funny, creative, self-assured kid I recognized. But she also acquired a new speech code” (34). Delpit realized that a change in her daughter’s dialect did not mean a loss of skill or denied access to the power structure. In fact, according to Freire, “students learn to read faster and with better comprehension when taught in their native tongue. The immediate recognition and familiar words and experiences enhance the development of a positive self-concept” (151). Delpit realized by her daughter using a language familiar to her resulted in better grades and communing with other students. It meant that her daughter recognized her need to “code switch” to feel comfortable and familiar in her own skin, which allowed her to feel a sense of her own identity and to succeed in school.

Delpit explains how her daughter, a black student, feels more comfortable around black students who speak and understand her language. She explains, “our language has always been a part of our very souls. When we are with our own we revel in the rhythms and cadences of connection, in the ‘sho nufs’s, and ‘what go roun’ come roun’s, and in the ain’ nothing’ like the real thing’s” (37). A cultural connection feeds the soul of the individual. Self-consciousness about the language does not exist around people of similar dialects. However, Delpit insists, for black people, “the real issue was our concern about what others would think. We worried how, after years and years of trying to prove ourselves good enough, we might again be dismissed as ignorant and unworthy by those in power, by “the white folks” (37). To counteract the need to prove herself she realizes her daughter partakes in “code switching” (39). By code switching, her daughter

is able to navigate and differentiate between BVE and Standard English. “The “successful” colonized person understands, with the help of her family’s and her community’s experience of colonization, that the survival technique for the subjugated group involves double realities.

Double realities and Dubois’s double consciousness are both emblematic of the black culture’s struggle to live inside the white mainstream cultural structure, living with a “sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others” (Dubois 3). She must be in two places at the same time, ovuh dyuh and here too, and not give any indication that her attention is divided. She must operate from behind the mask of the “white” language” (Delpit 11). She understands that for her daughter, “acquiring an additional code comes from identifying with the people who speak it, from connecting the language from with all that is self-affirming and esteem—building, inviting and fun” (40). In school, teachers rarely design courses with fun as a core requisite:

Children learn through worksheets or textbooks that do not refer to their lived experiences. Teachers seldom know much about the children’s lives and communities outside of the classroom and either don’t know how to or aren’t willing to connect instruction to issues that matter to students, their families, and their community. Nowhere is the student’s very personhood acknowledged or celebrated. Thirdly, the children whose language is considered defective are themselves viewed as defective. (41)

It is the fear and anger of rejection that locks an individual’s home language away from others not in their dialect community when “[c]onfronted with a pervasive racism, which is embedded in dominant texts or official discourses, most African Americans feel a need to reaffirm their African American selves, individually and collectively. This is often

accomplished primarily through language, as is evident in the rich tradition of African American literacy” (Gilyard 40). In America race tends to equal levels of language, class, and education. As a result, many in the black culture fear dismissal or being labeled as ignorant or unworthy. In attempting to move away from the stereotypes of the black race in front of white people, many black people will change their language when in their presence and use BVE only in the presence of other black people. While “code switching” is a reality for many black people it can also be a space of confusion, as Delpit exposes, and fear of losing power in society.

Delpit comes to understand that her daughter learns and participates more and better once she has been around people who share her cultural language. Delpit worries about her own life having been, perhaps like many black men, “infected by that collective shame we African Americans have internalized about our very beings. Having [been raised and living] in a racist society, we double-think every aspect of our beings—are we good enough to be accepted by the white world?” The fear of being around white people is that “We have to change our natural selves to just be adequate” (35). Thus college age black men have taken on a very aggressive stance, although an impotent stance, of “keeping’ it real.” Black men have established a comfort zone of being true to themselves. This cultural behavior of maintaining that cultural conscientiousness that DuBois speaks of in chapter one is in the black men a collaboration of all the historical revolutionary moments of the black man. Black male students simply respond when faced with criticism of their community even when it is implied by a lack of attention to it rather than others showing direct hostility. “There is mental conflict about the priority

that should be given to the mother tongue over the master discourse. In public life, the value given to the patriarch's tongue, the master discourse, always supersedes that given to the matriarch" (12). The "language of intimacy," as Richard Rodriguez calls it in his autobiography, *Hunger for Memory*, has no place in the public arena. In other words, soul and reality occupy separate linguistic spaces. "This conflict duplicates itself in every aspect of life, when the colonized tries to negotiate the two worlds of language by building bridges from one side to the other" (Delpit 12).

In this community of people who share the same cultural communication, black male students may excel. Black male students share language when they feel comfortable, accepted, and understood by people around them. There is not discrediting of language. There is no shunning or rejection of language as subordinate to a standard language. What happens to most black men upon entering college is that the experience of their own absence from the curriculum renders them voiceless. Rodriguez describes his feelings about academic discourse and his home language and experiences, which is very applicable to experiences of some black male students,

The continual disappointment with the master discourse creates a shroud that covers every utterance with a doubt about its worthiness. ... Unless [he] can reconnect with the sense of familiarity of using language that [he] grew up taking for granted, [he] loses all ability to integrate the dominant idiom into [his] language system and [he] is rendered voiceless. (12)

This not only causes the presence of black males in literature and composition classes to disappear but also affects the sustainability of black male students in college. It is

pertinent that black male students are allowed to comfortably assert their presence. When their voices are not heard, they are moved to a space of less power, in America presence becomes power. When the mother tongue is allowed as a window to the educational environment as viable with the patriarchal tongue, true education might take place amongst black male students.

While Geneva Smitherman, renowned linguist, validates black idioms and black dialect in her *Talkin that Talk*, she holds scholars and the academic institutions accountable for systemic racism. She states,

racism among scholar-elites exists within an institutionalized tradition based on a set of assumptions – virtually always implicit – about human nature, race, and social behavior. The fact that scholarly racism is subtle, rather than blatant, and institutional, rather than individual, makes it all the more an insidiously oppressive and effective dimension of the ideological apparatus that justifies and supports patterns of racist thought and behavior in the public domain and in the socioeconomic macrostructure.” (67-8)

Here Smitherman tacitly validates the “conspiracy theory” paranoia of many black men who blame “The Man” for their failures. She faults institutionalized racism of colleges for the demise of the black student. She asserts that institutions develop much of the racist discourse that negatively shapes the images of ethnic cultures that permeate society. While many linguists denote black dialect as wrong, Smitherman explains that the black dialect simply expresses a cultural language that speaks of the struggles of the African in America since captivity. Smitherman states that blacks have a way of speaking that follow a grammatical strategy although it may not be the precise

grammatical scale, it does adhere to a grammatical strategy. She explains that the letters omitted from various words in black language,

For example, a student who reads *den* for *then* probably pronounces initial /the/ as /d/ in most words. Alternatively, the one who reads *doing* for *during* probably deletes intervocalic and final /r/ in most words. So it is not that such students can't read, they are simply employing the black phonological system. (58)

Unlike her cohorts, Smitherman does not equate the sounds of words with an ability to read or to comprehend. Smitherman talks about the nature of the African American and how black language is attached to black culture. She talks about how society, researchers, scholars and many white people understand the black speech pattern as a retardation of academic Standard English that signifies that black people are uneducable. (1) Researchers have used many standard tests and evaluations to examine or prove that the black language keeps the black person, hence the black race from succeeding in the public eye.

Smitherman also points out that there is no measure of black language that is only based on black language. The measurement of correctness of Black English is hegemonic English, the language of the oppressor. How can a language that is used to oppress a culture be used effectively to measure cultural advance in that culture? If the culture is seen as having progressed, then it has acclimated to the system that oppressed it. The culture then becomes watered down, less of its own and a combination of the oppressor. As poet and writer Audre Lorde states, "The master's tools will never

dismantle the master's house" ("Audre"). Surely when the native culture takes on the oppressor's tongue, it reinforces its own oppression. If the culture does not adapt to the language of the oppressor then it is seen as antithetical to the dominant culture, which means they are against the hegemonic culture. The individuals who do not conform to society are deemed troublemakers who need discipline and punishment, resulting finally in more prisons being built to enforce the cultural conformity.

As a result, institutionalized racism dominates the analysis of language and linguistics, for language was the first key to assimilation of the Africans as slaves and later the slaves as civilians and then civilians into educated men. Smitherman asserts, "The path of racist expression in linguistic scholarship must be charted simultaneously by the sociohistorical development of "race relations" (as it has traditionally been referred to in the American academy), and by changing paradigms in the human sciences research tradition" (68). Present in the tests given by academia are tools that measure their own language and not the knowledge of understanding that all cultures possess in their own rights.

Academia would have society believe that African Americans have no form of language that allows them to communicate thoroughly with one another as well as with others in society. In fact Smitherman notes,

Clearly BI speakers possess rich communication skills (i.e., are highly *competent* in using language), but as yet there becs no criteria (evaluative, testing, or other instrument of measurement), based on black communication patterns, wherein BI speakers can demonstrate they competence (i.e., *performance*). Hence, brothers and sisters fail on language performance tests and in English classrooms. (58)

Blacks have a rich language to communicate, but there are no criteria for evaluating their successful adherence to grammatical strategies that are of their own. Instead, the black dialect is always criticized and deemed as outside and below academic hegemonic language.

As a language from a people who were captured immigrants in America, black American language is a composite of many languages. As noted by Smitherman,

Anthropologist Johnnetta Cole suggests that Black Culture has three dimensions: (1) those elements shared with mainstream America; (2) those elements shared with all oppressed peoples; (3) those elements peculiar to the black condition in America. Applying her concepts to language, I propose the following schematic representation as shown in Table 3.1. (59)

Notice that Cole points to three dimensions that relate to black culture. Smitherman, however, simply removes culture and focuses this same ideology on black language. Since language is a major way we pass on culture, Africans in a foreign land had to adapt to the language of their new land, America, in order to survive. Likewise, black males must adapt their way of speaking and being to survive and succeed in college.

Smitherman notes the,

psychological tendency of oppressed people to adopt the modes of behavior and expression of their oppressors (also, during the African slave trade, the functional necessity of pidginized forms of European languages). Not only does the conqueror force his victims into political subjugation, he also coerces them into adopting his language and doles out special rewards to those among the oppressed who best mimic his language and cultural style. (60)

Here Smitherman notes the slave who best imitated the European's language received a reward for sounding like someone other than himself. Thus began the black cultural conflict and controversy with American education. The good, docile Negro who learned well was praised not because he was proof that the slave could learn, but because the slave master could make a beast civilized. So, "Within this tradition, language is used as a teaching/socializing force and as a means of establishing one's reputation via his verbal competence" (61). American education becomes a means that demoralizes and unmans the black male's identity.

However, our white slave-owning ancestors have bequeathed us the belief that a black man who speaks well within the European language expectation only exemplifies his ability to mask himself as the docile slave. They forced American society to believe the docile slave is the exemplary student who learns to be someone else, who learns to follow, who learns to flaunt the hegemonic culture and despise, disregard, and disrespect his own African American language and culture. When black men speak the European language, they become well versed in European language and expression of experience. They become well versed in the European culture. However it is in the community where the use of black idioms build a viable reputation for black men. In their familiar places, they are able to build their own tools to measure the success of who they are. Only in their home do black men get to shine with their understandings. Smitherman weaves in her understanding, her truth, "though [the black culture] rappin bout the same language, the reality referents are different. As one linguist has suggested, the proper question is not what do words mean but what do the users of the words mean?" (61). Although

European language has been appropriated, the black culture has taken language and twisted it, shifted it, lifted it to another meaning and concept. Smitherman states that people who speak Black English use it not only because it is what they know but also because it uses the right words and connotations to express well their experiences. For the black culture, European language is simply a means of communicating with everyone.

Smitherman believes that the mastering of one language should not define and propel an individual to success, but the acquisition and use of language as a method to convey understanding should be the defining factor for ones' success or failure. Just as Delpit, Smitherman encourages educators to reject language as a signifier of knowledge ability. Keith Gilyard and Elaine Richarson in "Students' Right to Possibility: Basic Writing and African American Rhetoric" agree with Smitherman that academia "putting standard speech in the mouth of Black students 'ain done nothin to address the crises in the Black community'" (278). Smitherman, Delpit, Gilyard, and Richarson understand that focusing on the acquisition of Standard English will not solely change the living status and education of the individual; however, they all infer that learning through language and an environment that expresses the black students' background is conducive to transformation.

### **Giving Presence to Students: Reader-Response and Writing Theory**

In Louise Rosenblatt's *Literature as Exploration*, she encourages educators to focus on the students' background and life experience as a way for students to enter the discourse community of the literature class. She states "[t]he particular community background of the student will be a factor; whether he comes from the North or the

South, from city or country, from a middle-class or underprivileged home, will affect the nature of the understanding and the prejudices that he brings to the book” (94).

Rosenblatt suggests that teachers must be aware that many students bring with them to literature all the beliefs and morals and experiences from their lives. She believes it is important that schools impart knowledge about life, for the average American student spends most of his days in school. It is amazing that teachers, particularly literature teachers forget that they affect the lives of students. For years, the literature class represented the repository of all human emotion. It is the space where the individual feels connected to all things and grows emotionally, changing his morals and general outlook on life. Literature teachers “have not always realized that ... they affect the student’s sense of human personality and human society. More directly than most teachers, they foster general ideas or theories about human nature and conduct, definite moral attitudes, and habitual responses to people and situations” (4). Learning about society and man through literature brings a new and different perspective to the individual. Teachers must insist that these ideas are tied into the student’s beliefs of his actual life and “[a]ny knowledge about man and society that schools can give him should be assimilated into the stream of his actual life” (3). When tying knowledge into a student’s life, knowledge becomes applicable to the life of the individual. Because literature involves the human element, the nature of verisimilitude, it speaks to the human heart and logic. Rosenblatt believes,

The creation of a setting for personal response is basic, as is a situation in which students stimulate one another to organize their diffuse responses and

formulate their views. But as the discussion proceeds, the teacher will become involved in the further task of leading the students toward a fuller participation in what the text offers. This requires that the student critically reevaluate his own assumptions and preoccupations. The teacher can help in this process only if he understands some of the possible forces molding the student's response and can anticipate some of the major needs and concerns of adolescents in our society.

In the interchange of ideas the student will be led to compare his reactions with those of other students and of the teacher (later, if necessary, of established critics). He will see that a particular work may give rise to attitudes and judgments different from his own. Some interpretations, he will discover, are more defensible than others in terms of the text as a whole. ... Why did he choose one particular slant rather than another? Why did certain phases of the book or poem strike him more forcibly than others? Why did he misinterpret or ignore certain elements? (78-9)

Composition teachers have the role of discussing ideas about life and attitude, nature and conduct. In the composition class, students are able to discuss and decide on issues that usually are discussed in a home environment. In the composition class, the teacher has the ability to alter the student's reality about life and the world because reading and writing is pertinent to helping students find their voice. Using their own language helps students to "reconstruct their history and their culture" and "is the only means by which they can develop their own voice" (151). Through reading texts and writing their own experiences students will find connection and relevance to their own lives.

Rosenblatt suggests that during class discussion the literature teacher should arouse discussion through context, which, undoubtedly, will be for most freshman students based on personal response. In other words, the students will engage in discussion in which they are exposing their experiential views. Students will use critical thinking once engaged with each other's ideas, moral and values. In order to arrive at critical thinking the instructor must orchestrate a clear connection from the ideas and

lives of the students that they discuss to an understanding of the truths in the text. All students making a connection to the literature will analyze their own experience of a similar situation. Rosenblatt states, “Students should be helped to handle their responses to the political and social tendencies of a work. These should not block attention to the sensuous, emotional, and intellectual elements actually embodied in the text” (100). Instructors must understand the factors that influence the students’ responses. While the students interchange ideas, they will start to compare their ideas to that of others, including the teacher. The teacher must then assist the students in negotiating their attitudes and judgments. Often students might feel defensive regarding their ideas. They might feel those who oppose their ideas do not understand or accept their lives. Often these students might express an intense and inappropriate reaction to the story due to a “projection of the student’s own experience or preoccupation” (80). Yet, by teaching students to negotiate their attitudes and judgments, the instructor encourages the students to see their experiences in others. Each individual will extend beyond the self-meaning so that each sees how his actions affect others. This is very important because it allows the student to start to approach the understanding of others, “[f]or literature by its very nature invokes participation in the experiences of others and comprehension of their goals and aspirations” (93). By doing this, the students should arrive at logic that their own backgrounds and experiences color their judgment of the story. In order for the student “to encompass the complex human situations and emotions presented in literature” (106), he must have “[s]ufficient flexibility ...needed to free oneself from the stock response when it prevents a response more appropriate to the situation” (105).

Upon entering freshman English, black male students should feel that the instructor considered their cultural experiences when designing the syllabus. The syllabus should consist of classical literature (i.e. Shakespeare, Milton, etc.) and generational contemporary literature that is culturally appropriate but should not exclude literature by women and many cultures. Generational contemporary can be defined as literature after not only the 1960's but of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, such as *The Bond* by Drs. Sampson Davis, George Jenkins, and Rameck Hunt; any book by Eric Michael Dyson, and many other black male authors that might sustain the attention of young black men. All too often, the opposite happens—the instructor weighs down his syllabus with literature by European men and women from earlier times and different life experiences. Course literature is designed from the perspective of the privileged educational experience as opposed to offering more than one view of life. The purpose of instructional guidance is to bring students who are most distant from academia to a space of transformation, thus all composition courses should echo the curriculum of a survey literature course. By offering a diverse curriculum, the instructor will value and validate the experiences of black males. They might then find themselves included, first, by being addressed in the literature and the experiences they share and later by connecting those experiences to the experiences of others in the class. The aim is not to simply validate the experiences of black males but to broaden them.

In the 70's Mina Shaughnessy, the most prominent critic of teaching basic writers, suggested a way that composition teachers might remedy a way of training all basic writers to enter and succeed traditional American composition courses. She chronicled

that the inability of all students to write academically was due to their hypercorrection or, to their committing the same grammatical, syntactical, and organizational errors.

Although she does a thorough evaluation and creates prescriptives for writing by basic writers, she fails to see that her “developed fresh ways of coping with these deficiencies” at no point address the mono-cultural curriculum that BW teachers use in their class to spark thoughts in a culturally diverse student body (291). She offers techniques that the BW “must...work harder and faster to solve” (293) their deficiencies while weathering teachers who question their own skills as “explanations of student failures that have long protected teachers from their own mistakes and inadequacies” (292). Shaughnessy in her study avoids the existence of various English dialects, particularly African American Vernacular English. She assumes that all BW, no matter their cultural background and experience, fail to write because they suffer “the problems of getting an idea and beginning to write, or remembering where one is going as sentence generates sentence, of sustaining the tension between being right and readable and being oneself” as concepts fixable through her prescriptive. However, not all inability to write or difficulties with writing are a matter of grammar, syntax, and organization. In her most acclaimed research, Shaughnessy does not examine nor acknowledge the racial, class, educational, or historical barriers that may exist within the language, culture, and experiences of basic writers. She evaluates writing as just a method of expressing thoughts in the traditional way of American education yet not as part of cultural language. Sometimes the inability of an individual to write is a matter of confidence, comfort and acceptance by his peers. The words that some black male students choose to express their experiences come to

represent their lives. Therefore, a rejection of these students' expressions are directly a rejection of their experiences in life. College basic composition often does not speak of or to many black male students; it rejects their presences and their voices by ignoring their experiences or assuming unanimity of experiences. It becomes difficult for black male students to express themselves or to feel welcome in college. These first interactions as entering college students have the potential to end their encounters with higher education.

The reason black male students may find it difficult to write at first involves language, community, audience, authority and experience. In many of the ghettos black men talk about "ex-cons, 'gangstas,' and hustlers through out the neighborhood" so some find difficulty in seeing black college men as a role model (interviewee O). Their discourse often fetishizes criminal behavior as opposed to analyze. As part of a particular community, the language of black men is appropriate for their audiences. Since they use language that is familiar to them and their community, those outside of the community may have difficulty understanding. Black men may also feel uncomfortable speaking around people who may judge their language and thus their community.

At first, it does not involve the "deficiencies" that Shaughnessy documents in *Errors and Expectations*. However, Shaughnessy's essay, "Diving In: An Introduction to Basic Writings," address the concerns of many students lacking basic writing skills, including African American dialect speakers. Here Shaughnessy notes, just as Rosenblatt, that "teachers [must] also change in response to students,...there may in fact be important connections between the changes teachers undergo and the progress of their

students” (290). Teacher acceptance of students’ views and language is significant for it promotes student participation and fosters student ownership of classroom community. Black male students greatly benefit from a sense of community and belonging so that they are able to handle misunderstandings and stereotypes about their life experiences that may surface in class discussion. According to Delpit and Dowdy in *The Skin That We Speak*, “The commencement of formal education is usually one of the first settings in a person’s life when their language may be judged as right or wrong; when assumptions may be made about their intelligence, family life, future potential, or moral fiber every time a sentence is uttered” (XVIII). In the classroom, his audience is the instructor and the other students. The instructor has the power to state that his language and way of writing is not standard; it is wrong. It is an anomaly to academic English. When educators tell a student, particularly one who feels ostracized, that he writes incorrectly, it discourages him from writing. Educators must move away from criticism that discourages and towards a practice of sharing knowledge.

Shaughnessy developed four stages that instructors may possibly experience as they modify their teaching methods and beliefs to accommodate lower level learners in their college composition courses. Stage one Shaughnessy titles, **GUARDING THE TOWER**...the teacher is in one way or another concentrating on protecting the academy (including himself) from the outsiders, those who do not seem to belong in the community of learners” (290). The first stage outlines the general behavior a teacher might exhibit to protect the sanctity, rituals and knowledge of the academy. She guards the rites of passage the academy requires that many students to earn the label of educated

and knowledgeable. Many black male students often feel this restrictive energy from the instructor in a system historically designed to specifically maintain its hegemonic control over ethnic Americans. Shaughnessy goes on to relay that teachers might at this point believe the students incompetence in their initial essays “is rooted in the limits they were born with of those that were imposed upon them by the world they grew up in” (290). A teacher with lower educated black male students who writing skills are low may be find “that fact...stunningly, depressingly obvious: they will never ‘make it’ in college unless someone radically lowers the standards” (290). She holds teachers accountable for believing lower skill levels will result in failed college experiences although they receive her teaching.

She then states that teachers will then believe that “CONVERTING THE NATIVES” is the next important stage. In this stage, she says the teacher is so confident that his transferable knowledge is reasonable and desired by the students, “it does not occur to him to consider the competing logics and values and habits that may be influencing his students” (290). This is very important, for teachers tend to assert the own ideals through their lesson without regard for the students prior knowledge. This can result in student withdrawal and leave the teacher perplexed about the decrease in student population. If the teacher is aware, Shaughnessy believe the teacher will begin “SOUND THE DEPTHS” (292). According Shaughnessy, in this stage the teacher turns to “careful observation not only of his students and their writing but of himself as writer and teacher, seeking a deeper understanding of the behavior called writing and of the special difficulties his students have in mastering the skill” (292). At this stage, the

teacher begins to perceive a change in both himself and his students. He starts to see himself as an acting member of the class that he teaches. Shaughnessy believes, “From such soundings, ...teacher[s] [begin] to see that teaching at the remedial level is not a matter of being simpler but of being more profound, of not only starting from ‘scratch’ but also determining where ‘scratch’ is” (295). Here Shaughnessy asserts that the more basic the writer the more profound the teaching experience for the teacher must first understand the propensity of the lack of skill. The teacher does not envision himself as a person who does not understand or connect with his students. Shaughnessy asserts, the teacher is “DIVING IN” (295). This stage, continues Shaughnessy, “demands professional courage—the decision to remediate himself, to become a student of new disciplines and of his students themselves in order to perceive both their difficulties and their incipient excellence” (295). This is the stage where Shaughnessy wants teachers to realize that both he and the student have arrived at new paths. If the teacher is truly to teach, Shaughnessy asserts, “DIVING IN is simply deciding that teaching them to write well is not only suitable but challenging work for those who would be teachers and scholars in a democracy” (295). The teacher learns that he must modify his practices, beliefs, and techniques to learn and suit his students.

In college, our home language, mother tongue--those words, phrases, idioms become improper English. We no longer are articulate or passionate about what it is we must say. Many times, if a student is allowed to express his world in his own expressions he would then, as Rosenblatt believes, open his mind to a transformation. In the college classroom his community changes; he is no longer in a familiar community. Now his

college community seems in opposition to his own experience because it is not expressed in his own language. Often teachers overlook the possible discomfort that a student might feel and regard it as an issue that as an adult the student should handle. However, it is the job of the educator to design the curriculum to entice the student to experience the text and others' lives. Through this process, the student can then realize that the experiences of the college community are not in opposition to himself; their experiences become relevant to his own life.

### **Summary**

All of these theorists, Delpit, Smitherman, Rosenblatt, and Shaughnessy realized the need to reach the student who for whatever reason found either the composition class uncomfortable or the education environment uncomfortable. Delpit and Smitherman examined the emotional and educational impact of being ostracized or ignored due wholly to race. They noted that when black students enter college often the instructor, whether intentional or unintentional, dismisses black idioms and black expression; this action is a direct denial of the individual. Shaughnessy and Rosenblatt understood that educators often make students believe that there is a good and bad English, which leads students to question how teachers perceive them if they speak a certain way. Rosenblatt reveals when a teacher begins with the student's home language and experiences, he will enter true learning and connect his experiences to other experiences. This broadens his experiences. Shaughnessy points out the errors that students make are often hypercorrection but do not and should not infringe upon their learning abilities. Then, she points out the modifications that composition teachers need to make to teach writing

well to the remedial writer is “to become a student of new disciplines and of his students themselves in order to perceive both their difficulties and their incipient excellence” (“Diving In,” 295). All of these theorists seek to improve the composition classroom for the basic writer of diverse experiences and educational levels.

Many black males with low compositional skills when entering college can greatly benefit from the above theories. When disfranchised young black males enter college, involvement in the curriculum validates their experiences. As noted by Delpit and Smitherman when a student uses his home language he arrives at a space of comfort. It becomes easier, just as Delpit’s daughter experienced, to express oneself because he feels a part of the community. This breeds comfort and trust. With this trust the black males will risk sharing their own lives and beliefs, thus true learning may take place. Nevertheless, it is up to the instructor, as Rosenblatt encourages, utilizing knowledge of student backgrounds and experience to design the course. Shaughnessy suggests that the teacher alter her concept of errors and professional transform herself. Curriculum developers must seek to create a curriculum that is inclusive of black cultural experiences.

Encouraging present black male students to voice their expressions might move academia away from literature for a lesson or two to settle on rap music. The instructor would only be executing Rosenblatt’s and Shaughnessy’s theories regarding instructor initiation of establishing connection with the students through their experiences and self-modification. Self-modification would consist of the teacher analyzing, reviewing, and restructuring her teaching methods and her syllabus to incorporate literature, including

rap lyrics, and composition tasks that connect to the students' backgrounds. Bringing the modern black male voice into the academic arena can only succeed at generating a feeling of empowerment and inclusion for the black male. Encouraging voice, sharing experiences, and risk-taking can only move the black male students to succeed in the composition class while maintaining a positive sense of manhood.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **MASCULINITY IN THE COMMUNITY AND ACADEMIA**

#### **Overview**

In this chapter, I examine the historical construct of masculinity in America and in Africa to arrive at a construct African American manhood. Manhood then informs the choice of the black male as related to education and the street. Black manhood effects the development of black fatherhood, black economy, black relationships, black families, and, ultimately how black manhood effects the education of the black male.

#### **Scene of Black Masculinity: “You still my lil Nigga.”**

Recently while standing at a bus stop in New York City I witnessed an interesting interaction between two black males. “Hey little man. Lil’ C” He nudges Lil C’s shoulder with the back of his hand. “You be aw-ight. We’ll get another one later.” Lil’ C looks down at the ground and starts to cry. “Aw-ight. Let it go little man. You still my lil nigga.” He grabs Lil C by his shoulder and walks him down the street. I witnessed this scene between a father and a son. They were both dressed alike: baggy pants, brown Timberland construction boots and matching hat, and down bubble jackets with a hoody sweater underneath. Lil’ C is actually Charles Jr. 3 years old and the father

is Charles Sr. Charles Sr. or rather Big C comforts Lil C because he dropped his lollipop. I found this interaction rather strange because unlike some other fathers this man of 30 years old is addressing his son of 3 years old as if he is a teenager and a friend from the street. He did not hug him or pick him up to comfort him. He simply put his hand on his shoulder to reassure him that he was still his favorite person that they were still friends, and he could later get another lollipop. No moment of stereotypical fatherly love transgressed between the two.

This type of interaction between father and son is prominent but not typical amongst most black men who have experienced harsh street lives. Often black males that ascribe to the notion of street derived manhood do not have a father present or a positive male role model, so their realities are very different from those with a positive male figure in their lives. While I cannot state that I approve of the language and behavior that Charles Sr. uses with his 3-year-old son, I do believe he offers moral support and is a positive role model in teaching him the parameters of black American masculinity. Although I do not advocate Charles Sr. offers Lil' C a hard lesson about not crying over bad experiences in his life that he cannot change. This interaction between father and son, this lesson in masculinity possibly may prepare him to face the hardships and rejections in life that he may experience as a black man in America.

### **Hegemonic Masculinity**

What can we consider masculinity? American manhood or masculinity, according to Michael Kimmel in *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*, "We cannot understand manhood without understanding American history. But I believe we also

cannot fully understand American history without understanding masculinity” (2). He states that the development of American history and American manhood inform one another. In his study he outlines three types of masculinity: the Genteel Patriarch, the Heroic Artisan, and the Self-Made Man.

Developed in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Genteel Patriarch represented “an ideal inherited from Europe” that represented,

a dignified aristocratic manhood, committed to the British upper-class code of honor and to well-rounded character, with exquisite tastes and manners and refined sensibilities. ...manhood meant property ownership and benevolent patriarchal authority at home, including the moral instruction of his sons. A Christian gentleman...embodied love, kindness, duty, and compassion, exhibited through philanthropic work, church activities, and deep involvement with his family. (Kimmel 16)

The Heroic Artisan archetype, also inherited from Europe, was “independent, virtuous, and honest” and behaved “stiffly formal” towards women but “stalwart and loyal to his male comrades. On the family farm or in his urban crafts shop, he was an honest toiler, unafraid of hard work, proud of his craftsmanship and self-reliance (Kimmel 16). The Self-Made Man “derives identity entirely from a man’s activities in the public sphere, measured by accumulated wealth and status, by geographic and social mobility. ...this economic fortune would have to be translated into permanent social standing” (Kimmel 17). Each archetype emerged at particular historical moments in American development. Kimmel asserts that American manhood characteristics “owe their existence to the timing of the Revolution—the emergence of the Self-Made Men at that time and their great

success in the new American democracy have a lot to do with what it is that defines a “real” man even today” (17). Manhood changes with the events in history although some principles remain today.

To become a Self-Made man, American men had to prove themselves in the workplace. “The workplace was a man’s world (and a native-born white man’s world at that). If manhood could be proved, it had to be proved in the eyes of other men” (Kimmel 26). Men’s socializing with other men proves each other’s manhood, Kimmel notes as “homosociality” (26). He continues to explain that homosociality entails men experiencing “the evaluative eyes of other men that are always upon [them], watching, judging” (26). Kimmel offers the example of William Henry Harrison, our ninth president, as proof of the strong manly man. Harrison, proving his manhood, took “the oath to office on one of the most bitterly cold days on record in Washington” without wearing a topcoat. He caught pneumonia as a result, was immediately bedridden, and died one month later—the shortest term in office of any presidency in our history” (39). After the Civil War, the rise of the Self-Made man increased and remains in society.

In the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, America resembled the image of the Self-Made man—“restless, insecure, striving, competitive, and extraordinarily prosperous” (43). Kimmel states that because the identity of the Self-Made man was dependent on economics, politics and social status, his image would be forever volatile as are these arenas (43). He continues, “If social order, permanence, could no longer be taken for granted and a man could rise as high as he aspired, then his sense of himself as a man in constant need of demonstration. Everything became a test—his relationships to work,

women, to nature, and to other men” (44). According to Kimmel, American hegemonic manhood is shaped by exterior factors in history, “Manhood is not the manifestation of an inner essence; it’s socially constructed. Manhood does not bubble up to consciousness from our biological constitution; it is created in our culture” (5). In essence, each culture creates its idea of manhood. He notes that American manhood is defined by

tension between the multiplicity of masculinities that collectively define American men’s actual experiences and this singular ‘hegemonic’ masculinity that is prescribed as the norm that forms one of the organizing dynamics of this book. In a sense, this is a history of that ‘complete’ male that [Erving] Goffman describes—straight, white, middle class, native-born—the story of his great accomplishments and his nagging anxieties. Yet in another sense, it is at least indirectly the story of the marginalized ‘others’—working class men, gay men, men of color, immigrant men—how these different groups of men and, of course, women were used as a screen against which those ‘complete’ men projected their fears and, in the process, constructed this prevailing definition of manhood. (6)

Kimmel states that marginalized masculinities define and shape hegemonic masculinity. Each time masculine behavior emerges from the marginalized “other,” it alters hegemonic masculine behavior so as not to emulate or seem connected to the “other.” Hegemonic masculinity because of the masculine “other” becomes impermanent and volatile. The *Psychology Glossary* defines masculinity as relating to gender, which are “determined by one’s culture.” Therefore, the definition of male and female can change across countries, societies, and subcultures.” For example, the definitions of masculinity in traditional African cultures, black American culture, and the white American culture would vary according to codes and behavior.

## **Black Masculinity**

Looking at black manhood, in contemporary U.S. culture, we need to begin with codes of African manhood that survived the Middle Passage through history. According to David D. Gilmore, black manhood is problematic because it involves “tests or proofs of action, or confrontations with dangerous foes: win-or-lose contents dramatically played out on the public stage” (Gilmore 12). For example, “In East Africa young boys from a host of cattle-herding tribes,...are taken away from their mothers and subjected at the outset of adolescence to bloody circumcision rites by which they become true men” (Gilmore 13). Gilmore describe their circumcision as an initiation to manhood. The young African boys must resist showing any pain or fear during their circumcision. If they should flinch, wince, or turn away they will be “shamed for life as unworthy of manhood and his lineage will be seen as weaklings. Once this part of manhood is complete, the young boys must prove themselves living in the wilderness for a measure of time until their long apprenticeship is successful. Then they can return to society as a man and take a wife” (Gilmore 13). Pain and violence ushers in manhood for the young East African boys.

Another African cultural belief that expresses manhood through violence and stamina is Ethiopian. Their manhood or *wand-nat* as it is called by natives involves “aggressiveness, stamina, and bold courageous action” in the face of danger; it means never backing down when threatened (Gilmore 13). To exhibit their *wand-nat*, young men take part in a whipping ceremony called *buhe*. Often young men emerge from this show of physical endurance and courage with face, eye, and body lacerations, only to

then demonstrate their sexual virility by brandishing the blood soiled sheets from their wedding night (Gilmore 13-4). Again, in these African cultures manhood is earned through trials of physical strength, endurance, violence, and sexual virility.

Renford Reese in *American Paradox: Young Black Men* compared various theories of black masculinity to arrive at a definition of American black masculinity,

black masculinity is a concept that has been socially constructed by the dominant population and imposed on black men. The literature is replete with descriptions of how the white power structure has created stereotypes of the black man as a tough, physically imposing, crime-oriented, hyper-sexed, hedonistic, promiscuous, irresponsible, and barbaric species. Although these descriptions have been exaggerated and socially engineered, many black males have internalized and embraced all of these representations. (46)

Reese acknowledges these representations of black American males and manhood as a contrivance of the white hegemonic culture. It seems that the white culture exaggerated African rites of manhood: fighting, withstanding pain, and sexual prowess, as the grotesque animal nature of the African male bequeathed to the black American male. The very presence of Africans in America was based on the culture assigning African Americans the role of chattel. As a result the culture continued to exclude black males from their concept of manhood by simply dismissing them as animals.

Ideologies and images in America construe the image of black men as the source of distrust of the black culture, from slavery to modern imprisonment. Bell hooks believes black men suffer great injustices in America, "Whether in an actual prison or not, practically every black male in the United States has been forced at some point in his

life to hold back the self he wants to express, to repress and contain for fear of being attacked, slaughtered, destroyed” (We Real, xii). It seems that America has vilified black male bodies since their capture and transport to America. White supremacist construed black masculinity as a threat to all things great and white. Black males learned from historical American responses to their culture and biological differences to diminish themselves. The self that the hegemonic culture allowed black males to express was a self that seemed to pose no threat to the hegemonic control. If they posed a threat, they were lynched, whipped, or imprisoned.

During colonization, the African men were brought to America to labor. They were first brought because of their strength and their ability to labor all day in the sun and cold. At the beginning of the slave trade, black male bodies were just a symbol of brute strength. As the slave trade blossomed, slave masters used black males as studs. White Southern obsession with black male bodies were so fetishized that when a black men were “found guilty of a crime that was punishable by capital punishment ... lynching should have been the gross punctuation of that punishment,” but desecration of the black male body then resulted in castration (25). Black male bodies became a site of the fear, pervasions, and obsession of the hegemonic culture to the extreme of celebration of castration. This action of overkill only reveals the white culture’s delusion<sup>1</sup> of fear of black male bodies.

Both the insinuated hyperbolic strength and sexual prowess of the black male has given him an identity that intrigued and frightened America’s forefathers which still pervade our society. The sad part about the pervasiveness of the black man’s

stereotypical image is that not only has it affected the way the white culture envisions and relates to black men, but also it has affected the way black men envision and relate to themselves. hooks believes, “Negative stereotypes about the nature of black masculinity continue to over determine the identities black males are allowed to fashion for themselves” (We Real, Xii). In many cultures, males relish in the idea of being promiscuous even to the extent of calling each other *dawgs* and *players* as many black men do to designate the male most popular for his sexual *tour de force*.

After the Emancipation many black males sought a lifestyle unknown to them—freedom. According to John Beynon, the white American definition of masculinity or manhood “include[s] provider and protector, it is important to recognize that some men of color face challenges in meeting these roles due to such barriers as racism, poverty, lack of education, underemployment, and reduced access to services” (16). Historically, during slavery and new freedom, provider and protector are difficult for the black male to accomplish due to the already mentioned barriers. It is unfortunate that during the kidnapping of Africans, the black male could not protect his family. Then once they were transported to America and became slaves, the black males could not protect nor provide for their families for they had no rights as humans. Beynon continues, “‘hegemonic masculinity,’ ... defines successful ways of ‘being a man’ in particular places at a specific time (Kimmel 1994; Connell 1995). In the process, other masculine styles are rendered inadequate and inferior, [and are termed] subordinate variants (16). Many freed black males were transient and only had skills from and memories of slavery. According to hooks,

Enslaved black males were socialized by white folks to believe that they should endeavor to become patriarchs by seeking to attain the freedom to provide and protect for black women, to be benevolent patriarchs. Benevolent patriarchs exercise their power without using force. And it was this notion of patriarchy that educated black men coming from slavery into freedom sought to mimic. (*We Real Cool* 4)

Being the benevolent patriarch who worked and took care of a family was finally upon the minds and ambitions of the freed black men. Their newly found life of being freed men meant the prospect of keeping their families together and caring for them. However, black men found it hard to live up to the standards of making enough money to properly support and feed their families. “Hegemonic masculinity,” ... defines successful ways of ‘being a man’ in particular places at a specific time (Kimmel 1994; Connell 1995). In the process other masculine styles are rendered inadequate and inferior, [and are termed] subordinate variants (Beynon 16). Any concept of perceived black masculinity was, by the white culture, denied and belittled as manhood; white masculinity, was defined by white men in their cultural circles. The socialization of black men in America was denied and misconstrued as dangerous. The hegemonic culture considered black male gatherings rebellions<sup>2</sup>.

Reconstruction saw the juxtaposition of the well-educated black male against the ambitious black male laborer against the slick black male con artist. It is not that the enslaved black man was more civilized as a slave, but that Reconstruction created not only freedom to succeed but also freedom to fail. For the first time the black man was perceivably the sole controller of his destiny. Without the necessary education and

resources to build a town, a home, or even to create opportunities, many black men experienced much despair. During the pursuit of freedom and equal citizenship, the definition of black masculinity as defined by black men began to emerge and divide according to behavior. The more educated black men with higher status were considered docile, cultured and whitewashed which made them effeminate in the eyes of other black men and manageable and peaceful in the eyes of white America because they seemed to acquiesce to the ways of the hegemonic culture. Contrary to outside appearance of submission, they rebelled by mastering the hegemonic system of success. The more rural uneducated black men were seen as gentle, brutish animals that were faithful to the antebellum decorum. The rebellious slaves who as freed men migrated northward looking for fast money and easy access to the American dream often found hardship and the street. Thus, the latter environment gave birth to the street hustler.

Defining black manhood is very complex in America. Marlene Kim Connor in *What is Cool? Understanding Black Manhood in America*, asserts,

In a life where there are no rituals, no rites of passage, and few fathers in the homes to explain the concepts of manhood young boys attempt to define it for themselves. Their definitions of manhood become shaped not by the realities of puberty or by the rules of the larger society, but by the images and symbols that depict manhood in their environment. (25)

In many black neighborhoods, there are not many positive black male role models; so many young boys in the environment must redefine their manhood. Connors believes that after the extreme racial struggles of slavery black “Life was no longer defined by

bondage and be boundaries, and emotions ran high as northern and southern Blacks fought for jobs” (8). Due to unemployment and a lack of financial prospects, survival was paramount by any means necessary. Some black male found it difficult to attain the status of manhood according to the white hegemonic definition, “To be a *man* in America you had to adhere to the rules of the white man. But those rules did not apply to the Black man’s life, and even when they did, adhering to those rules seemed to require a compromise few Black men were willing to make” (9). The strictures of white manhood to provide and protect, were unattainable for most inner city black males who experienced extreme poverty and a lack of sufficient education. Connor notes that as many fathers remain absent, many young males will remain immature “boys [who] will eventually learn to be ‘men’ in the streets, where ‘being cool’ is the defining factor and “inner city [will become] more and more brutal,” (21). She defines “Cool” as “perhaps the most important force in the life of a Black man in America” (1). The notion of “Cool” developed into a “silent code of behavior, a lifestyle, a barometer, a measuring stick, a reality check,...for ...achieved ‘manhood’” (10). Men who ignore, reject, and rebel against the power structure personify cool. Connor states “Cool [was] the new rules and new culture for those Black people who rejected white American culture and white America’s notions of how people should behave” (2). Rejecting the behavioral expectations of white America, it became more important to live “with dignity, cultural and personal pride, and satisfaction” as opposed to just surviving (9).

“Cool” entailed living against the rules. Cool translated in the street as, according to Connor,

a desperate need for guidelines concerning maturity that incorporated the strange challenges of street life, of life without the tools of traditional American manhood, and of a life where life itself is the only thing you possess that's of any value. In a country where manhood is determined by the levels of risk you're willing to take—and where usually that risk is demonstrated through money, America's most valued entity—the young Black boy must demonstrate that risk with his life, since it is often unfortunately, the only valued entity *he* possesses. (20-1)

Connor states that the notion of “Cool” black manhood became increasingly more dangerous when it translated to street life, which is “angry, violent, dangerous, complicated, unpredictable, and relentless” (20). The harsh realities of the ghetto moved the idea of “Cool” from rebellion to a demonstrated violence of manhood where young black males can only barter with their lives. Unfortunately, the streets are also “fun, familiar, and filled with adventure, family, friends, and energy,” which heightens the desire to pursue street life. In the article, “Masculinity—Contributing to Health Disparities for Young Men of Color,” Maceo Thomas, Mark A. Boss, and Esther Kaggwa speak about the “cool pose” that many young men use as a coping strategy of survival,

The cool pose comprises attitudes and behaviors that present a young man as ‘calm, emotionless, fearless, aloof, and tough.’ Young men intend this facade to deliver a message of control in the face of adversity and seemingly insurmountable obstacles. The cool pose suggests competence, high self-esteem, control, and inner strength and hides self-doubt, insecurity, and inner turmoil. This pose often manifests itself, as well, in reluctance to show weakness or to communicate emotions, especially the softer emotions. Such a pose may also encourage ‘tough’ behaviors, such as ... make it difficult to express warmth and caring in intimate relationships or to negotiate peaceful resolution of conflicts. Tough behaviors, encouraged by the cool pose, certainly contribute toward young

men's rates of violence, suicide, substance abuse, HIV infection, and unplanned fatherhood. (2)

The concept of black manhood that rebels against the system and rejects emotions that are loving and kind also reject healthy logic to preserve life. Resisting or ignoring health issues is a way to disregard life and reject education.

### **Black Masculinity and Composition**

In *American Paradox: Young Black Men*, Renfod Reese found that successful students were the result of parents who “embraced a culture of achievement. They exposed their children to a broader perspective and always held them accountable as individuals for their behavior.” (6). He goes onto to imply that regardless of possible systematic structures these black students were encouraged to endure and rise above negative stereotypes. Similarly, Nathan McCall in his autobiography, *Makes Me Wanna Holler: A Young Black Man in America*, believes the main reason he did not commit robbery after his release from jail was he “remembered that [he] had something that most cats coming out of the joint did not: [he] had supportive parents” (273). He said, “They cared about me.... I couldn’t let them down.” (273). Parental love, support, and guidance seem to be one of the many and possibly the major factor to successful children regardless of the troubles they experience. Parents should instill hope in their children at an early age.

In his chapter “Nihilism in Black America,” Cornel West, one of the most eminent pragmatists, examines the plight of black America and its cultural need to

improve its status. He outlines that liberals argue for structural changes while conservatives contend for behavioral changes. West concludes, “we must acknowledge that structures and behavior are inseparable, that institutions and values go hand in hand. How people act and live are shaped—though in no way dictated or determined—by the larger circumstances in which they find themselves” (12). To reiterate West’s affirmation, it is both the structure of the system and the behavior of the individual that informs the outcome. Although McCall gravitated towards street life, this system did not maintain its hold on his life because instilled in him was first a strong family system. However, Reese and McCall understand that some young black males do not have positive influences in their lives, so their lives, actions, and beliefs are indicative of their negative neighborhoods. Young males’ risking their lives to be hard was manhood, not reading a book. Reese states black males “must be taught that there is nothing soft, weak, or unmanly about being educated” (17). Reese implies that it takes strength and dedication to be educated. When McCall exited prison, he recalls,

I thought about something.... The lessons about perseverance I learned in the joint. I’d learned about the strength of the mind and seen that mental toughness, more than brawn, determines who survives and who buckles. When I left prison, I knew I was armed with a different kind of weapon than I had relied on before going in. I had knowledge. (237)

McCall had to spend time in prison to realize that knowledge was his most important strength and not his body. Reese continues, “[Young black men] must be taught not to make excuses for things that they can control, e.g., reading and studying” (17), and

staying out of prison. Many inner-city black male students must learn to reach their educational goals just as these two men learned to negotiate the harsh realities of the street.

Many black males do not succeed in school because they anticipate rejection based on their personal histories. Rap is how many black males use “their own language...to reconstruct their history and their culture,” yet it is their language of choice even though they know it is not accepted in composition courses because it does not follow the structure of Standard English (Freire 151). Henry Louis Gates asserts, “There is evidence that, far from getting more similar [to Standard English], the black vernacular is going its own way” (xix). He implies that the black culture intentionally moves its speech away from Standard English. Rap, for many young black males, recalls language practices “since slavery [that] encoded private yet communal cultural rituals” that no one outside might understand (Gates xix). Rap has come to embody the experiences and belief system of many inner city males. Through the process of language creation, many black male dialects become simultaneously exclusive and inclusive because it excludes the hegemonic culture while insulating street culture. Often times the sometimes violent, vulgar, misogynistic lyrics of rap distorts reality for those excluded and included in its culture. For example the recent controversy over the words bitches and hoes has magnified many concerns. Some rappers hold the perception those women who live buy the codes of the street answer to negative names while women who do not understand and live by street values will find those negatives names offensive. Rappers who propagate these negative stereotypes about women contend that these names only refer to

women who as the rap artist, Young Jeezy, implies in his rap “Trap or Die,” (trap being the slang word for selling drugs), “Ya know these hoes love a nigga cause they know that we the truth” (*Trap*). Young Jeezy implies that “hoes know that we the truth” are the women who live and benefit from the illegal sell of drugs. Language here becomes inclusive of women who benefit from the sell of illegal drug sells and exclusive of women who do not. Although this negative stereotype of women is demeaning and expresses a lack of value for women as a whole, its example here is to show that harsh realities breed harsh language. The language of many inner city black males is harsh because their realities are harsh. Many black males turn to the harsh life of the streets because “Some are poor...and want to make quick money...Others don’t have no family so they find family in the streets...and can’t get a job...so they hustle” (Interview O). Their language mirrors their experiences; their language is a familiar expression that paints the reality of their lives. Yet, it is inclusive because the population that is ostracized and set aside become one inside the language; black boys enter black manhood through their own symbols of manhood. It is the role of the educator to end this isolation from inclusion and exclusion by encouraging the development of black male voices in composition classes.

The language codes in rap are similar to the codes of the black vernacular because of its intentional exclusion. Gates describes the codes in black vernacular as a “meta-discourse, a discourse about self. These admittedly complex matters are addressed in black tradition, in the vernacular, far away from the eyes and ears of outsiders, those who do not speak the language of tradition” (xxi). If this is true, then the rejection and

belittling of black vernacular is a direct rejection of the black culture, just as a rejection and belittling of rap is a direct rejection of the young black males who feel rap an expression of their lives. Keith Gilyard believes that home language masterfully expresses concepts because “every speaker has unconsciously mastered the language variety of his or her native community...equal to any other in terms of ability to express concepts” (15). When academics reject and state that the black dialect is wrong or not English, they express that people who have no understanding, logic, or ability to learn speak black dialect. In certain English dialects, according to linguists H.D. Adamson, there is a “pattern of sex stratification, with men using nonstandard features more than women” (110). This seems true for black males for they tend to have the most difficulty in dialect shift inside the classroom. Many young black males seem speak more slang and express more reluctance to change than do black women. Therefore, language for many black males holds more of their identity. Thus, many black males might recognize language in the classroom as a communication system designed for and by the white culture. Academic language seems to ascribe to its own meta-discourse away from the discourse of black males. To the young black male who runs the streets, Standard English does not seem to reflect black culture. Black men will always see themselves through the eyes of the oppressor when using any dialect or language that can be created with the words and grammatical structure of the oppressor. No matter how creative black men are with reassigning meaning, media uses their words, others outside of the lifestyle adopt the behaviors and language, and people will always attribute certain behaviors and language to black men. By co-opting black male language, mainstream society pretends

to understand black male experiences. However, Gilyard states, “fluency is relative to tasks and modes of discourse” (92). In other words how can someone appropriate a language without living the lives of those who spoke the words. Many black males who support rap do so because it speaks their lives and experiences. The lyrics conjure up realities in many of their lives.

McCall in his autobiography recalls as a young man when caught by the police his desire to explain his anger. He says, “How could I explain our anger and alienation from the rest of the world? Where was our common language?” (415). McCall remembers feeling alienated as a young black man, as many young black males do today. His alienation was due to an absence of a common language to bridge his experiences in the street and the experience of hegemonic authority. He later imparts,

A psychologist friend once explained that our fates are linked partly to how we perceive our choices in life. Looking back, I see that the reality may well have been that possibilities for us were abundant. But in Cavalier Manor, [the housing project he grew up in], we perceived our choices as being some what limited. (414)

He explains that perhaps his anger and feeling of inferiority were a result of growing up in the Cavalier Manor projects in Virginia. McCalls’ expressions of alienation and limited communication replays Rodriguez’s description in chapter 2 that unless the student can integrate his home idioms with the dominant idioms into his language system he is “rendered voiceless” (12). McCall implies that a system that ignores or does not address the voicelessness of young black males creates a “younger, meaner generation

...more lost and alienated than we were, and placing even less value on life. We were at least touched by role models; this new bunch is totally estranged from the black mainstream” (415). Many young black males who do not feel connected to the mainstream will continue to create a space and culture based on their environments that are void of many positive values and behaviors; they will continue to stay in the ‘hood.

McCall in his experience seems to call for more guidance and role models for young black men. He seems to support the ideals of both Washington and DuBois. Washington and DuBois wanted civil equality for black men; they wanted black men to be accepted as an integral part of the mainstream. DuBois believed black men must get a liberal education in order “to attain [their] place in the world” (49). Black men must learn to be themselves. By this, DuBois means that black men must be aware of their own thoughts and emotions in relation to themselves and the world. McCall’s desire to bridge his expression of his personal experience to those of authority reflects the need for DuBois’ call for black male consciousness. McCall believes, just as DuBois, that young black men need to learn how to express their feelings of alienation and anger. McCall found his voice as a journalist, while recently many young black men have decided to use rap as a way to express their consciousness and experiences. Like Washington, McCall believes great joy and achievement are the result of hard work, “sever and constant struggle rather than artificial forcing” (Harlan 584). Prison, which is artificial forcing, does little for many black men in their pursuit of racial equality, academic presence and progression, or true manhood.

## **Summary**

Defining masculinity throughout different cultures involves tests of strength, virility, and endurance. African manhood was tested by trials of enduring profuse physical pain and proving sexual virility. White American manhood is proven in America by various desires and behaviors of the overall American culture. When America was founded, manhood was based on conquest and physical endurance through land acquisition. Then as man Manhood then informs the choice of the black male as related to education and the street. Black manhood effects the development of black fatherhood, black economy, black relationships, black families, and, ultimately how black manhood effects the education of the black male.

Black men's development of consciousness would inform development of voice, which would then develop academic presence.

**CHAPTER IV**  
**GIVING VOICE TO AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES:**  
**MERGING RAP AND SERVICE-LEARNING**

**Overview**

This particular chapter co-written by my colleague, Michelle Jackson, and me was presented as a talk at the Conference on College Composition and Communication in March of 2005, will apply composition's re-accessed notion as an analysis of tracing the history, importance, and sustainability of oral tradition and rap in the African American community.. Although we teach at a college and a university, I teach in an adult high school program that services high school to college age students in pursuit of their high school diplomas, and Michelle teaches the traditional English courses at a private college. I have a disproportionately higher number of black males in my adult high school program, but a lower number when I teach a college course. In both of our teaching experiences, there are disproportionately low populations of African American males and higher populations of females and other ethnicities. We consistently find ourselves asking, "O brotha! WHERE art thou?"

We then find ourselves feverishly trying to sustain the interests of the few African American males that we do have. Of the strategies tried, we observed that when we use rap music, we are able to help African American males connect what they already know to learning new concepts or information. In doing so, it will demonstrate how rap has been a legitimate voice for African American males in the community but has not been

accepted as such in Academia. Furthermore, the chapter will also model how the merger of rap and service-learning further solidifies and sustains this voice in academia.

As Anne Gere and Jennifer Sinor highlight in “Composing Service-learning,” “Students’ expectations about service-learning are grounded in highly personal terms... [therefore] students in service-learning courses usually start from a highly individualistic and self focused perspective” (1). This stage of writing development for the student goes along with the general emphasis in composition theory of moving students away from the personal and to the social. In looking at how service-learning and rap can initiate the entrance of the African American male’s voice into academia, composition theorists and practioners have to re-access and add to composition’s general emphasis of moving from the individualistic to the social. Instead of performing a two-part operation for the “average” composition student, another part must be added to bring the theory full circle. Therefore, composition’s new emphasis must move the student from individualistic to social and back to individual. So how does this move happen with rap and service-learning?

### **The Importance of the African American Male’s Voice**

Like many educators such as Michael Eric Dyson, Lisa Delpit, and bell hooks, educators are concerned with the success rate of African American males in education. Educators must find a way not only to capture the minds and interests of African American male students at the college level, but they must also maintain and encourage their enthusiasm toward a righteous end. It is still difficult for different cultures that suffer within America to give presence to their own voice in America in a culture that is

wholly based on the European-American influence although there has been a strong movement to incorporate and honor the recorded experiences of many cultures. It is doubly difficult for African American males-- who for centuries were deemed animals, were designated endangered species and are to this day labeled boys in the eyes of racist Americans --to become a political economical force. This lack of achieved manhood in the face of common society means African American males must follow a conjured structure of success, which forces urban African American males to create a space for their expression that to most who consider themselves morally upstanding American citizens is violent, sexual, and misogynistic. We do not deny the violent, drug submerged, overly sexualized, female objectifying content of many of the urban African American males' expression of his experience, particularly in rap. Yet, it is as Gandhi (2005) stated, "my life is my message." Rappers speak through their lyrics about the life they live.

In order to encourage perseverance amongst African American male students in higher education, educators must assist them in legitimizing their experiences and perspectives as not divested from the hegemonic culture but as a vital part of American culture. By encouraging African American male students to express their experience of the world, educators will validate a desire to name the world and improve a feeling of entitlement, thus resulting in more educational degrees and higher economic control for African American males. This directly lessens the constant rise of the undereducated, lower-economic African American males' presence in the prison system.

Acknowledging the modern African American male voice in curriculum classrooms will encourage African American males to succeed in higher education. Academia would have everyone believe that the only African American male voices worth acknowledging are all of the past. Now academia is faced with a historical moment: the opportunity to examine the manifestation of an oral tradition that has profound implications for the positive progression of young African American men in African American culture. In American culture, African American males and their voices hold negative connotations. The racist and supremacist behavior of many white Americans renders images and expectations of African American males as inferior and antithetical to social acceptance. African American males' presence, thoughts and political decisions are muted in American society. Yet African American male voices recently manifest as rap are authentically their own. Not all African American males possess the same voice, but we do believe that the urban African American or lower socio-economic male voices are the most difficult to locate in our culture other than in the court rooms, and the least heard and acknowledged, other than in the jails. Our proposal to remedy the lack of validation, hence the lack of African American males in higher education, is to recognize and acknowledge the history and importance of oral tradition in African American culture, and to recognize its extension as the creative voices of urban African American males that are ever-so-present, so honorable, brutally honest about the lives of many urban African American males in America--Rap. When academia rejects the voices of rappers who initially emerged in 1985 from the concrete jungles of the northeastern states of America to tell the stories of the shadows that lurk in

the housing projects, to tell the stories of the fatherless households with the single-cracked-out mother, to tell the stories of a too-young African American boy in a gang selling drugs to help his single mom pay the light bill, to tell the stories of an integrated school system that portends to offer the surrounding poor community the wealth of their poor amenities, to tell the stories of a changed America after the Civil Rights Movement, young African American men are silenced, academia “puts them on lock-down;” they are locked in an “academic penitentiary.” When academia silences those African American male voices, academia also silences African American women; they silence their culture, their communities, and their identities.

### **Oral Tradition in the African American Community**

For centuries, the oral tradition in the African American community has followed what academics consider the rules of rhetoric. Rap shares some of the same tenets as Aristotle’s methods of persuasion: logic-- the way that the issue is laid out; ethos—the honor or truthfulness of the conveyed message and of the speaker; and pathos-- the emotions with which the issue is conveyed. All of these structures are dependent upon the relation of the speaker to the audience, and in African American culture, the speaker has always had a connection to the community. For example, the African storyteller, the *Griot*, would continue the oral tradition of story telling throughout the community. The *Griot*’s success is contingent on his continual positive connection with the audience. In Africa, the *Griot* holds great status and is often honored as the wisest person in the community.

Africans transported to America as slaves “brought with them their individual cultures, languages and customs. However, their white slaveholders suppressed this part of their heritage in them. Thus, they had to find other ways of expression, mainly story telling and songs” to maintain and perpetuate their culture (Papa, Gerber & Mohamed, 1). Through songs and storytelling, these captured Africans could tell of their experiences as slaves and of their memories from their homelands. Storytelling became an art form through varying techniques of gesturing, acting, and singing. "The story itself is a primary form of the oral tradition, primary as a mode of conveying culture, experience, and values and as a means of transmitting knowledge, wisdom, feelings, and attitudes in oral societies" (Obiechina, 124). Using these methods, slaves could teach their children about their African heritage and customs. Oral tradition was the only method of knowledge transmission amongst the slaves; literacy was not valued by slave owners nor allowed for slaves. A well-read slave, believed the slave master, would cause trouble by creating an insurrection. Fortunately, the slave master overlooked the wealth and benefit of the oral tradition,

Most slave owners forbade their slaves from speaking their own language, and forced them to speak English. They were forbidden from learning to read or write. In this manner slaveholders believed that they were keeping their slaves in ignorance so that they could neither rebel nor escape. They were greatly mistaken for many slaves would make use of their songs and stories to educate their people, and enlighten their minds and free their souls. For example the slave spirituals which they sang were a means with which they could communicate feelings of discontent and of homelessness and exile. However, not all their songs were of disparity and loss. They also sang songs expressing love, joy, and hope. Other than making use of lyrics as a form of expression, African slaves used their stories and spirituals to outsmart their owners. This clever tactic involved the passing of vital information concerning meeting places, plans, or dangers through the actual

hymns and stories. They were able to accomplish this by the use of hidden meaning in their words and the ultimate result was that they outwitted their masters and proved that they were not, after all an inferior race. (Papa, Gerber & Mohamed,1)

Although illiterate, African Americans were able to transcend the slave master's label as the inferior race and unintelligent through the use of songs and stories. In traditional African culture storytelling was a way to instruct and entertain. The children of the community learned of their past and the adults learned of the issues of the time. As a means of communication, storytelling makes knowledge easier to remember "as a series of events instead of a set of facts" and "gives more emphasis to the rhythm of the language, with repetition and short phrases making the stories easier to understand" (Papa, Gerber & Mohamed, 3).

Gates emphasizes that language techniques such as repetition, rhyming, and renaming are specific to the black vernacular. Gates terms this "signifyin(g)," which "epitomizes all of the rhetorical play in the black vernacular" (53). He states, "the relation of difference inscribed within a relation of identity" (45) between black vernacular and Standard English is the "product of historical forces" (51). Signifyin(g) in the black vernacular is more a (re)doubling of meaning, where unlike signifying in Standard English which is literal, becomes figurative upon the figurative upon the literal (44). In other words, black vernacular uses a sign that refers to something similar to but different from Standard English. Gates understands the confusion that such a definition and response can cause. However, this tradition of signifyin(g) in the black vernacular bears witness to an "encoded private yet communal cultural ritual" since slavery (xix).

Slaves used a “meta-discourse, a discourse about itself” (xxi). Away from the gaze of the white master “black people created their own unique vernacular structures and relished in the double play that these forms bore to white forms. Repetition and revision are fundamental to black artistic forms, from painting and sculpture to music and language use” (xxiv). Slaves had to use a language that involved the master’s language yet held their African traditions. Their task was “not to reinvent...traditions as if they bore no relation to that tradition created and borne...by white men...[but] to revise...to Signify” (xxiii).

Rappers carry on this African American oral tradition, of signifyin(g), conveying information in their lyrics just as the Griot conveyed information in his folktales.

“Folktales accomplished many purposes; they preserved and transmitted culture, as well as provided a means of escape, symbolically and for a short while, from the burden of slavery. The practice of the story-telling tradition acted somewhat as a means of empowerment for slaves: it was something that their white masters could not entirely control, and it encouraged slave solidarity” [sic] (Papa, Gerber & Mohamed, 4). Story telling allowed slaves the hope of freedom and the feeling of empowerment over their own words and thoughts, free from some of the master’s control. Rappers, like slaves, use story telling to express a desire to escape their every-day burdens and to pass on cultural knowledge. The rapper NAS (2002) in his song “I Can,” for example, tells African American children that they can accomplish anything because they come from a great culture. In his rap, NAS lists many historical victories leading back to Africa, the beginnings of his own oral tradition, his own storytelling.

The lyrics of rappers empower many teenagers and young men, particularly young African American men. Storytelling and rapping empowers the underdog, those that are cast aside by society. Rappers, like the storyteller, develop phrasings and words that may have no known definition for the mainstream culture but receive a cultural connotation from the rap community while not being controlled by mainstream white society. Words such as “phat,” which means nice, beautiful, and plentiful and phrases such as “off the hook,” which means crazy and wild are designed and created to elude the appropriating ear of the white culture. This movement away from or around the white cultural structure serves to strengthen and unify the language and community of the African American culture.

Historians, politicians, educators, and other well-studied professionals should be able to unzip the breadth of the message found in the compact form of a five-minute rap lyric. Instead many seek to resist any meaning or significance in rap. Some people insist that society, for the sake of a virtuous future, should not propagate this music, for it is vulgar and has no positive meaning. People who do not understand rap are considered, based on their lack of situated knowledge of the rapper, outsiders, those outside of the rappers’ knowledge. However, if one seeks to understand the life experiences of many rappers, he will understand that perhaps the message is not the problem but the lives that some rappers live. Educators must understand black males from their perspectives, as Freire believes, “students’ languages have to be understood within the theoretical framework that generates them” (152). Thus, it makes sense that social anthropologist, Elizabeth Tonkin would suggest that people outside of particular cultural knowledge

must not only understand the background of the speaker but also must bring their own knowledge to expand their interpretations:

Anyone who makes comparisons from different languages or cultures faces the difficulty that audiences may need a lot of background knowledge if they are to appreciate why an example is significant. Insiders have this knowledge; it's the outsiders who have to make explicit what insiders take for *granted*. And it's a common paradox that the more knowledge you bring to data the richer your interpretation, the more new information you can elicit. (18)

The experience and knowledge portrayed in rap lyrics are shared by the rapper and the community. The rapper lives or once lived amongst the community he speaks of in his rap. In order for outsiders to understand the rap lyrics, he or she must learn the history, customs, beliefs, experiences and the lifestyles of the community. The rapper and the African Griot live amongst their people. The rapper understands police brutality and the crack-cocaine infestation plaguing poor neighborhoods struggling to survive, the fatherless son who joins a gang and sells drugs to help his mother pay bills. That rapper speaks the lives, fears, joys, hopes and dysfunction of the 'hood. The rapper captures his audience with his sincerity of words and emotions. The issues and events portrayed in the rap lyrics express the experiences of his audience, his community. His voice is strong in the community because he paints a true picture of the emotions, events and hardships of the neighborhood. To connect the rapper's voice to learning, academic courses can begin to discourse on some of the truths, such as poverty, misogyny, drugs and violence, of the inner-city black male.

In the tradition of Dewey, true learning occurs when students are connected to society. Rap is an art form that has grown out of society. By following Dewey's dualisms of knowledge to action and individual to society, educators can use rap to create an ideal experiential democratic learning environment. Through service-learning, the community is brought into the classroom and students will be able to use rap to relay their understanding of the world. Rap has opened a new venue of cultural expression and awareness that entices many young African American men to enter the music industry as a career. Not only is rap an educational lure as an industry but also an educational lure as a form of self-expression. Situated knowledge is a focus in education with the many courses that require journaling. If male students, particularly African American male students are allowed to use rap as a catalyst for their own academic journaling, the honoring of their voice will encourage their academic success. This sharing of experiences in the classroom will pass understanding between the insiders and the outsiders, creating a space for communication. This transference of knowledge will fill in the gap of misunderstanding and non-acceptance of the insiders and outsiders. Through service-learning African American male students might get a chance to understand the vigor required to enter the business. Thus, they may see the value of their expression and culture in any business.

## **Development of Voice**

Through profound lyrics, lyrics that are in the language of the community, the rapper gains strength and honor as a rapper; his voice refines. Development of voice has been the topic of debate for centuries. It is the power of language that causes such uproar. The Ancient Greeks believed differently; they understood language as having a defining power. Africans believed the best storyteller was the wisest and smartest man in the village. Language is that which calls an individual to fame. An individual who possesses logic is the talk of the community. The community sings or tells stories about his life and experiences, thus constructing an identity for the individual, giving him confidence in his voice. So, language becomes a source of great knowledge and transforming power. Everything comes into existence through language by virtue of the speaker's perspective, through the rapper's voice. The stronger the rapper's voice the more the community respects the rapper's message, the more the rapper's voice paints a clear picture of the events and emotions of the community. Speaking with a confident voice stems from audience acceptance and audience acceptance stems from the rappers ability to strategically and charismatically use language to portray the truth of community life and issues.

Surely not every African American person or every poor person has as Tupac (1995) raps, "a crack fiend mama, [who] always was [a] black queen mama." Not every urban African American, urban white or poor person in the city can attribute their experience to a mother on drugs, but we all know that drugs are pervasive in the cities and specifically in the projects. We all know the urban stereotypes about the African

American family headed by a single mother living in an impoverished, violent neighborhood. Jay-Z (2003) voices the experience of social neglect, racial profiling and violence in the 'hood when he says, "I got 99 problems but a Bitch ain't one." Although the language used may be considered vulgar by many people, the words capture the true emotion and value of the community. His message clearly states to the community that in the 'hood my problem is not an aggravating female but racism and violence. In their own words, KRS1 (1993) addresses African American cops who are responsible for police brutality of African American victims; Public Enemy's "By the Time I Get to Arizona" (1991) speaks to the state of Arizona regarding their racism and refusal to celebrate Martin Luther King Jr.'s Holiday; and LL Cool J's "Around the Way Girl" (1990) celebrates the beauty and style of African American girls in the projects who must redefine feminine beauty in a mono-Anglo-aesthetic culture of America. These aforementioned rappers are some of the most prominent voices of the rap culture; they are original and unique. Imitation is not honored in rap culture. Imitation is considered weak or "lifting" (stealing) another rapper's style. Academia might easily honor the rap culture by studying the message and styles of rap as opposed to replicating its style as a tool for teaching. This action would reinforce the rappers' concept of white establishments making a commodity from the very thing that they despise.

According to Plato's allegory of the cave some people will emerge from the dark cave of slavery to society as philosophers. They will emerge from darkness to the surface to finally see the light of truth and when they reenter the cave, they will know the truth from the shadows. Many of our rappers tell us they have sold drugs, were in gangs

and lived a life of crime, and then they emerge from this type of slavery to the system. They realized that they are killing their own communities and they rap about their lives and then invite other urban slaves to join them in their newly found knowledge. It is a far stretch for us to state that all rappers see the so-called light and realize their wrongs but just for arguments sake let's say they do. Rappers tell the world their stories, and like the Platonian philosopher, they are rejected and denied a space, a voice in society. Instead of allowing the language and message to "jolt [us] out of [our] everyday awareness into a new awareness from which [we can] see things differently," (Crowley & Hawhee, 14), no one believes nor wishes to hear the rapper/philosopher because he knows the truth of slavery. Many rappers report the issues of life. Opposed to what some people have reported there is no gansta rap, only strong voices who chronicle the occasional violence in the lives of those not heard. Rap is the champion voice and expression of the 'hood.

### **Merging Service-Learning and Rap in the African American Culture: Our Lesson in Sustainability**

Oral traditions: myths, Negro Spirituals, Stories—these entities have been engrained in the African American culture. Through the years, the African American church has been a place of hope, motivation, determination, and activism. When African Americans could not get help from government organizations such as social services, the Salvation Army, or the Red Cross, they could have their needs met at the African American church. When young men or women needed a self-esteem boost, they got it from the African American church. The oral traditions, community stories, and Negro Spirituals that have risen out of the African American church have been sustainable

entities in the African American community. In addition, rap is one of many music forms that has grown out of the traditions of these entities.

To date, service and rap must be added to this list of sustainable traditions. It is quite obvious that service is a part of the African American community. As a matter of fact, through the philanthropic commitment of the African American church, the African American community has housed the homeless, fed the hungry, and served as the “Mecca” for political activism. While statistics (Leach, 2001; Hampton, Oliver, & Magarian, 2003) report disproportional incidences of destruction and disarray within African American communities, the fact of the matter is that through historically African American educational institutions as well as various organizations such as fraternities, sororities, churches, the NAACP, and The 100 Black Men (Johnson, 2005; Skocpol & Oser, 2004) African Americans are serving their greater communities. But, when we look at the level of service coming from African American males on non-historically African American college campuses, we see a disproportionately small number participating. The obvious solution to this issue would be to state that the amount of participation from African American males is synonymous with the number of African American males attending that particular college, and this is a legitimate answer; but the main question here is how do we enhance the learning experience of African American males on non-historically African American colleges’ and universities’ campuses so that they may project a stronger more defined voice in academia? According to Eyler & Giles (1999), the answer lies in a diverse service-learning curriculum. Eyler & Giles (1999) contend that “[t]he appreciation of different cultures and the reduction of stereotyping is perhaps

the first step in the process by which service-learning brings about personal and interpersonal development” (p.26). This is also the first step into giving voice to African American males. As an advantage for the African American males, introducing the merger of rap and service-learning allows them to, through analyzing the music, address the negative stereotypes that society has placed on them. As an advantage for their audience (i.e. other students and educators), other students are able to understand and appreciate cultures that are different from theirs. An African American male student who participated in a service project as a reading buddy to students at an area elementary school in Stanly County, NC commented about his authority: “My experience at the middle school was great! When I first started going, I was a little nervous. I didn’t think the kids would look to me as an expert. One little boy would pay attention to every word that I said. But as the semester passed, I noticed that they looked up to me. That felt good. It became my top priority to help these kids become better readers.” This semester long exchange with the third grader initially instilled a sense of voice and authority in the first-year-composition student. The student was able to recognize that he, in fact, did possess a clear coherent voice worth listening to.

### **The Theory behind the Merger of Service –Learning and Rap**

As we have demonstrated, orality is the very substance that under girds the African American culture. Not only does it validate the speaker to the audience and the audience to the speaker—it legitimizes the overall “experience.” When this experience is legitimized, the speaker is able to take ownership of this experience. With this new found level of ownership or expertise, the speaker is able to project a clear coherent voice.

Through the oral media of poetry and rap, African American males are able to validate or legitimize their life experiences by using the call and response mechanism carried down through generations and generations of African American families, churches, and communities. Because this voice is not widely accepted in academia and readily accepted in the entertainment and sports industries, unfortunately there are a great number of African American males missing in action from institutions of higher learning. This could be due in part to the idea that the college or academic curriculum holds no direct relevance to African American males' lives or communities. Because they are able to see or recognize this irrelevancy, they do not project an academic voice.

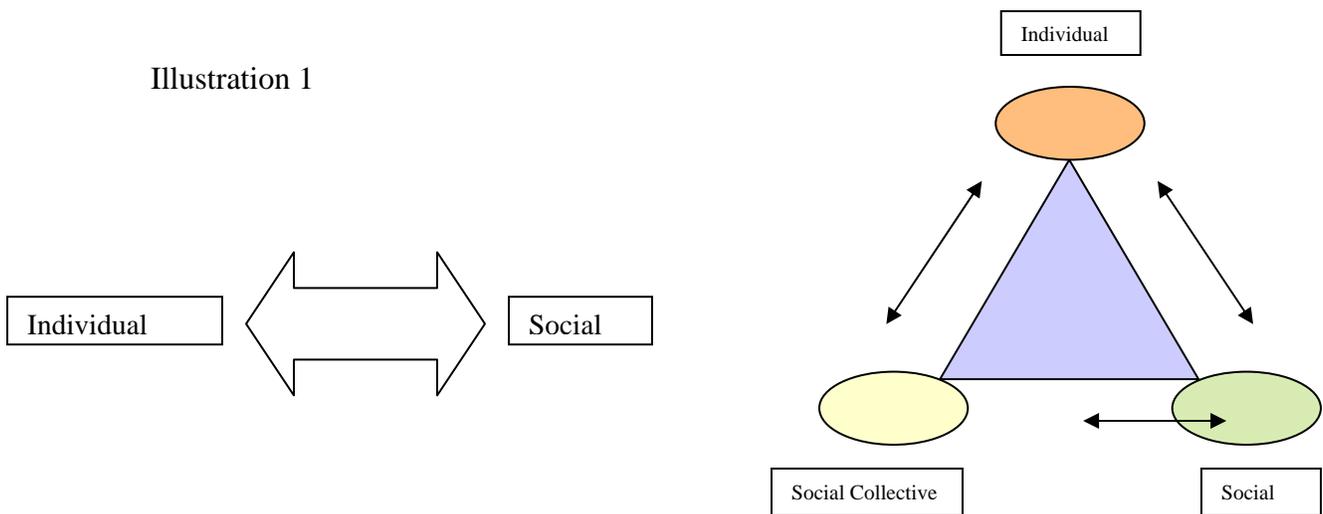
Service-learning courses, especially in composition, lend themselves to cultivating this "lost voice" by bridging the gap between academia and rap. By integrating service-learning into composition courses, we are able to bridge the academia/rap gap by analyzing the language and culture of this particular segment of society. Through this integration, language comparisons can be made between Standard English and rap dialect. Part of creating a communal language experience is to expose that "every variety of language is fully systematic...and fully capable of expressing the complete range of human ideas" and to expose the bridge by locating rap dialect inside of black dialect and then black dialect inside of Standard English. Gates informs us that rap follows black vernacular by reinventing and redesigning Standard English (Adamson 103). To identify a dialect we must use two rules: syntactic or phonological alternation and one alternating pair that is considered correct (103). Rap as part of black dialect follows the two rules of dialects just as other dialects of Standard English. The

phonological alternation is apparent, for example, with rap artist Nelly. He pronounces “there” as “thur.” It is used the same way as in Standard English whereas it sounds quite differently. As far as one alternating pair being correct, it follows the same standards as the black dialect since many phrases in rap songs are considered non-standard, which tends to mean incorrect, wrong, or bad English. In KRS-One’s song “South Bronx” he states “The rhymes you wrote was wack.” In this sentence using the verb *was* ignores the Standard English rule of subject-verb agreement. Using the verb “*were*” is considered correct and thus the correct alternation is “*were*.” Analyzing rap lyrics alongside Standard English places not only rap dialect inside Standard English, but also black identity inside of mainstream culture. Actually, language is the very premise on which we define ourselves. Michael Dyson asserts, “Language is crucial to understanding the questions of identity that blacks and all Americans wrestle with...because language reminds us that we exist at all” (qtd. in Spivey, 1995). Therefore, if one’s language is not accepted into a certain medium, then they are not validated, which means that they, in essence, do not exist, which in turn brings us to our conundrum: the lack of African American male voice in academia.

As Anne Gere and Jennifer Sinor (1997) point out, “Students’ expectations about service-learning are grounded in highly personal terms.” Therefore, “students in service-learning courses usually start from a highly individualistic and self focused perspective” (1). This differs from the general emphasis of composition theory to move students from the personal to the social. In looking at how service-learning and rap can initiate the merger of the African American male voice into academia, we have to reconstruct or add

to composition’s notion of moving students from the individualistic to the social. In looking at the African American male, we have to begin the individualistic move to the social and from the social move to a collective social and then back to individualistic, so that they can acknowledge their relevancy in society (see illustration 1). As the illustration demonstrates, simply moving from individual to social works for some people while for the African American male, the theory must include an additional step. They must be able to connect themselves to their greater community or social collective. By merely moving them to the social, they can formulate the misconception created by the media that oftentimes African American males are the impetus behind several problems or negative issues in the African American community. By moving them through the social collective, we are empowering them to be an aid to the solution rather than to the problem.

Illustration 1



So how does this happen with rap? As Michelle and I have said, rap represents a “truth.” It explodes the fallacy of a just social and socio-economic society for African

American men and the marginalized. Through reading and analyzing various rap lyrics, we are able to acknowledge these issues. This type of recognition is validating the African American male's experience and expressive medium. Once we have discussed these various issues, we can then transport them to a service-learning opportunity.

It is in this next level that our amended theory of moving from individualistic to social collective becomes recognized. When looking at the writing of the students we can see a progression. We first see, as Gere & Sinor (1997) stated, the highly individualistic writings. Evidence of this can be seen in the writings of the following student. One particular assignment in the Writing II class was "to write a research paper on the topic of your choice." In the excerpt displayed below, which was written earlier in the semester, you can see by reading the title of the topic, that this paper is highly individualistic. This student chose to write about his possible career choice and interest:

### **Illustration 2**

#### **Sports Agents: An In Depth Look**

A sports agent is an advisor of and agent for professional athletes in a wide variety of matters ranging from contract negotiations, public relations, pre and post career preparation, and marketing in an attempt to put the athlete in the best position on a personal and financial level.

Becoming a sports agent is a tedious venture in dealing with the three major professional U.S. sports (football, basketball, and baseball). In each of these sports they must be a graduate from a four-year college or university, or have a vast amount of negotiation experience. (Student Paper1, 2004)

By taking a closer look at the student's paper, we can infer that his choice in paper topics may have stemmed from his limited background in life experience. Because he has not

yet developed his true voice nor experienced much other than sports, it is obvious that his topic would match his current experiences and interest. This student's paper was written before he began his placement as a reading buddy at an area elementary school.

As students get more in depth with their placements, they gradually move to the social (making connections between causes, effects, and possible solutions). So we now have these two parts—the individual and the social—and to a certain degree, we can or should be able to stop here, but we can't. We have to take this a step further. The third part of the notion is to add a social collective piece. At this level, African American males, through reflective writings and dialogues have to review the first two levels of individualistic and social and synthesize how or where they and their communities fit into the larger scale of things. Evidence of this theory can be seen in a piece of Student A's writing that was done later in the semester. This particular assignment instructed them to choose a reading from the text *Beyond Border: A Cultural Reader* (Bass and Young, 2002) that they felt affected them directly. The assignment was given after the class was about half way through completing their service projects at an area middle school.

### **Illustration 3**

In America, racism has been a problem since the Pilgrims landed on Plymouth Rock (and probably before then). The lynching of fourteen-year-old Emmett Till, assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., and the beating of motorist Rodney King by white police officers (and their subsequent acquittal) have all been unambiguous acts of racism. Unfortunately many white Americans can only see such overt acts of racism, but African American Americans see the overt as well as the covert acts of racism. Bob Blauner explained, "African Americans and whites differ on their interpretations of social change from the 1960's through the 1990's because their racial languages define the central terms, especially "racism," differently" (304).

...Though the American culture has made great strides in the process of the elimination of racism, it is still apparent that more work is needed. If everyone could come to a common view, the goal could be reached indefinitely. (Student Paper2, 2004)

In looking closely at this second piece of writing by the same student, we can see that while he did not choose to write about literacy, he did choose a topic that affected him. Based on his choice of topic and the manner in which he wrote about this topic, we can see evidence of reflection, voice, and authority beginning to appear. The student is able to make assertions in a clear and concise manner.

Once students are able to make the connection, as did the student above, they are then able to add themselves to this step—hence social collective. It is during this phase that African American males are able to adequately conceptualize the origins of the problems within their communities, the ones who are affected by the problems, and the ways in which they can be solutions to the problems.

### **Idealistically Speaking: How Might This Merger Work?**

In an ideal service-learning composition class, the notion of moving the student from the highly individualistic to the social collective and back to the individualistic should work for all students. When working with true first-year composition students (students who are straight out of high school), it would be beneficial to choose a rap song for the students to listen to and discuss. Prior to choosing a rap song, the professor would want to get to know the students' backgrounds by offering them a short survey (5-10 questions) that requires them to analyze their backgrounds and peers. When choosing rap

songs, professors will also need to choose supplemental readings and activities that may accompany that particular song. If a professor is not familiar with any rap songs, polling the class would be one way to aid in becoming familiar with a song. For instance, one could ask the class to write down three rap songs that represent his/her background, neighborhood or life. From there, the professor can then research the songs using his/her favorite search engine on the internet.

The readings will also need to be related to the service project. The service project that is chosen will of course spring from the rap song. Also remember the most important component of all: reflection. Make sure reflection mechanisms are thorough and effective. A brief lesson plan outline for merging rap and service learning is as follows:

Lesson Plan Title: A Note from a Thug: Reading is Fundamental

Chosen Rap Song: “Thug Holiday” by Trick Daddy (2002)

Reading Supplements:

Gaines, Ernest (1993). *A Lesson Before Dying*.

Stripling, Barbara K. (2003, September). Dispelling the Myths.

Background Questions:

1. What is your ethnic background?
2. What is your gender?
3. What city and state did you grow up in?

4. Describe your neighborhood?
5. What other ethnic groups lived in your neighborhood?
6. What was your first experience with feeling different?
7. Do you see any positive and negative factors that may be associated with your ethnic makeup?
8. Describe the first moment when you realized that you saw a difference of color, ability, and sex.

Emphasized song lyric: “and how come the judges make more than the teachers is making when they the ones raising all the taxes and got us fighting for education life is crazy aint it” (Trick Daddy, 2002)

### Lesson Rationale

In using this particular song, one can go with many themes such as black on black violence, political inequality, religious inequality and inequitable education. The supplemental reading will offer a different view of black male experience through Gaines and commentary about the various images of black men through Stripling’s essay. With such a variety of themes, there are several places to choose for a service project. For example, one could choose to look at black on black violence and do a placement at a battered women’s shelter. For this particular composition class, the theme of literacy in education was chosen. Based on the chosen theme, a placement was decided. The placement was for the students in the composition course to become reading buddies to third graders in an area elementary school. The focus of the service project was to aid in improving the reading level of each student so that they could pass the end of grade

reading test. Therefore the task was to assign each student a reading buddy and have him/her read with that student and walk the student through mini critical thinking exercises that would accompany the reading.

### Projecting Voice from the Students

To allow the students' expertise to shine, the professor can allow them to translate and analyze the lyrics. Translation of the rap lyrics allows students and teacher to understand the similarities and differences between the use of language in rap lyrics and Standard English. It becomes apparent that rap lyrics use words differently from Standard English to express an experience or behavior that is specific to and understood by certain populations that share similar experiences. Translation will also expose for many black males the intentionality and complexity involved in creating a nuanced form of language that not only expresses many of their experiences but also causes and uproar in the mainstream through "the reorganization of cultural hegemony" that results from language being debated (Freire 150). The professor can then ask them to "break the song down" to him or her. At this point, the professor will need to play the song to them and also handout a copy of the lyrics. Students should be given about 5-10 minutes to analyze the song lyrics. Once they have analyzed the lyrics, the professor may ask them such questions as how does the song mirror society? What are some lessons that we can learn from the song? What is the sole purpose of this song? Who is affected by the message of this song?

The professor may also write these questions out and break the class up into groups assigning those with a vast background in rap as group leaders.

### Work In Placement and Readings

Before every placement, there should be adequate training for your students. This is the time that supplemental readings and materials can be used. These readings may also be used to accompany journal entries as well as informative papers.

### Putting It All Together

Remember that effective service-learning occurs with effective reflection. It is through students' reflections that you will be able to see the difference. Reflection exercises may occur in the form of journals, surveys, papers, etc. When applied effectively, this lesson plan will not only give African American males a distinct voice, it will also enable them to become very productive, conscious citizens in their larger societies just as DuBois and Washington sought for the black males in the early 1900's.

### **Summary: What Sustains Us?**

In looking at the contributions of the African American oral tradition to our greater society, we immediately recognize the sustaining power. Our churches and schools continue to study the rhetorical strategies of phenomenal speakers such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, Frederick Douglas and Sojourner Truth. The impetus behind their sustainability is voice. Each one of these speakers possessed a strong, coherent, distinct voice that they projected on to their audiences. It is their voice that defined their existence. Without this voice they would not have existed, similar to today's African American male not existing in college classrooms.

For service-learning administration, incorporating rap and service-learning into academic programs will strengthen the student's overall service experience. By incorporating the voice of rap, educators will empower the voice of many disengaged black males. We must be willing to analyze and acknowledge the conceptual and linguistic values of rap as one of the contemporary resurrections of the African tradition of language. This merger between rap, service-learning, and academia will strengthen the student's interpersonal development as well as bring a new sense of awareness of multiculturalism to the program.

Incorporating rap and service-learning into composition classes leads to one extremely vital state for the African American male—existence. By giving them a voice, academia is allowing African American males to exist. By allowing them to exist, we are able to hear their clear, coherent voices. When they realize that we are listening to them and that their experiences are validated, they will then be able to become a vital part of academic life, thus contributing positively and frequently to their academic communities. If educators modify course and departmental curriculum that helps guide and retain black male students, they will succeed in college. Then we will no longer have to ask the question “O Brotha WHERE art thou?”

## **CHAPTER V**

### **CONCLUSION:**

#### **FINDING WAYS TO GUIDE THE BLACK MALE STUDENT**

##### **Overview**

In this chapter, various conclusions have been made regarding the reasons why many young black males find it difficult to succeed in higher education. Reasons include language/dialect difference, curriculum exclusion of their experiences, situationality, and nihilistic belief. To encourage black males to succeed, educators are developing curriculum and programs to address the issues and concerns that these students may experience in college.

##### **Discourse in Rotation**

As an instructor of many students in the adult high school program, including black male students, it is my goal as an instructor to encourage each student towards a feeling of entitlement. More often I find, through experience and conversation with other instructors that many black male students experience difficulty with believing that they can accomplish their goals and become supportive active legal members of society. When asked will black males earning college degrees change the power structure, interviewee D responded, “No, because before we get up there something always happens” (sic). His comment implies that he believes the white power structure will place a barrier to prevent black males from succeeding. He believes as taught in history that the white culture tends to destroy emblems of black intelligence and wealth<sup>1</sup>.

Sometimes because of such fears young black males turn to the streets, “an avenue available to them to gain riches and has some level of respect” (Interview B). Many young black males see the streets as the only place where they can find success, riches, and respect. Many of them do envision minimum waged jobs as a way to overcome poverty. This kind of thinking from many male students leave not only themselves feeling alienated as noted in my research but also the remaining students in the class and the teacher feeling alienated. Those black males who feel aggression towards the educational establishment more often end up in prison as opposed to college. More prisons are then built to incarcerate the rapidly increasing number of black men who exhibit criminal behavior, and society loses productive, civic minded citizens.

Since I began my research, the statistics on male imprisonment have changed. There has been a decrease in black male imprisonment from 3,218 to 3145 black males imprisoned per 100,000 black males during 2004 – 2005 (“Prison,” 2007). The number of black men in prison has decreased while the numbers of Hispanic and white males imprisoned have increased. While I have no evidence to explain the change in number, I hope that the recent efforts of many faculty, curriculum, and program modifications have encouraged and supported disenfranchised black males to stay away from prison and move towards college education. I hope that the efforts of many supporters have been great encouragement for black men.

As I gathered my thoughts and research, I realized the composition and reading theories of Delpit, Smitherman, Rosenblatt, and Shaughnessy converge in theories of Cornell West and Paulo Freire. Delpit believes that it is pertinent that a student feels

comfortable and accepted when he is learning. She understands that the best way for students to learn and become a viable part of society is by having his own voice and expressing himself. Many black male students need a sense of their identities as black men in America, so they can begin to cooperate and claim their piece of the American dream. Similarly, Smitherman speaks of how a true word can only be spoken in a language that is culturally inherited. She explains that the African American language best expresses the nuances and connotations of the African American culture. Many black males use excessive violence, profanity, and vulgar language (rap is often homophobic and misogynistic) to express their views to offer, according to Smitherman's theory, a more exact and clearer view of their perceptions. This does suggest that the rappers word or any one's for that matter is moral, but just an expression of a perception, a voice about the world as the individual sees it. Rosenblatt suggests that all teachers start from the students' perceptions, experiences, and understandings. She implores teachers to take in account the possible backgrounds and experiences of the students when designing course curriculum. Her theory suggests that in order to transform a student so that he might move into the academic understanding, he must first understand others. Then through this connection with others, the black male student moves towards others' experiences to transform his own understandings. However, more often the undereducated black male student is discouraged by any criticism from the teachers. Shaughnessy in *Errors and Expectations* suggests to instructors to understand the inconsistencies of the basic writer as hypercorrections or as she states in "Diving In: An Introduction to Basic Writing," "a 'logic' of errors" (292). Modifying the way teachers

respond to student errors might help the writer to express himself better by not noting his inconsistencies as errors. Shaughnessy's stages are paramount for instructor development and a continuation of Rosenblatt's idea of using the students' experiences to broaden their experiences beyond their individual concerns. Delpit, Smitherman, Rosenblatt, and Shaughnessy all desire to move students, in this case the disengaged black male students, into a broader experience of life so that they can succeed to a democratic and liberatory education.

Cornell West in his chapter titled "Nihilism in Black America" discusses the hopelessness and despair that pervades the black culture, yet the development of a politics of conversion is needed to transform black America. In chapter three of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire believes, "to speak a true word is to transform the world" (87). West's and Freire's assertions bring together the ideals of searching for a reason and then finding a solution to the problems of a culture that is oppressed and as a result uneducated and lacks power. Both men examine the disenfranchised culture to dismantle first the behavior and then the factors that contribute to those behaviors. As do the composition and reader response theorists, West and Freire seek to offer solutions to guide the disenfranchised.

West speaks of nihilism in the black culture. He states that hopelessness and despair pervades the black culture. West asserts,

we must acknowledge that structures and behavior are inseparable, that institutions and values go hand in hand. How people act and live are shaped—though in no way dictated or determined—by the larger circumstances in which

they find themselves. These circumstances can be changed, their limits attenuated, by positive actions to elevate living conditions. (12)

His statement is applicable to the inner city black male who lacks entitlement to the American dream. Black males who live harsh realities and who must assert their manhood in harsh ways are only acting according to life experience. In many of America's dilapidated cities and towns, young men are defining manhood for themselves:

In a life where there are no rituals, no rites of passage, and few fathers in the homes to explain the concepts of manhood young boys attempt to define it for themselves. Their definitions of manhood become shaped not by the realities of puberty or by the rules of the larger society, but by the images and symbols that depict manhood in their environment. (Connor 25)

Young black men who are fatherless and motherless due to the weakened family structures find familial connection in the harsh streets. West simply states, for example, that some young black males who would rather tote guns, sell drugs, and abuse women instead of attending school to better their lives are simply acting according to what they see and experience in their decaying neighborhoods. Few people standing on corners, selling or using drugs, and committing violent crimes as a way of life are attending college. In the 'hood many people are in the survival mode and few people care to attain a degree that has delayed gratification, as opposed to drug dealing that reaps instant bulks of money.

Teachers must find a way to combat the proclivity of some young black males to return to the streets. This takes much understanding, so the teacher must get to know the

student. The teacher must come to understand some of the fears and deprecating experiences that lurk in the minds of many black males in America. West states, “the major enemy of black survival in America has been and is neither oppression nor exploitation but rather the nihilistic threat—that is, loss of hope and absence of meaning. For as long as hope remains and meaning is preserved, the possibility of overcoming oppression stays alive” (15). If it is true that the individual mirrors his environment as stated by West, then many of our young black males are hopeless and lack meaning, for many cities around the United States are becoming condemned and void of any progression. Although Hurricane Katrina ravaged most of New Orleans, many of the people living in public housing had long since suffered devastation from poverty, lack of education, and hopelessness<sup>2</sup>. Their lives became full of violence, drugs, rape, murder, devastation, and impoverishment long before the levees broke.

Many young black males in debilitating neighborhoods live what West notes as, “The self-fulfilling prophecy of the nihilistic threat is that without hope there can be no future, that without meaning there can be no struggle” (15). Some young males do not see a future for themselves. Many times in documentaries<sup>3</sup>, young black males state that they are lucky to live to 18 years of age. This kind of hopelessness and loss of meaning is portrayed in their many rites to manhood and their speech—violent act, gang related behavior, and glorification of gangsta rap songs.

Like educators, West speaks of a transformation or as he names it “politics of conversion” must take place amongst the black culture. Many leaders from other cultures may participate in his politics of conversion even though he specifically speaks of

developing a “collective black leadership.” He states, “nihilism is a disease of the soul. It can never be cured....But there is always a chance for conversion—a chance for people to believe that there is hope for the future and a meaning to struggle. ...Nihilism...is tamed by love and care” (18-9). Educators such as the aforementioned all speak from a space of hope and love. They believe that through appreciation and love of their students, they can “free [students] from stock responses” and begin to elicit “responses more appropriate to the situation” (Rosenblatt 105). Educators must validate and broaden black male experiences in order to seek transformation. Listening and communicating with inner city black males, educators, in West’s terms, will be involved in a politics of conversion that “stays on the ground among the toiling everyday people, ushering forth humble freedom fighters—both followers and leaders—who have the audacity to take the nihilistic threat by the neck and turn back its deadly assaults” (20). By using terms such as “audacity” and “threat,” he implies that transformation will be a struggle; it will involve leaders’ commitments, will, and often brute force but all with love.

Just as powerful as West’s assertions, Freire speaks of transformation through praxis. Freire states, “to speak a true word is to transform the world” (87). He asserts that in order for the individual to change the world he must speak a true word. Yet, this true word must be in dialogue with others,

since dialogue is the encounter in which the united reflection and action of the dialoguers are addressed to the world which is to be transformed and humanized, this dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one person’s ‘depositing’ ideas on another, not can I become a simple exchange of ideas to be ‘consumed’ by the other discussants. (88)

Disengaged young black males seize to transform the world because they do not speak a true word. Their words are often violent, criminal, impoverished and misogynistic. Rap that has been named Gangsta Rap has taken over the industry of rap music, for original rap was just signifyin(g), more a play with words that was no more harmful than a game of the Dirty Dozens,<sup>3</sup>. The majority of Rap music speaks of the violent circumstances in which many black males live in distressed metropolises and suburbs around the United States. Rappers' words only relay their experiences and perceptions but no discourse takes place. They do not say true words; thus no transform results from their words.

Within the past 30 years that rap has gained presence, the deplorable characteristics and themes of the rap songs have become more apparent in society. Because the words of the rapper are being “consumed” by so many young males, their realities are being misinterpreted as a true way to exist. However, if educators practice loving their students and engage them in critical thinking by dialoguing, together they can say a true word; they can transform the world. Educators must seek to change the dynamics of a society full of debauchery, drugs, and violence that continue to swell as our lower economic neighborhoods teem with many black males without education, jobs, and prospects of acquiring the American dream. When educators encourage students to say a true word, Freire notes that we move away from verbalism and activism. Verbalism as defined by Freire is “an empty word...without action”; it cannot transform (88). Verbalism is only reflection without a commitment to fulfill the action. Many young black males listen to rap with all of its verbiage and believe that it is a dialogue. They do not perceive of their own consumption of the music; there is no critical thought

about what they hear on rap records. They do not make a plan to change the world based on the conditions relayed by the rap song. There is no action after listening to the lyrics. Freire also speaks of activism of which “there is no transformation without action...if action is emphasized exclusively, to the detriment of reflection” (88). Surely, those young males who listen to rap music and decide to commit violent crimes are expressing only activism. This is not to say that black males alone fall pray to listening to music lyrics without thought, surely all sexes and race of people do the same, however, I pose rap music as a way to begin dialogue with disengaged black male students. We, educators, must love our students in order to encourage them to transform--to see realities beyond their experiences. We must dare to speak a true word, to share a true word with students. We must encourage black males to speak a hopeful word in order to begin a transformation.

Freire speaks of inauthentic words as words that have no transformative power because they are not the union of action and thought. Such words, he says are “deprived of its dimension of action” (87). Deprivation is the key word that relates to the dream and hopes of many black males who feel trapped by the negative roles assigned to them. Presently, many young black males are expressing activism but no reflection; hence, our crime rates and imprisonment are rising. Often the realization of becoming a doctor or lawyer or even a rap star is void of action because they only reflect about the possibility. The opportunity for many of these youngsters dissipates because they are deprived of the resources—the knowledge—to actualize their dreams. Many youngsters who turn to educators are often discouraged because “educators... [when they] speak ... are not

understood because their language is not attuned to the concrete situation of the people they address” (96). Often educators suffer the inability to converse with the inner city black male because, as West states, educators and those politics of conversion must “stay on the ground amongst the toiling everyday people” and not float above them. Too often, some educators stand above the undereducated and label them as underachievers. Too often, some educators dismiss young black men whose lives are violent as a product of their environment. These educators perceive no opportunity for transforming students. The opportunity to transform these young men is in understanding their experiences. Educators must become familiar with the harsh realities that resulted in the extreme decadence that pervades the lives of many disengaged black males. With this knowledge, educators must then discourse with and on black males’ terms. Developing a space of co-commitment will begin a sharing of experiences and hopeful transformation.

### **Passing the Torch: Upholding the Fight**

To culminate Delpit, Smitherman, Rosenblatt, Shaughnessy, West and Freire, Keith Gilyard, in *Let’s Flip the Script* charges that the vision of literacy educators, as well as all English instructors, is to “further the development of authentic democracy—enlightened citizenry and all that—by helping to create informed, critical, powerful, independent, and culturally sensitive student voices” (74). He encourages educators to struggle toward this “true democracy” (74). He states that it is necessary for the writing instructor “to create spaces for negotiation, innovation, and exploration of political views. Writing [has] to mean something to [students if they are] going to write with meaning” (126). He continues, “that students who are vested in writing the way [he] was, in a sense

of purposefulness, not necessarily particular persuasion, have the best chance to achieve the writing standards set by academic institutions” (127). By accepting and broadening students’ political ideals, which broadens their ability to write, the instructor accepts and encourages the students to master their native languages. Gilyard states, “The notion of linguistic competence, that is, the idea that every speaker has unconsciously mastered the language variety of his or her native community,...any such language variety mastered was equal to any other in terms of ability to express concepts” (15). Here Gilyard coincides with Smitherman’s and Delpit’s concept of language equality in its ability to express clearly an idea. He asserts that home language can masterfully express concepts just as the language of the hegemonic culture. He continues by stating part of African Americans’ distrust in the educational system is its decided privileging one language system over another. Literacy for instance and academic writing, he contends,

privileges certain language interaction, school-based literacy is not a means of ameliorating social inequity but a tool for reproducing it, serving mainly the purposes of the elite. Their particular brands of speech and writing are celebrated; other types are undervalued, discouraged, and penalized. Students generating the latter patterns realize early on, sometimes quite clearly, that the linguistic playing field is tilted against them. Some relish the uphill climb. Many don’t even bother, thus falling victim to school systems that purportedly serve their best interests. (23)

Just as some students take-up the linguistic challenge, Gilyard understands that others and most often those students who feel devalued will relinquish writing to the more privileged students. Specifically, many black male students often feel ostracized in

composition courses because of language privileging and resist contributing to writing assignments.

Gilyard asserts that educators need to understand as Delpit declares, “that any form of language use is a manifestation of personal motivation and social dynamics” (93). For many black males, the language used in rap lyrics portrays a social dynamic of their harsh living environments that motivates them to tell the stories of their existence. Some rap music exposes the debilitating circumstances that many Americans, specifically black Americans, are subjected to in economically and educationally depressed neighborhoods. Gilyard states,

African Americans aren't the only ones who don't fare well in the American script of exploitation—just a prominent example. [His] aim, therefore, is not merely to highlight the victimization of African Americans but to explore adaptive responses to that victimization along the axis language. In other words, [he is] considering the healing qualities contained in the counterstory about language that has been central to the African American intellectual and expressive traditions. (99)

Gilyard explains here that victimization is a common link between black males and other cultures of men. Black males are not unique in their victimization but they are unique in their response to American victimization. Just as Gilyard speaks of the African American culture, I speak of black American males. They are not the only population that has trouble in composition course, but their prominent lack of success in entering freshmen composition courses is preemptive of success in required courses that may terminate some black males' educational goals. The encounter of rap lyrics and academic language

and societal language expectations has revealed the social injustices and hopelessness that West states plagues particular environments. Rap, Gilyard states, “at its best is on the same mission [as African American literature is a grand gesture toward healing]. A blend of urgent beats and reinvigorating Black orality, rap is recent testimony that the contesting Black voice in every generation will somehow force itself upon a broad audience” (106). Rap is the voice and language of many of America’s young black males in dire need of educational, economical, and overall developmental assistance. Many educators believe that black males who use and listen to rap music have an inability to change their language. Educators often give up on some black male students who exhibit difficulty in and a resistance to acquiring academic English. It seems that both student and teacher do not understand what Gilyard terms “Operationalizing fluency” (92). Gilyard states, “Ignored is the reality that fluency is relative to tasks and modes of discourse. People may exhibit different degrees of fluency in different genres” (92). In order to overcome their harsh realities, many young males who live impoverished lives use rap as a way of expressing their language fluency to write their lives. Their exhibition of language fluency in rap does not mean they cannot develop fluency in other genres. In fact, their ability to express themselves in their native language should reveal their ability to express a concept. As Smitherman states language should not be an indicator of intelligence but their ability to express concepts clearly. To ignore their use of language to express their concepts is to deny all forms of multiculturalism. Educators must accept and acknowledge their language use, regardless of its violent, homophobic, misogynistic content, to examine its ability to relay a message. We must first accept and

understand the message and then we can seek to deconstruct, but only to further understand its inception and etymology.

Introduction to writing should involve literature. Similarly to Rosenblatt, Gilyard believes, “Literature has always been a powerful way of reminding [him] that [he is] not just in the world but of it” (78). His belief that literature reminds students that they are part of the world, an active member of society has profound implications. For example, educators might better encourage black male students to participate in composition courses, as Rosenblatt says, if educators begin with some of black males’ experiences. This association of background might encourage black students to begin to explore a sense of entitlement. Gilyard continues,

surrounding a text in class, being united by it, being at odds with others because of it, approving and/or disapproving it, discussing it confidently, feeling passionate enough to write about it and want to share that writing (which then means attention to conventional usage), seeking new texts, and searching our new talk are some of the most important activities students can undertake—not because they are good ideas in and of themselves, I see now, but because they support democratic development and are on that basis to be favored. (79)

Gilyard encourages the broadening of the students’ ideals through reading and then finding connection with others through conversing and writing about the text. He believes, “Through the realm of literature, it can be argued, runs the clearest path to proficiency in both reading and writing” (78). Through this process of communing as Gilyard believes, as does Freire, that “...democracy...is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience” that allow students who possess low

education skills to enter into equal discourse with the hegemonic culture (75). True transformation happens through each student's communion with the other. Not only will a change occur amongst students, but also Gilyard believes this process seeks "some gentle equalities and student empowerment, in our establishments of education" (81). An education system that practices this democratic approach would "take advantage of varying talents, strengths, and interests of students" (83). Here Gilyard calls for an effect throughout the entire educational system. He wants students to live equality and empowerment. In order to accomplish a change in the diverse student body, educators must first move away from the term multiculturalism and towards the "term transculturalism as a better description of certain educational initiatives that emphasize specific transactions among students from various cultural and ethnic backgrounds as opposed to being primarily concerned with "exposure" (18). Exposing many cultures has not necessarily encouraged a cultural interaction; it seems simply to prompt specific professors to read certain ethnic literature. This sharing of ideas and beliefs amongst students will result in a more democratic education and an experience of a multiculturalism that is not rooted just in adjustments to the canon.

For the past years, the extent of multiculturalism has been specific professors teaching multicultural literature that has been accepted into the canon. Gilyard asserts that multiculturalism must be taught throughout the entire education system. He suggests that "taking multiculturalism seriously" would have three results in the educational system:

...First...whole departments would be more serious about multiculturalism....second...the ethnic composition of classrooms would change, especially in upper-level literature courses. A higher concentration of students from so-called minorities might even become language arts professionals....third...The United States has been a polylingual multicultural nation since its inception and if the educational system had reflected this reality all along, there would never have been a need to propose this particular *ism* as a panacea of educational ills. (85)

Gilyard believes, that if multiculturalism is taken seriously by the education establishment, then more than likely three results will occur: (1) all departments will focus on teaching course from multicultural perspectives, (2) more ethnic students would attend higher level language courses, and (3) the diverse ethnicity in America would have proven itself effective in creating a society of loving difference by eradicating “isms.”

Freire speaks of the eradication of the isms as the “pedagogy of the oppressed, a pedagogy that must be forged *with*, not *for*, the oppressed (whether individuals or peoples) in the incessant struggle to regain their humanity” (48). He encourages coming together of the oppressor and the oppressed to transform society. He suggests that teacher and students must dialogue and take part in knowledge to regain everyone’s humanity. It cannot be only one group’s consumption of knowledge while the other has its meta-discourse. There must be a “co-intentional education” (69). Both student and teacher must be subjects “unveiling...reality...to know it critically... [and] re-creating that knowledge” (69). In order to commune there must be “[r]eflection upon situationality” which “is reflection about the very condition of existence: critical thinking by which people discover each other to be ‘in a situation’” (109). When educators view the situation of many young black males’ lives as portrayed in rap songs, critical thinking

should not arouse blame but a coming together to heal conditions of the situations. When teachers and students share their experiences and their knowledge it allows each of them to transform. Only through dialogue and saying a “true word” will society transform.

Freire believes,

People will be truly critical if they live in the plenitude of the praxis, that is, if their action encompasses a critical reflection which increasingly organizes their thinking and thus leads them to move from a purely naïve knowledge of reality to a higher level, one which enables them to perceive the causes of reality. (131)

Freire suggests that we all practice transformation. If each individual and group critically think and act we will eradicate the “isms” that Gilyard speaks. Freire asserts, “Only dialogue, which requires critical thinking, is also capable of generating critical thinking. Without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education” (93). Educators and students will be able to discourse and share their knowledge thus changing reality for they will see and understand the causes of reality.

It is our duty as teachers to see now as the time to encourage our black male students with low education skills to pursue college educations. Poor urban black males brandish gang flags around the country, ushering themselves to death or prison. It is time for politics of conversion—educators, politicians, parents, and any other leaders of the communities—to take note of the culture of hip-hop, rappers and gang bangers. We must no longer ignore this group and push them aside as troublemakers. Instead, we must embrace them and love them into transformation. Gilyard asserts there, “is indeed a new literacy challenge we and our students face, a task we must be equal to if we are to have

the most favorable participation in civic and business affairs, if our society is genuinely to become more inclusive and approach its full potential for humanism“ (86). This is by means no easy tasks for they will fight us to preserve their rituals and creations, but we must...we must love them by communing with them. Like West and Freire, Gilyard concedes that a change in the educational system and behavior of society, specifically for black males, will encourage them towards verbalism and activism, thus increasing their educational success that directly lessens their population in prison and improve the black cultures political values in society.

### **Initiatives to Sustain the Black Male Student**

Many colleges around the country have developed courses and programs to reach these specific populations of black males. For example, the University of West Georgia created an all-male “freshman learning community” titled Black Men with Initiative that provides moral support and focuses on encouraging black male students to study, wear appropriate attire, and achieve goals (Jaschik 2). Similarly, Medgar Evers College in Brooklyn, NY developed the Male Development and Empowerment Center in 2001 to address the lack of black men graduating from high school that ultimately affects the number of black males entering college. The brochure lists their curriculum as “general education; leadership development; entrepreneurship training; vocational education; skills assessment—testing and evaluation; counseling and career guidance; and health, wellness, and physical fitness programs.” Its curriculum also includes various auxiliary curriculum for academic, career, and behavior modification. To sustain black boys through lower education to graduate from college, Dr. Tom Parker, an education

management professor at Clemson University, developed the program Call Me Mister. Dr. Parker believes that the best way to sustain the black male student in South Carolina is by recruiting black men to become schoolteachers and role models by investing \$7,000 toward tuition fees as an incentive. The program boasts a completion of 20 black male teachers with 150 more in training.

Jeffrey K. Coleman, the Assistant Director of Multicultural Affairs at University of North Carolina at Greensboro, developed monthly African American Male Outreach programs and an African American Male Working Group to address the retention and success of disengaged black male students. The African American Male Outreach program engages faculty, staff, and students in dialogue that focuses on issues black males face and how to deal with them to be more successful academically. The African American Male Working Group brochure boasts its development as a unified force between black male students and administrators to implement methods “to improve the quality of life and increase the graduation rate of African American male students at UNCG” (2). These are just a few of many progressive programs to improve and retain the number of disengaged black male students in academia.

At the University of Washington, Professor Georgia M. Roberts offered a course titled Topics in American Culture: “The Textual Appeal of Tupac Shakur.” The course online description reads:

This course will explore the literary-historical influences present in the work of late poet and hip hop artist Tupac Shakur. We will look at a variety of texts, including Sun Tzu’s “The Art of War,” Machiavelli’s “The Prince,” Frantz Fanon’s “Wretched of the Earth” as well as various selections from the works of

Huey P. Newton and Antonio Gramsci. We will read these texts alongside Tupac's lyrics in an effort to understand the "theory of being" proposed by his work. Two primary goals will govern the overall structure of the course: 1) we will situate Tupac's thinking about race, culture, economics and national belonging within a larger historical framework, and 2) we will critically engage the significance of religious and military allusions and metaphors throughout his work.

Roberts used the convergence of Tupac and various texts to discuss class, race, gender, and the historical and aesthetic conditions to discuss the relationship of power to the construction of knowledge. Although her course was not designed specifically to retain black male students, a contemporary black male who was idolized by many disengaged males was the focus of the course. Roberts created a safe place to speak a true word and transform her students by engaging her students and giving them a space to discourse on such issues.

In my own teaching experience, I retain male students by using various popular cultural creations. Often I use rap music as well as current authors' works to approach my students. My curriculum consists of various rap artist such as Jay-Z, Talib Kweli, KRS-1, Public Enemy, and many more so that we as a class can analyze and appreciate the technique and message of these voice. When using rap music, I address theme, word choice, dialect, and nuances and connotations of words. In essence, I encourage the student to translate rap dialect to standard dialect. Thus, we all see the differences in the use of certain words and the similarities of sentence structure between Standard English and rap dialect. In my composition, class students are required to do a semester-end music project. The music project guidelines are: 1) Choose a song that has profound

meaning in your life (please no profane, sexual, or violent content), 2) copies of lyrics, 3) audio of music, and 4) meaning of song in your life. The students must present their project to the class. Many types of music are presented by the students, and often we end with such a variety of music—gospel, rock, rhythm and blues, rap, heavy metal and etc.—that it opens each student and me to new experiences. Once the student shares their connection to the song, we are able to see our own experiences through the others' experience, thus allowing us to begin to inter transforming our experiences and the world.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, Delpit, Smitherman, Shaughnessy, Rosenblatt, West, Gilyard, and Freire conclude that although they have spoken about specific reasons for students' exclusion from the academia, ultimately educators need to create a space where students do not feel alienated. We must accept the experience of our students and understand them. It is a space of sharing that must be created in the classroom so that we not only understand their language but the experiences and situation that they explain. However, it must begin with dialogue, a sharing of experiences and a loving of the other. Dialoguing, communion, sharing of knowledge and experience, will result in transforming the world. Together through critical thinking and praxis educators and students will validate all dialects as equal to others in conveying concepts. This will then validate the identity of each student in the classroom and eventually in society.

This has great implication for disengaged black men in academia. The contemporary popular black male voice of rap is absent from college curriculum because of its vulgar language. Due to recent programs and courses developed to bring the

contemporary black male voice into the classroom, many black male students are continuing in college composition courses to voice their beliefs. The development of these programs is not only to sustain black male presence in college, but also to transform everyone's beliefs, perceptions, and responses to black males. The nihilistic belief that many young black males exhibit can be transform when we practice inclusion of language/dialect difference, diverse experiences, and examine situationality. To encourage black males to succeed, educators continually develop curriculum and programs to addresses the issues and concerns that these students may experience in college.

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### Chapter 2

1. The Moynihan Report projects that if black families of the 1960s continued to exhibit low economics, single-parented homes, absentee fathers, lack of education, and lack of political positions, it would bring on the demise of the black family. When the report was first released, the black community and its supporters were outraged because it seemed that he was stating that the black culture is lazy, dependent on governmental assistance for monetary survival, unable to learn, and unable to maintain familial ties. Now many black educators and social anthropologists return to this report and question that perhaps the black community should have responded by developing programs to prevent the present destruction in black families and black communities.

### Chapter 3

1. For centuries public displays of the white cultures preoccupation and effect on the black body has grown from public lynch gatherings to televised car chases. This focus seems to me a Delusional Disorder: “A psychosis in which the delusional system is the basic or the only abnormality, and in all other respects the person seems quite normal” (564). Alloy, Lauren B., Neil S. Jacobson, and Joan Acocella. *Abnormal Psychology: Current Perspective*. Boston: McGraw-Hill College, 1999.
2. From slavery to the present, gatherings of black people reap disciplinary actions from the penal system. “Conspiracy and Rebellions.” “Brotherly Love.” *Africans in America*. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part1/1narr5.html>

### Chapter 5

1. Throughout much of American history the white culture has systematically and sporadically annihilated any form of black intelligence, progression and wealth. The countless number of black leaders’ deaths, not all notable people, that are attributed to the white culture dominate the subconscious of black Americans. Some notable endings, amongst many, in the black culture are: the deaths of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Medgar Evers, and Malcom X; the destruction of the all black town of Tulsa, Oklahoma in 1921 (State Representative Don Ross. “Prologue.” *Tulsa Race Riots – A Report by the Oklahoma Commission to study the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921*. 2001. 8-1-07. <http://www.tulsareparations.org/TRR.htm>); the Bell Curve Report alleged findings of the black culture’s genetic inferior intelligence as compared to all other races, specifically the white race: “Recent narrowing of the average IQ gap between black and white Americans (about 3 IQ points) is attributed to a lessening of low black scores and not an overall improvement in black scores on average. The debate over genes versus environment influences on the race IQ gap is acknowledged” (12). (Beatty, Brian. “Part 3 - IQ and Race.” *Human Intelligence: The Bell Curve*. 2007. July 25, 2007. 8-1-07. <http://www.indiana.edu/~intell/bellcurve.shtml#part3>).
2. 37.7 % of New Orleans urban population live in extreme poverty. “See City is No. 9 in Poverty Clusters; Study Links Milwaukee, New Orleans.” By John Schmid. *The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*. Oct. 12, 2005 [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_qn4196/is\\_20051012/ai\\_n15666206](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qn4196/is_20051012/ai_n15666206); “New Orleans of Future May Stay Half Its Old Size.” By Adam Nossiter. *The New York Times*. January 21 2007.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/21/us/nationalspecial/21orleans.html?pagewanted=1&eF5088&en=F7a40848f6402&ex=1327035600&partner=rssnyt&emc=rss>

3. A very powerful documentary about two young black brothers who live in one of Chicago's notorious housing projects—Henry Horner Homes. Kotlowitz, a social anthropologist, chronicles the lives of 10 year old Lafayette and his brother, 7 year old Pharoah for two years in the drug infested and sub-poverty stricken environment. One of the most profound and frightening moments is the reality when one brother states he probably will not survive to his late teens. *There are No Children Here* by Alex Kotlowitz New York: Anchor Books Edition, 1991.
4. "'The dozens' is an African American custom in which two competitors -- usually males -- go head to head in a competition of often ribald 'trash talk.' They take turns insulting -- 'cracking' or 'ranking' on -- one another, their adversary's mother or other family member until one of them has no comeback. This is called playing the dozens or doin' the dozens and sometimes dirty dozens. ..."  
[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dirty\\_Dozens](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dirty_Dozens)
5. This website, *Hip Hop University*, lists courses on Hip Hop discourse offered at different colleges around the United States.  
<http://hiphoparchive.org/hiphopu/courses/category/exclusive/>

## **APPENDIX: ACTUAL QUESTIONNAIRE AND CONSENT FORM**

### Questionnaire Consent Form

Name of Researcher: Adrienne L. Phillips, Ph.D. (candidate)

Supervisor: Dr. Hepsi Roskelly

Title of Project: Keepin' it Real: The Black Male's (Dis) Ability to Achieve in Higher Education

This is a consent form for your participation in this study.

Purpose of the Study: I am carrying out a study of the various reason that black men believe they have been identified as the least population to succeed in college. The objectives are 1) to determine black men's current beliefs toward American higher education and 2) to determine the suitability of academia for the black male from the perspective of the black males who attend college, drop-out of college, graduated college, and never attended college.

What Will I Be Asked to Do? I wish to interview you because of your experience as a black male in higher education and /or of college age. Your participation would involve answering some questions, which would require about 30 minutes. Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from answering any question in this study.

What Type of Personal Information Will Be Collected? Responses to the questions will be considered public but you will not be identified as a source in the doctoral paper I plan to write on this topic.

Signatures (written consent): Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. Your continued participation should be as

informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

_____	_____	_____
Participant Name	Signature	Date

Questions/Concerns: If you have further questions concerning matters related to this research, please contact: Adrienne L. Phillips (704) 651-2626 or [enneidra@hotmail.com](mailto:enneidra@hotmail.com) (please be sure the subject line reads PHD SURVEY)

## Questionnaire

Thank you for agreeing to do this questionnaire. The information from this questionnaire will be used for completion of my dissertation. ALL PARTICIPANTS AND ANSWERS ARE ANONYMOUS. I will not judge your answers. Please do not write your name on this paper. You may write your answers on another piece of paper or on the back. Please answer the question to the best of your knowledge.

Age \_\_\_\_\_ Sexual Orientation: (circle one) Heterosexual Bisexual Homosexual

1. Were you raised in (circle one): a city a suburb What state? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Define masculinity. In other words what skills must a boy learn to be a man?
3. What age did you discover masculinity (how to be a man)?
4. Were you raised with positive or negative male influences?
5. Why do you think so many BM\* turn to the street?
6. Why do you think BM are in jail?
7. Do you feel it is important for BM to attend college? Why? Why not?
8. What things might influence the success of BM in college?
9. Did you attend college? Why?
10. What or who affected your decision to attend, continue, or drop from college?
11. Did you graduate? Why or why not?
12. How do you believe educated BM would change the power structure in America?
13. What would change about the black culture if more BM earned college degrees?
14. What should colleges do to encourage BM to successfully complete college?
15. What can the black Community do to encourage BM to successfully complete college?
16. How has your decision to attend, complete, or withdraw from college affected your life as a BM in America?
17. What is your occupation and why did you choose job/career?

\*BM= Black Men