

Comparing Their Stories: A Narrative Inquiry of African American Women of the
Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (1960-1966) and Contemporary Student
Activists (2002-2012)

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Dedication

This study is dedicated to my grandparents the late Dr. W.B. Mitchell & Mildred Mitchell and The late Mr. Richard “Blake” Cloud and Inez Davis Cloud who personified everyday activism, the women who participated in this study, and the thousands of Black female student activists who fought and who continue to fight for freedom without recognition.

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Abstract

This study is a collection of oral personal experience narratives from four self-identified Black female student activists – two from the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) (1960-1966) and two from the contemporary movement (2002-2012). I investigate general aspects of their experiences of being Black, female, students and activists within the context of their communities and educational institutions. My research questions are: 1) What were/are the cultural and historical factors that drove/drive each woman to activism? 2) How did/have women develop(ed) ways of knowing about self and community through activism and education? 3) How do Civil Rights activists (1960-1966) and contemporary activists (2002-2012) characterize one another? Specifically, this study utilizes structured narrative analysis to organize and present the stories of Black female student activists. Then I use Black feminist theory as an analytical lens to articulate how Black women develop ways of knowing self, community and society.

The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was important to the Civil Rights Movement because it engaged a group of young freedom fighters who did not take no for an answer. As systemic inequities and the need for equality persist, who will be the new generation of freedom fighters? How are young people organizing? What are the connections to the civil rights activist? This study called for candid conversations about race, gender and class for Black female student activists within American society. Although separated by 50 or so years, these two generations have many similarities and differences in what motivates their activism, how they have developed a sense of self and community through their activism and how these women communicate, strategize and organize. This study adds to the research about Black women activism and offers a view

of the historical and contemporary perspective of Black female student activism in relation to one another. I capture the essences of Black female student activism through narrative representation to be interpreted as both modes of social action and knowledge that is self-proclaiming.

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List of Abbreviations

AUC	Atlanta University Center
BGR	Black Girls Rock©
BPM	Black Power Movement
BPP	Black Panther Party
BWLC	Black Women's Liberation Committee
CDF	Children's Defense Fund
CFC	Crunk Feminist Collective
CORE	Congress of Racial Equality
CRM	Civil Rights Movement
CM	Contemporary Movement
DD	Dream Defenders
FAAN	Fostering Activism and Alternatives Now!
FMLA	Feminist Majority Leadership Alliance
GED	General Education Diploma
HBCU	Historically Black College and University
MOW	March on Washington
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
QBG	Quirky Black Girls
SCLC	Southern Christian Leadership Conference
SNCC	Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee
TBT	Truth.Be.Told
TWWA	Third World Women's Alliance

Chapter One

My Story I – Journey of Self-Acceptance

My story¹ begins as a Black² female born into a working-class family in the U.S. South. Conscious of my race, class, and gender at a very early age, I knew that the journey to find my place in this world would be challenging. Not yet understanding why this was or even how to navigate the social struggles that were inevitable, I gravitated towards spaces that were comfortable and perspectives that praised the Black woman. Black social organizations, sororities, churches, community and campus clubs and countless Black female mentors and friends were all a part of my journey to self-acceptance. I now realize that my family structure was a major help in the process of my racial and gender development and a social awareness. Raised in a two-parent household and the youngest of three, I was fortunate to witness life from various vantage points - learning from my family and my own life experiences, which have led me to my current place as an scholar-activist³.

My family is unique in that we discuss and debate everything – and I mean everything. I gained an appreciation for politics, history, social engagement and education from the many conversations we held over dinner and during community

¹ Throughout this dissertation my voice or the “My Story” sections will be identified with italicized text.

² I use Black interchangeable with African American throughout this dissertation. I capitalize Black, because Blacks like Asians, Latinos and other minorities constitute a specific racial group and as such, require denotation as a proper noun. By the same token, I do not capitalize white, which is not a proper noun, since whites do not constitute a specific racial group. For the same reason I do not capitalize women of color. Black is a term adopted after the U.S. Civil Right Movement of the 1960s.

³ I feel it necessary to define for this project the term scholar-activist: one who engages in formal education and the production of intellectual knowledge but is motivated by a sense of responsibility and a shared humanity to be of service to their community.

service activities. It was not that my parents were the most degreed but they were natural intellectuals who understood the importance of education and having a healthy self-esteem for a Black child. We were not afraid to talk about racism, sexism, homosexuality, or classism and how these social issues affect us daily at work, at school, at church, and within the economic, political and legal systems. Not only did we talk about these issues but formed strategies on how as individuals and a collective we can approach the issues at ground level – through activism⁴ and social movements. We watched the evening news and important historical moments in politics and pop-culture together, debriefing afterwards in hopes of learning from one another. We often volunteered together, which led us to start a non-profit to help the disadvantaged and underserved and to combat some of the social ills that affect our local community. My sister and I often argued with my parents about the gendered rules and chores in our household, and engaged in debates on the necessity of a feminist perspective within a patriarchal social system. As I reflect on my childhood, I appreciate my family for the role they played in my overall development as a Black woman.

My interest in African American issues and race relations was spurred by my relationship with my parents and the time that we shared talking about their coming of age during the 1960s and 1970s in the South. Both born and reared in Atlanta, Georgia, they were front and center for many of the key moments during the Civil Rights Movement (CRM). Although my parents were too young to actually participate in many of the events and protests during the 1950s and early 1960s, they still were very aware of

⁴ For this dissertation, I define activist/activism as the active participation, in various ways, of people who lobby around a particular set of issues (Urrieta, 2005). This activism could involve, political activism, community organizing, etc.

what was going on in their schools and neighborhoods. Their parents, grandparents, teachers, neighbors and friends were all talking about the movement and how they would or wouldn't get involved. My mother often tells the story of how she felt when she heard of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s death. She had just turned seventeen years old, a junior in high school, when King was assassinated. Disappointed that she never got the opportunity to work along side him and other leaders, she was determined to pay her respects at his funeral. But my grandparents were concerned about her safety, because of the riots that were happening all over the country. After much deliberation, they finally agreed to let her go along with her best friend and her friend's mother. She said they waited outside the church with thousands of other onlookers. With pride, she told me how she walked alongside Andrew Young, Sammy Davis Jr., and Eartha Kit in the funeral procession.

My father often spoke of his experience being a Black man in the South – the good, the bad and the ugly. He always spoke with pride when talking about his neighborhood and education. Educated in Atlanta's public school system, my father and mother attended Henry McNeal Turner High School – an all Black school named after a civil rights activist of the Reconstruction era. My father told us stories about the students that integrated the University of Georgia – Charlayne Hunter (Gault) and Hamilton Holmes – both graduates of Turner High. While his brothers and many of his friends left for the Vietnam War, my father chose fulltime employment and part-time college student. He was among the first young Black employees to integrate the Atlanta transit system. He encountered racial slurs, discrimination, and even violence. He told me stories about his friends that were killed for their participation in the Black Panther Party (BPP). The

police at an unemployment protest arrested the leader of the Atlanta BPP chapter – a close friend of my father's. He never made it to the precinct; he was shot dead for allegedly resisting arrest. Although neither of my parents was active in the movement – like many others, the movement affected them. There was a greater appreciation and admiration for those brave soldiers who were advocating for civil rights.

I have held on to the stories of my parents and I have tried to make meaning and find a place for them. It wasn't until I began my graduate work that I realized these stories have been guiding me throughout my life. Unaware of its impact, the CRM has been ever present in my educational path and personal development. This study is important to me because of my personal experience as a Black female student activist and my deep commitment to celebrating the work of Black women. I join the ranks of other Black female scholars using qualitative research to understand the experiences of the other and the experiences of self (Collins, 1998; hooks, 1981).

I made a concerted effort to become an active citizen and change agent in my community during my formative years of high school and college. Volunteering my time and using my network to raise money wasn't my only contribution to the many social issues that plagued my community; but I also read and discussed with others the causes for these issues and devised plans to combat these issues. I would like to say that is when I became (unofficially) a scholar-activist. At the age of fourteen, I volunteered at the Office of the Mayor of Atlanta. Maynard Jackson – then in his third term – was the first African American mayor of Atlanta. There I was introduced to the stories of many of the Black women activists and their roles within the CRM. My curiosity for history was

sparked and this began the unwavering quest for understanding how my multiple identities influence my view of society and the influence on my activism.

Most of my education about African American life and history has been supplemented through sources outside of formal education. These sources are the basis for all that I know about myself, as a Black woman. It was important for my family to offer a balance to what was being taught in school (or lack thereof) and what I was being taught through the mass media. I would often hear my parents say that their goal was to produce emotionally healthy, spiritually connected and socially aware children, with a positive self-image of themselves and their community. But no matter how hard my parents tried to affirm Blackness as beautiful and worthy, it was inevitable that I would struggle with internalizing White supremacist values and aesthetics. It was when I walked outside my home that I discovered that the world saw me much differently than I saw myself. Hence, my goal is to present a historical and contemporary view of Black female student activism as a way of understanding Black female empowerment and how the intersection of their multiple identities influence their activism. In addition, the struggle to find my-full-self (i.e. Black, female, student, working-class, activist) within the corridors of the academy (academic and social community) has influenced me to investigate how other women like me navigate these oppressive and often alienating institutions.

Still true today, I have to supplement my educational experiences with sources outside my department and outside the University. Understanding that most academic programs are limited in what is offered in the classroom to enhance both scholarship and social consciousness, my faculty has not only encouraged me to explore courses in other

programs but also to take advantage of opportunities of service projects within my community. I have been and am currently very active in my local community, working independently and with organizations to help alleviate issues concerning our youth and the economically disadvantaged. Specifically, I serve as a board member for two non-profits, helped start and maintain a Children's Defense Fund (CDF) Freedom School, taught General Education Diploma (GED) courses to adult learners, volunteer for a community garden, and mentor high school and college students. My involvement with these projects and organizations has been both personal and professional. The knowledge that I bring into the classroom has much to do with the experiences that I have outside the classroom. Because of my upbringing, countless conversations I have had with my parents/elders, and my own lived experiences, I have gained an appreciation for African American history and activism.

Epistemic Orientation

My experiences – and my socialization/upbringing – have led me to this place in my academic career. African American history is the basis for all that I know about myself as a Black woman and the way I see the world. Activism and community work is how I have learned to challenge racism, sexism, capitalism, and imperialism that pervade our society. For this reason, I utilize an Afrocentric feminist epistemology – a theory designed to help bridge the gap between personal and professional lives of Black women and facilitate a partnership and shared understanding between the researcher and participant (Collins, 2000). A key component necessary to the knowledge validation of Black women within Afrocentric feminist epistemology is accountability, which denotes that “all views expressed and actions taken are thought to derive from a central set of core

beliefs that cannot be other than personal” (Collins, 2000, pg. 265). Black women’s activism has always been personal for the simple fact that they are Black, female and for the most part poor (Collins, 2000, 2006; Harris-Perry, 2011; Rabaka, 2011). It is Black women’s collective actions within everyday life activities that resist and challenge dominant social structures, which acts as their activism (Collins, 2000). The “personal is political” slogan dates back to the second wave of feminism and identifies the intersection of public issues and personal problems for women – understanding that the personal experiences of women were “not just personal problems but, instead, had broader political implications” (Hanisch, 1970; Stanley & Wise, 1993).

Epistemology is defined as the standards we use to assess how we know what we know and what we can claim to be true. Harding (1987) suggests that epistemology is the overarching theory of knowledge that investigates the standards used to assess why we believe what we believe to be true and answers questions about who can be a knower. According to Collins (2000) “far from being the apolitical study of truth, epistemology points to the ways in which power relations shape who is believed and why” (p. 252). Because elite White men have traditionally controlled Western theories of knowledge, their interests pervade the themes, paradigms, and criteria of traditional scholarship (Collins, 2000). Consequently, Black women’s experiences along with other women of color have been excluded from what counts as knowledge.

“Traditional epistemological assumptions concerning how [Black women] arrive at ‘truth’ simply are not sufficient to the task of furthering Black feminist thought...the process by which we arrive at truth merits scrutiny” (Collins, 2000, p. 18). One of the assumptions inherent in my approach is that knowledge is both complex and socially

constructed. I recognize that knowledge can take shape in numerous forms and is difficult to explain and understand. This knowledge is shaped by the individual, as well as by the social constructions of the larger society. Coupled with the idea that knowledge is complex and socially constructed, I believe that context plays a role in every situation, every individual experience, and every observation/interview (Patton, 2002). My research is important because it represents a discourse and a perspective historically silenced, dismissed and ignored. It gives Black women the opportunity to tell their own stories, counter to the dominant narrative heard about Black female students.

Most importantly, I have an appreciation for narratives - the stories of my elders, their struggles and triumphs. I have an appreciation for passing down knowledge and the importance of cultivating the relationship between generations. Brayboy's (2005) example of TribalCrit offers a wonderful example of how stories serve as the basis of how our communities work. Oftentimes the academy dismisses the use of stories to create theory, however, our stories are the foundation of how we know what we know.

"Theories, through stories and other media, are the roadmaps for our communities and reminders of our individual responsibilities to the survival of our communities" (p. 427). Jeffries & Generett (2003) suggest in "attempting to understand the communities in which we work [and live], Black women researchers must consider the places we were reared, our gender, race, class, and ability, along with other interrelated factors that play a crucial role in developing and shaping our experiences and the experiences of our participants" (p. 3).

This study involves a collection of narratives from four Black female student activists – two from the SNCC (1960-1966) and two from the contemporary movement

(2002-2012). These women self-identify as Black female student activists – past or present. They have dedicated their lives to ensuring equity among a variety of groups and issues – race, gender, sexual orientation, education, sexual assault to name a few. In recognizing that Black female students are not a monolithic group, I took a concerted effort to recruit a diversified group of participants as it relates to socioeconomic background (class), social interests, and regional location. They work to improve the lives of oppressed people and offer motivation and inspiration for those participating in the movement and in the process developed a base of knowledge of self and community through activism. For these women, activism is a central aspect of their lives – actively engaged in human rights well beyond their years with SNCC (pronounced “snick”), CRM and the contemporary movement. It is my desire to tell the stories of these women and the connection they have to one another. With this dissertation, I work to reconstruct educational history to include Black female student activists’ experiences (i.e. separate from the experiences of men and older women) within the CRM and set in motion the study of their experiences within the contemporary movement.

Most of my education about African American history and involvement with activism has been supplemented through sources outside formal education. Having to fight my way through the problems that society has created for the Black woman sparked my interest in history and activism. As a doctoral student in the field of education, specializing in cultural studies, I have chosen to focus my research on Black female student activism in the form of a narrative inquiry of the historical and contemporary perspectives on how they came to identify as Black female student scholar-activists and how they came to make sense of their multiple identities – being Black, female, socially

active and educated. Lastly, my ultimate goal is to contribute to the intellectual knowledge of Black feminist work, help raise awareness of the good work being done by young Black women at the grassroots level, and offer a medium for older and younger Black activists to communicate and work together.

Purpose of Study

The Civil Rights Movement (CRM) is one of America's greatest stories – the fight for equality and justice and the struggle of men and women who dedicated themselves to right the wrongs of the faulty American system. Layered with racist, sexist and oppressive ideologies and practices since the Civil War, America has made strides to overcome its dark past. However, it has not been without the unwavering determination and strength of many freedom fighters, generations of idealistic activists – men and women, individuals and organizations – seeking an equal and fair shot at the American dream⁵. Hence, this movement is uniquely American and something that resonates in us and with us everyday. Still, there is more work to be done. The disproportionate number of Hispanic and Black men in jail, families living in poverty, and high school dropout rates are all examples of why this nation is still divided along the color line and still battling the demons of racism that are so embedded in the American legal system, educational system, healthcare system, economic system, and media (Bell, 1992;

⁵ The American Dream probably has a slightly different meaning for every U.S. citizen, depending on one's personal value system and the generation in which one was raised. However, for this dissertation I align my thoughts with Collins (2006): “as a belief in the equal treatment of each individual citizen over differential group treatment; the guarantee of basic fairness in jobs, education, housing, and consumer marketplaces; and the promise that, if one works hard, one can have a promising future” (pg. 4).

Anderson, 1988). Whether one is an African American, White, Hispanic, Asian, young or old – the CRM still impacts us all.

Two thousand and ten marked the 50th anniversary of the formation of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Many celebratory and commemorative events, documentaries, lectures, and articles have surrounded the significance of SNCC—its ability to mobilize thousands of students so quickly and even more so, the national attention received due to the make-up of the group being very diverse. SNCC is an organization formed out of the American Civil Rights Movement during the 1960s. Ella Baker – a field secretary for SCLC, organized SNCC after the Greensboro Sit-ins of 1960. Her goal was to assist the new student activists because she viewed young emerging activists as a resource and an asset to the movement. Ella Baker is one of many unsung heroines of the CRM and an elder that believed in a multigenerational approach to organizing-planning-strategizing for the movement.

SNCC is known for their commitment, creativity, and radical youthful energy. “SNCC became a community for a small but growing number of [young] idealistic activists, whites as well as Blacks, nonstudents and students, northerners and southerners” (Carson, 1981, p. 1). These young people were energetic and enthusiastic about participating in the movement. Many chose to join the movement in spite of their friends and families and their own concern for their safety. Not only were their lives in danger, SNCC members put their education on the line – many being expelled from their institutions due to their involvement in the movement. Understanding there were very dangerous times ahead, these students were willing to leave their homes, schools and defy their parents and educational institutions to join the movement. SNCC ushered in a

more radical resistance to racism, “uniquely and vividly reflecting the emergent values of an expanding social movement” and attracted many of the courageous young activists (p. 1). Consequently, during SNCC’s formative years there were many lessons learned in strategy and tactics that helped the national CRM.

Another unique aspect of the SNCC organization was the number of women students that participated and held leadership roles. Black female students left their institutions to work alongside Black men during many of the CRM demonstrations (Hughett, 2010). SNCC was intentional about how the policies of the organization were set up. The group was “antibureaucratic” and “antihierarchical”, willing to work with anyone who was willing to work with them, although status was still a major influence (Payne, 1993). SNCC followed the philosophy of non-violence and like many other Black organizations was anchored in Christian values. SNCC was the most active organization in the Mississippi Delta and one that was open to women leadership. However, despite the diversity and the “beloved community – a multifaceted belief system characterized by nonhierarchical leadership, community centered organizing and ideological openness,” there was still gender inequality in SNCC (Anderson-Bricker, 1999). Who could forget the infamous statement by Stokely Carmichael - one of SNCC’s most outspoken members: “The position of women in SNCC is prone” (Carson, 1981)?

It was quite common for women to be involved with the CRM but they usually took a back seat to male leadership. Many of the civil rights organizations were based on Christian principles and led by ministers whose sexism and authoritarian views of leadership prevented women from reaching higher positions (Collier-Thomas, 2010). Much like the Black church, these organizations saw women as supporting cast – that it

was not in God's divine order for women to lead. Yet it's evident through historical documents that women's participation was at an all time high during the SNCC era of the CRM. Charles Payne (1993) in *Men Led, But Women Organized: Movement Participation of Women in the Mississippi Delta* states that it was no "secret that young people and women led organizationally" – men led, but women organized the CRM (p. 1). In many of the organizations – Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and National Association of the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) among others – the women involved provided food and housing for movement volunteers. Black women also directed voter registration drives and taught in the Mississippi Freedom Schools (i.e. freedom schools were developed as a part of 1964 Freedom Summer civil rights project, as an effort to register voters in the Black community and educate Mississippi students for social change) (Moore, 2009). Black women were in large part responsible for generating support among Blacks in rural areas (Payne, 1993).

The majority of Black women active in civil rights organizations were socialized in this racist and sexist society and were conditioned to disregard their femaleness and to value race as the only relevant label of identification (hooks, 1981). There were still major issues within the larger Black community that demanded Black women's attention that had to do with race more so than gender. It is necessary to note that "for some women work within Black organizations sensitized them to gender issues" and resulted in a more feminist consciousness during the mid to late 1960s (Collins, 2006). In response to structural changes in the mid 1960s, Black female activists in SNCC formed the Black Women's Liberation Committee (BWLC) that later evolved into the Third World Women's Alliance (TWWA). Both organizations are women's activist groups that

emphasize opposition to sexism, racism and imperialism. However, it could have also been the case that women purposely placed men at the forefront – because they were well aware of the sexist society in which they lived – so that more people would engage with the movement (Robnett, 1997).

Women had a big influence on the movement as members of NAACP, SCLC, SNCC, among others and as dedicated participants in civil rights activities (i.e. marches, boycotts, sit-ins, etc.). Given the social and religious views at the time, it is astonishing that women achieved any leadership positions during this era. However, there were a few Black women who achieved prominence. For instance, Septima Clark was responsible for training teachers for the SCLC, Ella Baker was the executive secretary for the SCLC and instrumental in forming SNCC, and Fannie Lou Hamer was Vice Chair the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party and an elected delegate to the Democratic National Convention. Moreover, these women were instrumental in organizing activities and corralling young people to be a part of the movement.

Among those young activists, female students like Diane Nash, Ruby Doris Smith-Robinson, Bernice Johnson-Reagon, and Prathia Hall played active roles in organizing and participating in student sit-ins at segregated lunch counters, movie theaters and other movement activities affiliated with desegregation. Although these young women (along with many others) were extremely instrumental within the organization, they are not household names among the “general population”, and are even lesser known by the younger generation. This could be largely due to few published accounts of the Civil Rights era that document the major role Black female students played in the modern movement for social change, the lack of in-depth focus on the CRM

in U.S. history courses in public schools, or this newer generations' complacency with Americas deceptive racial and social advancements (Crawford et al., 1993; Collins, 2006; Pough, 2007). In most conversations about women activists during the CRM names like Rosa Parks, Coretta Scott King, or Dorothy Height are more likely to come up as influential. I seek to shine a brighter light on the young women who dedicated so much of their knowledge, leadership, and talent to the movement through this narrative study.

Although there have been many books written about Black women's activism, there are very few that focus exclusively on the experiences of the young Black female student activist within SNCC and even fewer accounts within the contemporary movement⁶ (Fleming, 1998; Holsaert et al., 2010)⁷. Cynthia Fleming's (1998) *Soon We Will Not Cry: The Liberation of Ruby Doris Smith Robinson* gives a beautiful description of Black female student activism in the 60s. Her in depth look into the life and legacy of Ruby Doris Robinson offers a view of the unique balance of Robinson's intelligence yet sometimes brash voice that catapulted her to one of the top leadership positions in SNCC. Robinson's activism not only focused on racial equality but she advocated and fought for women's rights as well. However, a number of other studies and/or biographies have consolidated the experiences of these women as social and political activists, focusing on their race and gender, but overlooking the differences in their experiences based on their age, class, and education. "For decades history has been so dazzled by [Black men's]

⁶ For this dissertation, contemporary movement refers to the social, political, environmental activism for true democracy, social justice and self-determination against systemic racism, sexism, classism, homophobia that has taken place over the last ten years (Moola, 2004).

⁷ Here are two examples of books that exclusively focus on BFSAs. Fleming's *Soon We Will Not Cry: The Liberation of Ruby Doris Smith Robinson* and Holsaert, et al. *Hands on the Freedom Plow: Personal Accounts by Women in SNCC*

commitment and charisma that it has not looked behind them to see the tens of thousands of Black women standing there” (Hine & Thompson, 1998, p. 267). It is my objective to elevate the Black female student activist narratives by capturing and comparing their experiences of activism. I also use Black feminist theory to examine Black women’s experiences as student activists during the CRM and contemporary movement. Hence, this dissertation is vital to the field of history and Black feminist scholarship because it focuses on a key period in American history (i.e. civil rights movement) and examines issues of race, gender and class in the context of historical and contemporary Black female student activism.

During the CRM, activism for Black women was grassroots and often something that was an everyday common act; unfortunately, many place it in the past (Payne, 1993). However, I argue that there is a large number of Black female student activists helping to lead the contemporary movement for human rights (which includes civil rights, women’s rights, and gay rights) and other organized social and political activities in diverse institutional contexts – community-base Black organizations, multiracial coalitions, grassroots and professional groups, feminist associations (Guy-Sheftall, 1995; Springer, 1999; Collins, 2006; Brown, 2009). Despite the current assumption of youth apathy, a modern movement exists – especially among Black women. Although there is a sense of an “unrealized potential of the American Dream, its vision still remains attractive” (Collins, 2006, pg. 5).

Springer’s (1999) *Still Lifting, Still Climbing: Contemporary African American Women’s Activism* offers a unique selection of critical essays that examines the broad range of social, political and global activism of African American women during the

CRM and post-civil rights. Although not within the ten-year (i.e. 2002-2012) span that I am researching, this book is an excellent review of the sociohistorical narrative of Black women's activism up to the twenty-first century. The title (*Still Lifting, Still Climbing*) as well as the essays within "emphasizes the idea of historical continuity between African American women of the past, present, and future" (p. 2). I agree with Springer (1999) "the struggle is never over as long as social inequality (e.g. AIDS, sexism, institutional racism, drug abuse, poverty, homophobia, to name a few) continues to plague any member of the African American community" (p. 2).

Much like Black female student activism of the CRM, contemporary Black female student activists' is a phenomenon rarely researched (Finely, 2007). The extensive searches I conducted on Google, ERIC, JSTOR, numerous library databases and ProQuest Dissertations/Theses dissertation database indicate that no studies have been completed on comparing the experiences of Black female student activism of SNCC and contemporary movement. The majority of contemporary accounts of Black female youth activism are situated within Hip Hop feminist pedagogy. Hip Hop pedagogy as a discipline surfaced during the early 2000s as a practical application and intersection between Hip Hop and education. Informed by Freire's (1970) work on Brazilian farm workers and the use of literacy as a tool for liberation, Hip Hop pedagogy is interdisciplinary in that it is situated in cultural studies, women's studies, African American studies, urban education, and social justice education⁸.

The vast majority of research in Hip Hop pedagogy focuses on Hip Hop's power

⁸ Social justice education is a concept that argues that educators are responsible for helping to create a social just society by infusing social and political issues and activities within the curriculum. John Dewey, Paulo Freire, and bell hooks are all examples of educators who explore the practice of social justice education.

to engage students in urban communities (Stovall, 2006; Hill, 2009; Clay, 2004/2012, Love, 2012). When most people think of Hip Hop they think of rap music, but Hip Hop culture is comprised of several components including Disc Jockey (i.e. Deejaying), Master of Ceremony (i.e. MC or rapping), Break Dancing, Graffiti Art, and Beat Boxing, and the fifth element being the knowledge. Research suggests that Hip Hop has historically functioned as a tool of rebellion to give voice to marginalized and disenfranchised communities (Collins, 2006; Pough, 2004; Dyson, 2007; Love, 2012). “The areas in our contemporary society touched by Hip Hop are so vast that it is sometimes difficult to look at contemporary U.S. popular culture and distinguish between what is Hip Hop and what is not (Pough, 2004, p. 5). “Understanding Hip Hop culture is crucial to understanding its influence, particularly its influence on the live of young Black women” (p. 6).

In addition to Hip Hop pedagogy, a significant number of African American women in the Hip Hop generation are bypassing scholarly venues and other traditional outlets for political and feminist thought for a readership that is more non-academic (Collins, 2006). Black female students are not only preforming activism (through social justice activities) but they are also expressing their activism through mass media, social media, and popular culture – for example, personal essays, fiction, music, spoken word poetry, dance. Pough (2004) suggests, “talking about Hip Hop as a culture, not just in terms of its connection to rap, sets the stage for a wider understanding of Hip Hop as a youth movement and as a cultural phenomenon that encompasses a variety of genres” (p. 5).

Although much of the literature I found focused on Black girls or youth of color

and not specifically Black female college students, it does give me a baseline of knowledge on the subject. In fact, recent feminist scholarship suggests that the Hip Hop feminist movement may very well be the most “political polyvocal and socially visible manifestation” of the ongoing evolution of the Women’s Liberation movement prevalent in contemporary U.S. society (Pough et al., 2007; Brown, 2009; Springer, 2002). Ruth Nicole Brown is the leading scholar on Hip Hop feminism. Her work shows educators how to use Hip Hop to inform educational practices that could encourage and sustain local and global youth community activism efforts (Brown, 2009; Brown & Kwakye, 2012). Brown’s (2009) *Black Girlhood Celebration: Toward a Hip Hop feminist pedagogy* recognizes the everyday work many young women of color are doing, outside of mainstream categories, for social change by painting an unconventional picture of how complex – and necessary – the goal of Black girl celebration can be. She “defines and uses Hip Hop culture and feminist methodology as the way in, to transform oppressive institutions, policies, relationships, and beliefs in young women” (pg. xiv).

Pough et al.’s (2007) book *Home Girls Make Some Noise: Hip Hop Feminism Anthology*, is a collection of critical essays, cultural critiques, interviews, personal narratives, fiction, poetry and artwork by contributors varying from women working within the Hip Hop sphere, Hip Hop feminists and activists “on the ground”, scholars, writers and journalists. The book acts as a living document that chronicles just how vital Hip Hop is to the everyday realities of contemporary America (Pough et al., 2007). They explore “Hip Hop as a worldview, as an epistemology grounded in the experiences of communities of color under advanced capitalism, and as a cultural site for rearticulating identity and sexual politics” (pg. vii).

In keeping with the theme of a contemporary movement, I argue for the need to utilize sources outside what is normally considered legitimate academic scholarship. The majority of the other sources that I have come across have been what most would consider nonacademic – multimedia clips on Youtube®, blogs and Internet articles highlighting young Black women who are influential as activist within the non-profit sector and on college campuses. With the lack of research found about Black female student activism, one would think Black females are not engaged in activism. However, when we look at other sources outside academic journals, the story is much different. Black female students are very involved at their institutions, in their communities, and globally.

Much has changed with the introduction of modern technology. Students are talking about their experiences and displaying their activism via Facebook®, Twitter®, Youtube®, Tumblr®, personal blogs and other social media outlets. Students are able to connect with one another more easily and quicker than ever before. The ways in which young people organize and demonstrate has changed from picket signs and marches to online petitions, video blogs and Facebook® groups. I am not arguing for a greater effectiveness of one over the other, rather the need to recognize the importance of all types of activism. There were some recent events where students organized around an issue through a demonstration and online – Jena 6 in 2006, Troy Davis' execution in 2011, Occupy Wall Street in 2011, and Trayvon Martin's murder in 2012, for example. With these examples, students traveled to the cities where these demonstrations were held, organized on their local campuses and participated through online protests. Black female students have been present and actively involved with these protests and many

more. As I sift through the many videos, blogs, Internet articles, non-academic and academic literature, I see various organizations and mini-movements that are going unrecognized by many.

Due to the possible disconnect between the generations, some of the civil rights activists are asking: When I die is that it? Who will carry the legacy of freedom fighters (SNCC, 2011b)? SNCC was important to the CRM because it engaged a group of young freedom fighters who did not take no for an answer. As systemic inequities and the need for equality persist, who will be the new generation? How are young black women organizing? What are their connections to the civil rights activist of the 1960s? How do they make sense of their multiple identities and experiences being Black, female, scholars and activists? The aforementioned questions are general inquiries that I am seeking to understand and answer throughout this research process.

Research Questions

My purpose in this research is to examine narratives about the shared experiences of Black female student activists. The research questions that guide this study are:

- *What were/are the cultural and historical factors that drove/drive each woman to activism?*
- *How did/have women develop(ed) ways of knowing about self and community through activism and education?*
- *How do Civil Rights activists (1960-1970) and contemporary activists (2002-2012) characterize one another?*

Specifically, this study utilizes Black feminist theory as an analytical lens to articulate how Black female student activists from different generations develop standpoints on self, community and education (Collins, 2000).

There are several reasons I have chosen to focus on this particular subject. The first is to hopefully fill the huge gap in research about how Black female students' experiences of marginality at the intersections of their race, gender and class and how it has informed their activism. Secondly, is to connect two generations, examine their influences on one another, and offer one intergenerational conversation about Black female student activism. Thirdly, to argue the need to utilize resources outside what is normally considered academic scholarship as legitimate sources of knowledge.

Research Methods

Qualitative methods typically produce a wealth of detail about a broader range of experiences for a much smaller number of people to gain an in depth perspective about a phenomenon (Patton, 2002). My research is a combination of cultural studies, history, feminist theory, and education. Because of the interdisciplinary nature and multigenerational approach to this dissertation, I am able to utilize sources, an epistemological and theoretical framework, and research method that will allow me to be creative and unconventional.

With this study, I explored the experiences of Black female student activists through a collection of oral personal experience narratives (Patterson, 2008). The narrative inquiry approach includes interactive interviews of four Black female student activists, two who were active in SNCC (1960-1966) and two contemporary activists (2002-2012), to gain better understanding of their experiences. Thus, I investigated

general aspects of their experiences of being Black, female, students and activists in the context of their communities and educational institutions. I used Labov's (1972) structured narrative analysis to organize and present the stories these women share about their past and present experiences. I chose to use Collin's (2000) Black feminist epistemology to interpret the data. I collected these narratives naturally and conveyed meaning in standard structural forms that had recurrent patterns that I identify and used to interpret the data (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Narratives are often used to "understand a social phenomena from the perspectives of those involved, to contextualize issues in their particular socio-cultural-political background, and oftentimes to transform or change social conditions" (Glesne, 2010, pg. 4).

My selection process was quite narrow and purposeful because this study identifies a very specific individual and seeks an in-depth view of their experiences (Patton, 2002). The participants for this study were selected based on their self-identification as a Black/African American woman and their participation as student activists in SNCC or a contemporary activist organization. All interviews were face-to-face, three in person and one with Skype® and were recorded on a digital recorder. I also took fieldnotes before, during and after the interviews. Upon completion of the interviews, I transcribed, coded and analyzed the data from all participants to find patterns in the responses within the same generation and across generations in order to gain an understanding of Black female student activism.

It was necessary for me to keep in mind the complexity of history and its role in the participants' lives, their identity as female, and Black. In conjunction with interviews, I completed document and archival analysis of data for this research. The documents

reviewed included the following: newspapers, magazines, multimedia clips, blogs, social media sites, and letters from SNCC, NAACP, and other contemporary activist organizations.

Delimitations and Limitations

It is always important to be open and clear about a study's limitations, that is, to anticipate and address criticisms that may be made of a particular method and/or analysis (Patton, 2002). Delimitations narrow the scope of the study and are those characteristics that researchers can control, whereas limitations identify potential weaknesses and are those elements that the researcher cannot control (Creswell, 2003). They both provide parameters – although different – by which the researcher can establish the boundaries, exceptions, reservations, and qualifications within the design (Castetter & Heisler, 1977). The delimitations of this study are the race, gender, and age of the participants. I recognize that SNCC was a very diverse organization, more diverse than most other civil rights organizations during the 60s (Payne, 1993). Though there were a number of men, white women, and non-student community organizers that I could have chosen to focus on, I decided to recruit Black female students because of the lack of written research and the personal connection to my story. This is also the case for the contemporary activists. Recognizing that student activism spans all races, classes, and genders, I have chosen to focus on the activism of Black female students.

This dissertation is limited in the analysis of literature and oral data from the perspective of the participants. The written resources on Black female student activists in SNCC are somewhat limited and the literature on contemporary Black student activism is very limited. Because of my methodology – qualitative – I acknowledge that biases do

exist and that they cannot be totally controlled or separated out. It is also necessary to acknowledge that interactive interviewing is “emotionally draining and time consuming,” ideally requiring researchers to have already established a relationship with participants (Ellis, Kiesinger, and Tillmann-Healy, 1997).

Role of Researcher

It is my intention to extend beyond the boundaries of formal education (schooling) and institutions of higher education (colleges and universities) as a scholar-activist. I believe that teachers/professors and community activists are both educators and have had a unique relationship throughout history. As a cultural and educational scholar, my work demands that I examine both the classroom and the cultural pedagogy that takes place outside the classroom in order to make sense of race, class and gender and their relation to the socio-educational process (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2001). I push against the dominant narrative of academicians spending the majority of their time in the ivory tower enthralled in their research.

I offer a counter narrative of a Black feminist scholar-activist connecting my scholarship and activism. All of the women in this study started their activism on campus and moved into their communities. Black female student activism is the medium that I have chosen to use because of the history of their activism and the potential of its affect. Historically, Black women’s activism has been consistent and linked to both academia and the community (Collins, 2000; hooks, 1981, Springer, 2002). Because of the intersectionality of race, gender, class, sexuality, Black women’s research has the potential to affect numerous groups (Crenshaw, 1991).

I consider myself an “organic scholar” who has returned to graduate school to further extend my reach – obtaining the credentials and knowledge necessary to carve out a place for my research interests in the ivory tower. My goal upon completion of this degree is to empower young minds to be critical thinkers, to be engaged in their communities, and to continue building alliances with community organizations and activists (Peterson, 2011). The anxieties and pressures that once haunted Black academicians about the relevance of their work to the struggle in the Black community aren’t as prevalent now as they were with the generations before. However, it is necessary for me to take seriously the charge that is given to most African American scholars engaged in this particular kind of work – which is to speak to everyday people, to engage different ideas and move the agenda of our communities forward. Ladson-Billings (1997) writes,

I have come to understand that my African-ness does not diminish my American-ness and vice versa. My identity is not an either/or proposition. Rather, it is both/and. In the same way my scholarship and my personal/cultural life are not either/or propositions. I do scholarly work that both challenges and enhances my personal/cultural life. I live a personal/cultural life that challenges and enhances my scholarly work. I am a “colored girl” who has attempted to make life in the academy satisfying and meaningful “enuf” (p.52-70).

Much like Steve Biko, a student leader and anti-apartheid activist, I refuse to be told what to think and what to write (Stubbs, 2002). As an African American scholar, I don’t have the luxury to just talk amongst academicians. I am expected to carry the knowledge that I

have learned in the classroom and contacts that I have made back to my community to share and create programs that will help the Black community.

As a cultural studies scholar, I am charged with the unique ability and responsibility to balance theory and action (Barker, 2008). My research is necessary to further encourage the fields of cultural studies, history and feminist studies to approach the subject of Black female student activism. I have an affinity for women, college age women in particular and an appreciation for their strength and tenacity. Because of my own story as a Black female student activist, I recognize the effect that my experiences had on the development of my standpoints on self, community and education (Collins, 2000).

Significance of Study

My goal is to offer a different perspective of Black female student activism, linking the Civil Rights Movement and contemporary movement and showing how these women have had similar experiences through their activism on college campuses and in their communities. This research argues for the acknowledgement of the knowledge that Black female students produce through their experiences with activism. I also claim that there is a need to bridge the gap between the CRM and contemporary movement, making the argument that whether similar or different, a more collaborative effort in activism is needed in the Black community.

Partnering Black women activists and teachers/professors, literature and service projects, dialogue and issues of representation will allow us to bridge theory and action while producing significant research for the field of education. My intention is for this research to add to the literature of cultural studies in education and historical and

contemporary Black feminism. The commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Brown vs. Board of Education (i.e. 1954) and other events in civil rights for African American people have emphasized how movements for social justice helped to define American history and “serve as catalysts to refocus thinking on how educational leaders have become social justice advocates and activists” (Normore, 2008, p. ix).

Institutions are redesigning curriculum and creating courses framed with the concept of social justice and several issues including race, diversity, marginalization, equity, access, ethics, class, gender, spirituality, ability and sexual orientation (Normore, 2008). Women make up more than 50% of all college students (i.e. two year and four year institutions). For the first time in history African American women’s enrollment in colleges hit a record high. According to the most recent census data, nearly 1 in 10 African American females are enrolled in colleges and universities (US Census Bureau, 2010). It is necessary for these institutions of higher learning to focus more time and energy on researching Black women’s agency and self-empowerment in order to aid in their survival at these institutions. hooks (1992) states “unless we transform images of blackness, of black people, our ways of looking and our ways of being seen, we cannot make radical interventions that will fundamentally alter our situation” (p. 7). More now than ever before, it is necessary for Black women of all ages to come together. Collins (2000) suggests that coalition building is necessary for social justice “because each group possesses a partial perspective on its own experiences and on those of other groups” (p. 247).

There have been a number of books written on the experiences of civil rights activists; however the female’s voice has not been captured as often (Standley, 1993).

There is also a gap in research about Black female student activism between civil rights and present day. So, how do we inspire a new generation of activists when there is – possibly – a disconnect between the generations and a lack of literature for them to learn about one another? It is my objective to elevate the African American female narrative within the context of the civil rights era (i.e. SNCC) and within contemporary student activism to fill the void in the literature within academia and add to the non-academic literature. My goal with this research is to offer a new perspective on the ways in which we view Black female student activism. It is believed that when the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power era ended, the highly regarded and well publicized student activism and organizations went with it. However, there has been a steady stream of activism on college campuses and throughout the nation in communities large and small but seldom have Black female students been the focus of scholars (Berger, et al., 2006).

Not only is it necessary for Black women to continue the fight against the defamation of the Black woman, but also for young Black girls to see images of young Black women actively engaged in social causes⁹. It is as equally important for young Black girls to have a connection with older women who are engaged in social justice work. It is not enough to see celebrities campaigning for Presidential candidates, posing for photo ops, or writing large checks to worthy causes; we need to see regular – everyday – women making a difference in their own classrooms and communities. I would like to see more young Black girls embrace feminism. “Because the majority of

⁹ For this dissertation young girl will be defined as female child between the ages of 7-17 or female child of grade school age. Young woman is defined as a female between the ages of 18-25 or female of college age.

African American women encounter their own experiences repackaged in racist school curricula and media, even though they may support the very ideas on which feminism rests, large numbers of African American women reject the term ‘feminism’ because of what they perceive as its association with Whiteness” (Collins, 1996, p. 13).

The majority of my service work takes place outside of the academic arena. Much like bell hooks (1990) my desire is for my research to reach those outside the academy and create a partnership to attack issues within the community. A key component of Black feminist thought is the refusal to reinforce the social relations of domination and to ensure that research is accessible to women from all walks of life while still being rigorous and well researched (Collins, 2000). The very fact of my research offering a critical feminist perspective supports the ideals of Black feminist thought. This dissertation is a direct attack on the dominant narrative of the Black female student and offers another bridge between the academy and the community.

It is anticipated that the implications of this study may be used to illuminate the stories of Black female student activists and find links between two generations. I also anticipate that this research will potentially contribute to the conversation of what impact the CRM has on the current generation’s attitude toward activism and move forward the conversation on how Black women have impacted their communities through education and activism. Offering my story as a student activist, through this study I seek to find sources of inspiration for activism among other Black women and how these very sources connect to one another. I plan to capture the essences of Black female student activism through narrative representation to be “interpreted as both modes of social action and knowledge that is self-proclaiming” (Howard-Bostic, 2008). “Unless we transform

images of Blackness, of Black (women), our ways of looking and our ways of being seen, we cannot make radical interventions that will fundamentally alter our situation” (hooks, 1992, p. 7).

Organization of Dissertation

The first chapter provides my story as an inspiration for this research and the purpose of study. I have outlined the research questions that guide this work, discussed the potential significance of this research, noted the delimitations and limitations, and discussed my epistemic orientation. Chapter Two provides a more extensive view of the methodology and methods of data collection and analysis used for this study. It also describe my positionality and outlines Collins’ (2000) Black feminist epistemology, which is used as the conceptual framework and analytical tool in this study. In Chapter Three I explore further and chronicle the Black female student activists’ experiences during the CRM (1960-1966). This chapter includes a literature review on contemporary Black female activism (2002-2012) and identifies similarities and differences of activism during the CRM.

In Chapter Four, I will present the narratives of the four women, two who were active participants in SNCC during the 1960s and two women who are activists in the contemporary movement. This chapter responds to the research questions by representing each participant in their individual story. Chapter Five includes my analysis and interpretations of the experiences of Black female student activists. The final chapter will include the implications of this research.

I plan to capture the essences of Black female student activism through narrative representation in hopes to add to the intellectual consciousness and social empowerment

of the Black female. It is my hope that this work encapsulates one intergenerational conversation of Black female student activism, their connection to grassroots movements for equality, and the resources they name that drove/drive their work.

Chapter Two

Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to present the methodology of this study. This dissertation is an interview study designed to capture “oral personal experience narratives” (Patterson, 2008, pg. 37). As the researcher it is important that I am transparent and thorough with my methodology to add trustworthiness and credibility of the research process because in qualitative research the researcher is the instrument of interpretation (Ellis, 2004). As such it is necessary to discuss my positionality. I use Collins’ (2000) Black feminist epistemology and Hip Hop feminism pedagogy to explain my positionality as a Black feminist scholar-activist. In addition, I will follow with the methods of data collection and data analysis. A detailed description of the participants will be included along with how participants were recruited. This chapter is brought to a close by presenting my thoughts on the importance of partnerships and building rapport within qualitative research.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research utilizes multiple methods and is multi-disciplinary, which prevents an all-encompassing definition. Qualitative research at its root involves a “naturalistic approach” and the collection and use of a “variety of empirical materials”...“that describe routine and problematic moments and meaning in individuals’ lives” (Denzin and Lincoln 1994, pg. 2). The aim of qualitative research is to understand a particular phenomenon (Denzin and Lincoln 1994). This study uses narratives as a way to provide new understandings and produce new knowledge. Purpose and audience deserves special attention when it comes to qualitative research. It is logical to assume

that all research has a specific intended purpose and targeted audience (Patton, 2002). In this case, the intended audience is Black women activists and educators because of the impact they have on the education of Black and brown people. The purpose is to understand their own experiences and bridge the gap between theory and action.

Denzin and Lincoln (2008) compare the qualitative researcher to a “quilt maker”, creatively piecing together “strategies, methods, and empirical materials” (pg. 4). In addition, my approach to this research project has been influenced by numerous theoretical considerations. A theoretical consideration may be very broad and uses a researcher’s epistemological and ontological perspectives to influence their methodological and theoretical choices (Patton, 2002; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). As a scholar I draw inspiration from my African American culture and experiences that I have had throughout my life.

With this study, I will explore the experiences of Black female student activists through “oral personal experience narratives” (Patterson, 2000). Narratives are used to understand experiences from the perspectives of those involved, to contextualize issues in their particular social, cultural, and/or political environment, and oftentimes to change social conditions (Glesne, 2010). My purpose of this research is to carve out a space for Black women to share their experiences as student activists. My research questions are:

- 1) *What were/are the cultural and historical factors that drove/drive each woman to activism?*
- 2) *How did/have women develop(ed) ways of knowing about self and community through activism and education?*
- 3) *How do Civil Rights activists (1960-1970) and contemporary activists (2002-2012) characterize one another?*

Positionality and Reflexivity

It is important for me to position myself within this research to better explain choices in how I have come to conduct fieldwork, code and analyze data, and establish a rapport with participants. It is equally important to reflect critically upon my multiple positionalities and “think through the ways in which various identities may influence and shape the research encounters, process and outcomes” (Hopkins, 2007 pg. 396)

Positionality has origins within feminist literature and allows a clear path to identify the lens with which I interpret the world – where one stands in relation to the *Other* (Madison, 2005). This study is guided by my positionality: 1) as a Black woman – interested in understanding Black women and girls; 2) as an educator – interested in using narratives of Black women to inform educational practices in higher education institutions; 3) as a contemporary activist – interested in understanding the connection of Black female student activists from the CRM and contemporary movement.

When I began this study, I was a little unsure of how I would be received – as a young woman interviewing older women and as an older woman asking younger women about their experiences as activists. How do I go about selecting my participants? How do I explain the project? How do I use their narratives to tell a story? The use of oral personal experience narrative method allowed me to be creative and let the research follow as a more natural process of engagement (Cole & Knowles, 2008). I understand that it is necessary that because I take a political stance as a Black feminist that I must sustain a constant mode of self-reflection as it relates to my life and research. It is just as important for me to identify myself as a member of the contemporary movement and Hip Hop generation. When I refer to Hip Hop, I mean how I navigate the space of Hip Hop

music and culture to form ideas concerning my race, gender, class, inequality and privilege (Love, 2012).

Throughout my research, I continue to ask myself “what purpose am I doing this work”, similar to Alice Walker’s question of “what is the work my soul must have” (Walker, 1984, p. 242)? Madison (2005) writes about positionality and stresses the importance of vulnerability, transparency, judgment and evaluation. Like many qualitative dissertations, I include reflexive statements (“My Story”) throughout this dissertation to make apparent my assumptions and positions within this research.

As a Black feminist scholar-activist, I have to have a comfortable relationship with theory – that even in the midst of confusion and struggle I stay committed to working through uncomfortable ideas. I have come to understand the importance of my knowledge source (outside formal schooling) and its connection to my life experiences. Sophia Villenas (1996), in her article “The Colonizer/Colonized Chicana Ethnographer: Identity, Marginalization, and Co-optation in the Field”, described the struggle most scholars of color encounter doing research in their community. She explains, the researcher-as-colonizer relationship is a delicate relationship; marginalized by the academy yet using resources from the academy to research ones own communities and ones own lived experiences. I agree with Villenas when she states, “I am my own voice, an activist seeking liberation from my own historical oppression in relation to my communities” (p. 730).

The text *Oral Narrative Research with Black Women* offers examples of Black women scholars engaged in some of the same work that I am involved in and offers an understanding of how identifying as Black women impacts research. The books editor

Vaz (1997) starts the conversation in the book with the question “Why conduct oral narrative research with African and African American women?” Vaz explains that such a research method “allows the unique knowledge domains of Black women to come into full view” (p. vii). This book offers strategies those authors found useful in unearthing the experiences of African American women. It is my intention to produce work that extends the value of Black feminist narratives. I am very conscious of not being exploitive of Black women, rather celebrating their work within their communities. For example, I used “interactive interviewing” to foster a more authentic and “trusting relationship” with my participants (Ellis, Kiesinger, and Tilmann-Healy, 1997).

Black Women in the Field: Experiencing Ourselves and Others Through Qualitative Research edited by Jeffries and Generett (2003) guided me through the steps of creating emancipatory work for Black women by offering examples of how to negotiate my multiple identities as a woman of color, scholar, researcher, and community member. This collection of writings helped me look closely at the experiences of my participants and considered how their identities impact their activism and the lives of those with whom they work in the community with. Villenas (1996) reminds us of this when she writes:

As members of marginalized groups assume more privileged positions in the educational socioeconomic structures of hierarchy, people who were once merely the exotic objects of inquiry are now the inquirers – the ones formulating and asking questions. As some enter the ranks of teachers, administrators, and scholars, we are becoming the enforcers and legitimators as well as the creators of official knowledge. Hence, as qualitative researchers in the field of education, we

need to explore and understand the dilemmas created for Chicanas/os, African Americans, Native Americans, and scholars from other disenfranchised groups vis-à-vis the majority culture. We scholars/activists of color need to understand the ways in which we manipulate our multiple, fluid, clashing, and colonized identities and how our identities are manipulated and marginalized in the midst of oppressive discourses. (p. 728)

Moreover, Jeffries and Generett (2003) collection of essays “returns [the] attention to the knowledge base created by women of color and bolsters the dimensions of Black women educators’ efforts” (p. 2).

Positionality and Black Feminist Theory

Historically feminist scholarship (Harding, 1987; Olesen, 2000; Reinharz, 1992) is based on white female perspectives and was designed to challenge the hegemonic ideas of elite white male patriarchy. Feminist research focuses on issues of justice and power, and is committed to uncovering and understanding the forces that cause and sustain gender oppression (Maguire, 1996). Aimed at giving voice to women, feminist research has often left out the experiences of women of color; historically this flaw was brought out during the 1990s with 3rd wave feminist critiques (hooks, 1984 and 2000). My purpose in this research is to carve out a space for Black women to share their experiences as student activists participating in SNCC during the 60s and students currently involved with social justice work. I attempt to illustrate how Black female student activists are theorists and producers of knowledge.

My desire to compare these narratives is rooted in my belief that knowledge is produced through the personal experiences of Black female student activists. The

importance of an Afrocentric methodological approach is described in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Political Empowerment* (Collins, 2000).

Collins writes,

I knew that when an individual Black woman's consciousness concerning how she understands her everyday life undergoes change, she can become empowered. Such consciousness may stimulate her to embark on a path of personal freedom, even if it exists primarily in her own mind. If she is lucky enough to meet others who are undergoing similar journeys, she and they can change the world around them. (p. x)

This concept of sharing stories and connecting them to other Black women's experiences is powerful and can help in understanding the challenges that many Black women face doing activist work. It can also offer a view of contemporary representation of Black female student activism not often seen. Furthermore, an "Afrocentric feminist epistemology validates the experiences, dialogical knowledge, caring, and accountability that may exist within a Black female academic philosophy" (Jeffries & Generett, 2003, p. 4). Black feminist thought fosters both Black women's empowerment and conditions of social justice (Collins, 2000).

Remembering the intersections of class as well as race and gender is also important in this work. Crenshaw's (1989) conception of intersectionality is one way to understand multiple targeted identities. Although Collins frames my research Crenshaw reminds me to attune to the intersections of identity. While the history of Black women in society and specifically in higher education is rich and complex, there is still much to be explored through their experiences.

Collins (1998) uses standpoint theory in developing a Black feminist praxis in order to provide analytical guidance and intellectual legitimacy. She (1997) views standpoint theory as an “interpretive framework dedicated to explicating how knowledge remains central to maintaining and changing unjust systems of power” (p. 375). Founded in Marxist ideology, standpoint feminism argues that group location in hierarchical power relations produces shared challenges for individuals in that group; and those common challenges lead to a group knowledge or standpoint that influences the group’s political action (Collins, 1998; Hartsock, 1983). “In this sense, the notion of a Black women’s standpoint gains meaning in the context of a shared Black consciousness dedicated to sustaining racial solidarity...which invoke explicitly political objectives” (Collins, 1998, p. 202).

My role as a researcher has been influenced by the four dimensions of Black feminist epistemology: 1) Lived experience as a criterion of meaning, 2) the use of dialogue to assess knowledge claims, 3) the ethics of caring, and 4) the ethics of personal accountability. These four dimensions will provide me with a deeper understanding of the participants in my study. In chapter five, I will also use these four dimensions as a lens to analyze the narratives of my participants.

The first dimension, “lived experience as a criterion of meaning”, identifies two types of knowing – knowledge and wisdom – as important features of Black feminist epistemology (Collins, 2000). For African American women lived experiences have more credibility when making knowledge claims. Collins posited that through lived experience as a Black woman, wisdom is required for survival in navigating the intersecting oppressions. She gives the example of Sojourner Truth proclaiming, “I have

ploughed, and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman?" Truth and other Black women are situated as "connected-knowers" because of their lived experiences. Not only have African American women developed a distinctive Black women's standpoint, but have done so by using alternative ways of producing and validating knowledge (Collins, p. 252).

The second dimension identified as essential to Black feminist epistemology is "the use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims" (Collins, 2000). This dimension implies conversation between two subjects, not the speech of subject and object. "A primary epistemological assumption underlying the use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims is that connectedness rather than separation is an essential component of the knowledge validation process" (Belenky et al. 1986, p. 18). This concept of connectedness and the use of dialogue as one of its criteria for methodological adequacy is rooted in African traditions as well as feminist traditions in general (Collins, 2000). Molefi Asante (1987) suggests, "people become more human and empowered primarily in the context of a community, and only when they become seekers of the type of connections, interactions, and meetings that lead to harmony" (p. 185).

The ethic of caring is identified as the third dimension (Collins, 2000). It suggests that individual expressiveness, the appropriateness of emotions in dialogue and the capacity to empathize with others are central to the knowledge validation process. All three components of ethic of caring are rooted in the traditions of the African American community. Much like the flavor African Americans are known to put into their food, the value placed on personal uniqueness is essential to the self-exploration of the Black woman. "Emotions indicate that a speaker believes in the validity of an argument" and

“personal expressiveness heals the binary that separates emotion from intellect” (p. 263). For example, Nina Simone’s (1966) original rendition of the song “Four Women” was pure genius with the emotions it stirred in listeners. However, Jill Scott, Kelly Price, Marsha Ambrosius and Ledisi performed the same song in 2010 – putting their own individual flare and emotional connection on the lyrics – offered a new meaning to a new generation.

The final dimension is the “ethic of personal accountability” characterized in Black feminist epistemology (Collins, 2000). Personal accountability is essential for Black women activists in order to get buy-in from their communities. Knowledge claims made by individuals respected for their moral and ethical connections to their ideas will carry more weight than those offered by less respected figures (Collins, 2000). In sum, ideas cannot be separated from those who create and share them. It is essential for individuals to assume responsibility for arguing the validity of their position on a particular issue.

Reinharz (1992) suggests that social justice, dismantling power structures, recognizing the exploitation and oppression of women, and understanding that women’s experience varies based on race, class, sexual orientation, and ability are all concerns of feminist research methods. Moreover, when these four dimensions become politicized and attached to a social justice project, they can form a framework for Black feminist thought and practice (Collins, 2000).

Hip Hop Feminism

This dissertation explores the contemporary (civil rights) movement and the generational relationship within Black female student activism; therefore, I find it

necessary to include Hip Hop feminism as an extension of the traditions of contemporary Black feminism. Collins (1998) is clear that the intentions of Black feminist thought is to understand the shared experiences of Black women and to critique power structures, not to be seen as a solution to Black women's marginality. Social theory must reflect the current social conditions. Black women are no longer restricted to domestic work, living in segregated cities, riding on the back of the bus; this Hip Hop generation is dealing with HIV/AIDS, high incarceration rates, and high unemployment among Black women. Collins (1998) states: "Although reclaiming and celebrating the past remains useful, current challenges lie in developing critical social theory responsive to current social conditions" (p. 10). Hip Hop feminism extends Black feminist thought to understand Black women's social reality today (Durham, 2007).

In the book chapter "Using [Living Hip Hop] feminism: Redefining an Answer (to) Rap" (2007), Aisha Durham defines Hip Hop feminism:

...as a socio-cultural, intellectual and political moment grounded in the situated knowledge of women of color for the post-Civil Rights generation who recognize culture as a pivotal site for political intervention to challenge, resist, and mobilize collectives to dismantle systems of exploitation (p.306).

The term "Hip Hop feminism" was originally coined by Joan Morgan (1999) in her groundbreaking book *When Chickenheads Come Home To Roost: My Life as a Hip Hop Feminist*. This book gives a unique and fresh perspective on Black feminism for the post-Civil Rights, post-feminist, post-soul generation. Hip Hop feminism uses the culture of Hip Hop (i.e. music, clothing, art, dance, film, books, etc.) to critique and understand our everyday lives, articulate questions we have about the world, and listen to the narratives

young people create and present (Brown & Kwakye, 2012). Understanding that our foremother's feminism (i.e. unwavering quest for gender equality, at all cost) is not equipped to consider the issues that the young women in the Hip Hop generation face, Morgan calls for a feminism that is "brave enough to fuck with the grays" (p. 59).

Life is not black and white and neither is feminism. The "grays of feminism" being that there are some things about patriarchy that we like, having a society free of gender inequalities and expectations is a little hard to swallow because we don't want to always pay for our dinner, hold open doors, fix things, move furniture, or look under the hood of our cars (Morgan, 1999). We embrace the complexity of wanting to be sexually desired as a woman and feeling "safe like a li'l girl" but also "respected as a woman" and "treated like a lady" (Morgan, 1999). The "grays of feminism" was also a reference to the examples of feminists we draw inspiration from; although they may not identify as feminists, our mothers, grandmothers and neighbors "practice resisting systemic and structural inequalities and patriarchal illusions" in their daily lives (Brown & Kwakye, 2012, p. 2). Hip Hop feminism claims the "powerful richness and delicious complexities inherent in being black girls now" (Morgan, 1999, p. 56).

Brown and Kwakye's (2012) *Wish to Live: The Hip Hop Feminism Pedagogy Reader* acts as a redress to history and pedagogy. "Much like Hip Hop, pedagogy has relegated the voices of women, particularly women of color, to be only on the receiving end of instruction" (p. 4). Like Black feminist thought, Hip Hop feminism – in theory and practice – argues that the knowledge and experience of young women in the Hip Hop generation is valuable and should be used in the community and in the classroom.

Consequently, Hip Hop feminist pedagogy is used in diverse learning and teaching spaces and one that:

1. Appreciates creative production expressed through language, art, or activism,
2. Privileges the in-betweenness of a black girl epistemology or a black feminist standpoint,
3. Values and cares about the shared knowledge produced by black women's and girls' presence,
4. Interrogates the limitations and possibilities of Hip Hop, feminism, and pedagogy and is, therefore self-adjusting,
5. Stages the political through performance-based cultural criticism,
6. Is located and interpreted through the community (or communities) in which it is immersed (p. 4).

It is easy to say that Hip Hop pedagogy is creative and fun but not academically rigorous, which is the furthest thing from the truth. Hip Hop feminism pedagogy, in particular, pulls from the disciplines of history, women's studies, cultural studies, musicology, education and English. In addition, Hip Hop feminism's agenda is to create a space for important conversations inside the classroom and in the community.

Hip Hop feminism encourages and creates the space for "multi- and intergenerational conversations about music, love, life" and ways in which we can work together on social issues (Brown & Kwakye, 2012, p. 4). It is also the messy work of negotiating generational tensions and ideas about leadership" (p. 1).

It is work that requires the right combination of humility and skill; the cleaning up of the room after the juke party, the taking out of the trash after the videos were discussed, debated, remixed, and it is providing transportation to ensure everyone arrives home safely after the poem was written, recited, and the cipher dissolved (p. 1.)

The Hip Hop generation understands that it doesn't stop with them. Hip Hop feminism in theory and practice builds bridges with those even younger, for the purpose of personal and political transformation – building communities of accountability (Brown & Kwakye, 2012). It seeks to examine the “multiple, contested, and complex ways women of color – particularly Black women and girls – negotiate decision making, employ rhetoric or self-esteem, and oppose punitive social policies in the contexts of their everyday lives” (Brown & Kwakye, 2012, p. 5).

Critical Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry allows social actors to produce, represent, and contextualize experiences and personal knowledge. As a researcher, I do recognize and acknowledge the multiple ways of knowing, studying the world and the social interactions of people. For this study, I identify as a narrative inquirer because I “recognize and embrace the interactive quality of the research-researched relationship, primarily use stories as data and analysis, and understand the way in which what we know is embedded in a particular context” (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 7). “What narrative researchers hold in common is the study of stories or narratives or descriptions of a series of events and embrace the assumption that the story is one if not the fundamental unit that accounts for human experiences” (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 4). In addition, contemporary narrative

inquiry is characterized as a mixture of interdisciplinary analytic lenses, diverse disciplinary approaches and both traditional and innovative methods (Chase, 2000). I choose to connect critical approach and narrative inquiry approach because they both allow the researcher to identify and critique the social and cultural character of personal narratives (Squire, 2008; Usher, 1996).

Although this dissertation is a collection of personal experience narratives, it includes narratives pertaining to both past and present events. I choose to employ a critical personal experience narrative approach to examine the narratives of Black female student activists. Because of my politics on issues of positionality, subjectivity, voice and representation, a critical stance helps me think more critically about how I conduct qualitative research (Madison, 2005). A critical approach to research encompasses the ideas of “detecting and unmasking beliefs and practices that limits human freedom, justice and democracy” while having a commitment to use findings for social change (Usher, 1996, p. 22). I choose to impose a critical lens for two reasons. One, critical researchers work to make their values explicit within the research – seeing research as a political act relying on value systems and challenging value systems (Usher, 1996). Two, critical researchers involve participants as co-researchers – who combine investigation, education, and action (Maguire, 1987). The research becomes an educational endeavor through analysis of the problems’ structural causes and then becomes a process of collective action aimed at social change (Glense, 2006).

Moreover, critical race research is grounded in the experiences and knowledge of people of color and offers a liberatory and transformative solution to racial, gender, and class subordination – one of those solutions being storytelling and counter-storytelling

(Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Storytelling has a rich history within the African American community, but oftentimes stories go unheard and/or are drowned out by the dominant discourse. A critical race methodology offers space for personal stories/narratives that recount an individual's experiences with various forms of racism and sexism. Counter-stories, most of the time, differ from mainstream-western-Eurocentric perspectives, and provide a necessary balance. "Storytelling and counter-storytelling [one's] experiences can help strengthen traditions of social, political, and cultural survival and resistance" (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, 32).

In addition, Black feminist thought and Hip Hop feminism are critical social theories that "[encompass] bodies of knowledge and a set of institutional practices that actively grapple with the central questions facing U.S. Black women as a group" (Collins, 2000, p. 31). These critical theories aim to empower Black women within the context of "social injustice sustained by intersecting oppressions" (p. 22). With this research my goal is to unveil the lived experiences of Black female student activists and use Black feminist theory to examine their experiences and critique institutional practices that work to stifle the Black female student activist.

It is necessary for me to note that the second wave of the women's movement (i.e. 1960s and 1970s) helped to revitalize the personal narrative method; making personal narratives essential primary documents for feminist research. Second wave feminists resisted the traditional approach to historical research that life histories and other personal narratives were primarily useful for gathering information about historical events, cultural change, or the impact of social structures on individuals' lives but not considered serious archival documents, as they realized most documents written by women were not

included in the traditional definition of historical research. Like my aim with this research, they were interested in women as social actors in their own right and in the “subjective meanings that women assigned to events and conditions in their lives” (Chase, 2000, p. 655).

For these reasons, I have chosen to use the oral personal experience narrative (Patterson, 2008). Langellier (2001) posits, “embedded in the lives of the ordinary, the marginalized, and the muted, personal narrative responds to the disintegration of master narratives as people make sense of experiences, claim identities, and ‘get a life’ by telling and writing their stories” (p. 700). Narratives are all around us; starting at a very early age we hear stories from our parents (e.g. fairy tales), learn to read stories and share them with our friends. In the most general sense, our lives are a series of stories and like Connelly and Clandinin (1990) put it, “humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and collectively, lead storied lives” (p. 2).

Depending on the discipline, personal narratives vary in definition and methods of analysis; however all require the collection of texts for further analysis, for example, the selection and organization of documents, composition of field notes and/or chosen sections of interview transcripts for close inspection (Riessman, 2005). Like most methods, narratives also call for interpretation. What distinguishes oral personal experience narrative from other methods is the sequence and consequence of the text collected – “events are selected, organized, connected, and evaluated as meaningful for a particular audience” (p. 1).

Like other narrative inquirers, I seek understanding, of experience and people and I recognize that knowledge is socially constructed and context bound. I understand that

knowledge can take shape in many forms and is both complex and socially constructed. Knowledge is shaped by the individual as well as by their social surroundings. I believe that context plays a vital role in every situation, every individual experience, and every observation/interview. Understanding the complexity of history and its role in the participants' lives, their identity as female, and Black will also come into play.

In the beginning, I grappled with how I would present my interpretations throughout my data collection and analysis process. Understanding that there are many stories that could be told and multiple ways to represent the data collected, my goal is to present the data in layers (Bochner, 2009). Recognizing, as Bochner (2009) noted, "life is organized and organized life occurs in layers" (p. 366). Therefore, I choose to present the findings as a collection of narratives through structured narrative analysis (Labov, 1972). I choose this representation based on my interpretations of the data and how best to represent the data in order to keep the voice of the participants present.

Participants

The individuals for this study represent both the historical and contemporary time period of Black female student activism, ranging from women who were members of SNCC during the 60s and young women who are current student activists. The idea is to connect the story of SNCC and the contemporary movement to understand the relationship between the generations and their experiences as student activists. I garnered participation through various connections that I made throughout the years, not realizing at the time that I would be doing research on Black female activism and that those introductions would prove to be beneficial.

I believe that it wasn't by chance that I have been fortunate to live and experience various locations significant to the CRM – Atlanta, GA (home of Martin L. King, Jr. and other civil rights activists and the location of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee headquarters), Albany, GA (Albany Movement-significant to the movement and formation of the SNCC Freedom Signers), Oxford, OH (training ground for education and resistance training for students participating in Mississippi Summer Project) and Knoxville, TN (a few miles from the Haley Farm – the training facility for the Children's Defense Fund (CDF) Freedom School, and Highlander Folk School – education and resource center for social change activism). These places not only sparked my interest in learning more about the CRM but also offered me opportunities to interact with individuals significant to the movement. In addition, my position as a higher education professional and graduate student has connected me to a multiplicity of faculty, students and higher education professionals.

The four women that I interviewed were purposely selected for their race, age, gender and participation in social justice work as a college student (Patton, 2002). When thinking about whom I would choose as SNCC members I thought of my alma mater, Albany State University (ASU), and the people I knew who were members of SNCC. I wanted to choose women who were accessible but whose stories were still relatively unknown. By choosing women that were relatively close to the city in which I live, arranging face-to-face interviews and follow-up interviews would be more manageable. I also wanted to choose women whose stories were relatively unknown to offer an additional vantage point into Black female student activism. After my preliminary literature review I came across two women whose stories had a similar connection to my

own story of being an activist, Annette Jones-White and Doris Derby. Their stories, briefly introduced in *Hands on the Freedom Plow: Personal accounts by women in SNCC*, intrigued me but left me wanting to know more.

Annette Jones-White and I attended the same undergraduate institution – ASU. A few months back she was spotlighted as a distinguished alumnus on the University’s website, so I knew the university would have her current contact information. During my tenure at ASU, I was honored with the prestigious title of Miss Albany State University, the same title that Annette held in 1961, during her time at the university. I called the alumni affairs office, explained that I was a former ASU student currently working on my doctoral degree and in need of getting in contact with Annette for my study. They were not allowed to give me her contact information but they agreed to act as the liaison and email her my recruitment (see Appendix C) letter for the study. The very next day I received a call from Annette, excited about being a participant and helping me with my study. We talked for almost 30 minutes about my study, where she asked several questions about the process and her access to the interview transcripts. Her concern was for her words to be presented in the “right way.” Because she had been interviewed before and felt that she was misquoted, she wanted to make sure that she had access to the final document before it was published. I reassured her that we would work together – as partners - to tell her story and that she would have access to transcript and final paper before print. A week later, I interviewed Annette at her home, surrounded by memorabilia of her life as a wife, mother, educator, and activist. Her membership and participation in SNCC started with the Albany Movement in 1961. She currently is retired and spends most of her days working on her autobiography.

I was aware that Doris Derby was the former Director of African American Student Services and Programs at Georgia State University. A fellow student affairs professional, her career path was similar to my own and I wanted to know if her activism as a student influenced her career choice. I used Google® to search for her contact information and obtained her work email and phone number. I emailed her the recruitment letter and received a favorable response from her fairly quickly. She was eager to help in any way I needed, offering to put me in contact with other participants and other resources. It took us some time to schedule an interview date, as it was during the holidays when I contacted her. When we finally settled on a date, she invited me to interview her at her home. During her time in the movement she documented the experience through photography and paintings. She too had memorabilia of her time in the movement, as a wife and educator. Her membership and participation in SNCC began in 1962.

As for the recruitment of the contemporary activists, I utilized my student affairs resources. I emailed a good friend and colleague of mine who works at a women's college in the northeast and asked if she knew any students that fit my profile. She emailed me a few names and notes about their activist work. I emailed four candidates and decided to choose the first to contact me back. Fortunately, the first catch was a gem. From my initial conversation with Erika Turner, I knew she was the right person for this study and one who had an interesting story to tell. I informed her that we would have to conduct the interview via Skype® because we live so far from one another. She was comfortable with using technology stating that she would Skype® her family and friends back home often. Erika is a senior religious studies major at Northeast College. Her

activism includes the creator and founder of BlackOUT, a student organization for queer African American women. She plans to become a writer.

I was fortunate to have met Jayanni Webster, a bright co-ed at Southeast College, who is very involved on and off campus. I watched her grow and develop throughout her undergraduate career and expressed my interest (almost a year earlier) in including her story in my study. I emailed her the recruitment letter for the study and she responded with excitement. We agreed to conduct the interview in my office on campus. Jayanni recently graduated with a degree in interdisciplinary program for global studies. Her activism involves community organizing and Amnesty International. I wanted to stay with women that were local (or somewhat accessible) so that I could interview them in person but I also wanted to make sure my participant pool varied in geographical demographics. Because my study focused specifically Black women, I wanted to make sure there was a diversity of perspectives and experiences as it relates to African American life.

The overall data for this study was taken from four women: Annette Jones-White and Doris Derby who served as members of SNCC in the 60s and Erika Turner and Jayanni Webster who participant in the contemporary movement as student activists. I asked questions about what drove them to be activists, what influence their gender/race/class have on their activism, and their connection to the older or younger generation (see Appendix A). Participants were asked to share their stories from

memories they had while working with SNCC and activist work they are currently doing. Listed below is a description of the participants for this study (Table 1)¹⁰.

Table 1. Participants Demographics

Name	Hometown	College/University	Activist Work
A. Jones-White	Albany, GA	Albany State College '58-61 Spellman College '62-'64 Virginia State College '80	Community Organizer SNCC NAACP
D. Derby	Williams Bronx, New York	Hunter College '62 University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign	SNCC NAACP Mississippi Summer Free Southern Theater
E. Turner	Las Vegas, NV	Northeast College '13	Community Organizer Blackout –Queer Student Org
J. Webster	Memphis, TN	Southeast College '12	Community organizer Amnesty International

Interactive interviewing played a role in the methods of inquiry that I utilize. I acknowledge that I have a role in the way participants inform me of their experience with

¹⁰ I will use the real names and institutions of each participant. However, I have chosen to name the contemporary's institutions by region to protect their relationship because they are still affiliated with their institutions. They all agreed to self identify after being given the option in the consent form (Appendix B). I have chosen to reveal the identity of my participants because of the historical reference and educational implications of this study.

activism. Using open-ended questions, maintaining an open-minded approach, and observing participants' behaviors (i.e., body language, verbal responses, etc.) provide me with additional thick, rich data that enlightens my understanding. For this project, interactive interviewing is used as a tool to connect the participant and the researcher.

Ellis, Kiesinger, and Tillmann-Healy (1997) suggests:

Interactive interviewing reflects the way relationships develop in real life: as conversations where one person's disclosures and self-probing invite another's disclosures and self-probing; where an increasingly intimate and trusting context makes it possible to reveal more of ourselves and to probe deeper into another's feelings and thoughts; where listening to and asking questions about another's plight lead to greater understanding of one's own; and where the examination and comparison of experiences offer new insight into both lives (p. 122).

Interactive interviewing emphasizes the relationship between the researcher and participant by "paying attention to the dynamics of the interview situation" with the expectation that all participants (i.e. interviewer and interviewee) will "probe both self and other" (p. 122). "In this process, the distinction between researcher and subject gets blurred" (p. 121).

Data Collection and Analysis

The data collected for this project is managed through various methods. Before I could use narrative inquiry to produce an oral personal experience narrative, I had to collect data from Black female student activists. "Researchers who take a broad view of narrative and are interested in narratives' context may use a number of such records – oral, written, and visual texts, fieldnotes, participants' and their own commentaries,

alongside related cultural representations and records of important realities in their own and their interviewees' lives" (Squire, 2008 pg. 46). The data that I gathered for this study were face-to-face interviews with four participants, multimedia documents, archival data, social media data, and reflexive fieldnotes. I conducted face-to-face interviews with participants chosen. I allowed them to pick the time and location to make it comfortable and accommodating for them. Each participant read and signed a consent form (Appendix B), which outlined the study, interview protocol and any risks. Each participant agreed to self identify for this study. As stated on the Informed Consent Form (Appendix B), "though the researcher will know the identity of the participants and the institutions included in this study, each participant will be given the option to self identify or remain anonymous."

I remained transparent about my positionality – as a student and as a researcher from a predominately white institution. I reassured them of my commitment to documenting Black women's stories of student activism and started each interview with my story as a Black female student activist. Although all of the interviews lasted over 2 hours, I had follow-up phone calls with the participants. One of the major concerns with some of my participants was the ability to be involved in the co-construction of their story. They had experienced being interviewed by other researchers that didn't give them the opportunity to read the final study before it went to production and was miss quoted. Through member checking and the process of collaboration, I was able to establish credibility and buy-in with my participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). For example, after I transcribed the interviews I sent each participant a copy to view and comment on. Next, I

sent a copy of the narrative that I constructed from the transcript. Once I received their comments, I made the necessary corrections and sent them a final draft of their narrative.

Soon after I finished all of the interviews I began transcribing each interview. Unfortunately, this took several months because I was revising other chapters at the same time. With each interview, I made sure I took my time to carefully listen to the participants' words, not to misquote. Doing so gave me the opportunity to take notes of what I wanted to know more or needed clarification from the participant. I later returned to the participants who were available for follow-up interviews and asked for more information or clarification on particular sections of the transcript. Throughout this step, I pre-coded (Saldaña, 2009) sections of data that stood out to me by making notes on what I found most powerful about the participants words.

Since two of my participants are Black women student activist who participated in SNCC, archival data was compiled chronologically to situate SNCC and the CVM within this study. Glesne (2010) suggests keeping fieldnotes allows the researcher to capture their thoughts and feelings as they occur in the field. Writing fieldnotes after each interview and as I sift through other data, have provided me with descriptions of people, places, events, activities, and conversations; and a place for ideas, reflections, hunches, and notes about themes. I infused these fieldnotes throughout the analysis section. I have also found it necessary to use analytic memos to organize my thoughts and keep track of useful information such as reflexive notes, possible titles, thoughts for the "my story" sections, and quotations from the literature (Glesne, 2010). Specifically, the reflexive notes was a place for me to record my observations, thoughts, and questions on how I, as

the researcher, and my research procedures interact with and influence research participants and vice versa (Glesne, 2010).

I used multimedia (i.e. video clips, digital music, and television transcripts) and archival data to gain a view of contemporary Black female student experiences as activists. I also collected archival data about the SNCC organization. Merriam (1998) writes, “documents – e.g. novels, autobiographies, newspapers, songs, letters – are a ready-made source of data easily accessible to the imaginative and resourceful investigator” (p. 112). In addition, I gathered data through social media sources – Twitter®, Facebook®, and Tumblr®. Within these social media sites, I focused my selection of sources on themes of young Black women activism. These documents were used in this research to uncover meaning, develop understanding, and discover insights relevant to Black female student activism. Document analysis in qualitative research makes use of excerpts or entire passages from journals, correspondence and memoranda, and official publications (Merriam, 1998).

One of my aims for this study was to understand how Black female student activists developed ways of knowing about self and community through activism and education. I identified these stories in two ways: (a) through responses to particular questions on the interview protocol (i.e. How has your role as a scholar/activism influenced your activism?), (b) by identifying terms and phrases that signaled, for example, understanding of self (i.e. “I began to see the world and myself ...”). After I had identified these experiences, I used Labov’s (1972) model of structured narrative analysis to code and structure the participant’s oral personal experience narratives about being Black female student activists. As stated before, I use Black feminist theory as my

theoretical framework, but I also use components of Black feminist epistemology as an analytical tool to analyze and interpret the experiences of my participants.

I have chosen to use Labov's (1972) model of structured narrative analysis because I am interested in:

identifying how the participant tells their story the way they do; how the participant gives the events that recount shape; how the participant makes a point; how the participant 'packages' the narrated events and their reaction to them, and how the participant articulates their narrative with the audience or audiences that hear them (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996, p. 58.)

Very influential within the field of narrative research, Labov (1972) and Labov and Waletzky (1967/1997) have become a classic example for many researchers utilizing personal narrative. Labov and Waletzky's (1967/1997) highly revered article, "Narrative Analysis: Oral Versions of Personal Experience," presents the idea that ordinary people's oral narratives of everyday experience are worthy of studying. Building upon this idea in his book *Language in the Inner City*, Labov (1972) developed a sociolinguistic approach to narratives and stories on the idea that stories convey meaning in sequences and structural forms. With the groundbreaking scholarship, which argued that Black English vernacular should be recognized as a language rather than incorrect english, he identified relevant clauses by preserving line numbers from the original transcript and original speech. Afterwards he discards the redundant or unessential text in order to analyze the selected relevant text in terms of their function in the overall narrative.

Labov's (1972) model consists of six categories: *abstract*, *orientation*, *complicating action*, *evaluation*, *resolution*, and *coda*. Each category addresses a

different question about narrative structure for the distinct purpose of fulfilling a specific function in a story. This model of structured narrative analysis use a series of events to construct narrative from text – treating personal narrative as story text. Riessman (2008) posits that Labov’s model of structured narrative analysis “allows topics and voices to be included in qualitative research that might be missing otherwise” (pg. 80). I have included my interpretation of the chart outlining the Labov (1972) model; including the six categories, the narrative question the category addresses, and an explanation of the categories role in the narrative (Table 2). Although these elements (i.e. categories) may make multiple occurrences and be recurring within a narrative and will more than likely occur in the aforementioned sequence, the point is to see how the identification of such structural units can help researchers think about their data for better more in-depth analysis (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996).

Table 2. Labov's (1972) Model of Structured Narrative Analysis

Category	Narrative Question	Role in the Narrative
Abstract	What is the story about?	Introduces the listener to what the story is about
Orientation	Who, when, where?	Identifies the time, place, people, and events in the story
Complicating action	Then what happened?	The body of the narrative that provides the sequences of events for the story
Evaluation	So what?	Makes the point of the story clear and focuses on the narrator's interpretation, experience, and feelings of the events
Resolution	What finally happened?	Signals the end of the story
Coda	What does it mean?	Brings the listener back to the point where the story began

There are many advantages to the Labovian approach, some being that it “facilitates the identification and analysis of event narratives and produces detailed narratives for comparative analysis (Patterson, 2008, p. 28). However, there are some problems with the Labovian approach. Focusing primarily on an “event” within their experience of student activism creates a partial view of their experience. Focusing specifically on “event” narratives rules out many other kinds of talk that might be commonly classified by both speakers and hearers as stories. For instance, “these stories could be about events that did not happen directly to the speaker, that happened more than once, that may happen in the future or that might have happened”; and that use

“imperfect or conditional tenses that do not fit with Labov’s focus on past tense narrative clauses” (Patterson, 2008, p. 28). Another problem with the Labovian approach is that within the strict structured analysis, analyzing clauses in isolation from the rest of the transcript and not taking into account context in which the narrative was produced can produce overly simplistic, reductive analysis and interpretation (Patterson, 2008). I have made a few adjustments to combat these problems.

My dissertation is unique in that I am not only talking to women who are reminiscing on their past experiences but also talking to women who are still in the process of their experience as a student activist. Taking a strictly Labovian approach limits the possible research outcome. Patterson (2008) suggests that by simply moving from an event-centered approach to an experience-centered approach will not only “fit more narratives better, but will also enable researchers to produce richer, more comprehensive analysis and interpretations of the full range of forms the oral personal experience narratives can take” (p. 37). There are many ways in which I can “utilize the valuable aspects of Labov’s work by using more inclusive definitional criteria” (p. 37). Patterson’s definition of oral personal experience narrative – “text which bring stories of personal experiences into being by means of the first person oral narration of past, present, future or imaginary experiences” – is broad enough to include all aspects of personal experience narrative without being too broad (p. 37). With this definition, I was able to apply the full Labovian model and method but also use the experience-centered approach for more inclusive definitional criteria.

Coding

According to Coffey and Atkinson (1996), “in practice, coding can be thought of as a range of approaches that aid the organization, retrieval, and interpretation of data” (p.

27). I have approached this data with three types of coding: open coding, in-vivo coding, and codifying. Open coding is described as an open process because it “allows me to engage in exploration of my data without making any prior assumptions about what I might discover” (Kerlin, 2002). Next, I captured the participant’s voice and for this Saldaña (2009) recommend in-vivo coding “for studies that prioritize and honor the participants voice” (p. 74). In vivo coding is particularly useful in studies where the participants voice is often marginalized and by using their words “enhances and deepens” an understanding of “their cultures and worldviews” (p. 74). Then, to further my analysis, in the second round of coding I have employed the codifying (categorizing) method in order to arrange the data into groups that could show patterns in the data. After coding and the process of codifying or looking for patterns in the codes, I used Labov’s structured narrative analysis to represent the data (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996).

Goodall (2000) states that the performance of writing is relational – “to become a writer, you need to write stories that other people want to read, to relate to” (p. 40). He suggests that it is imperative that you create patterns out of the “raw materials of lived experience, imagination, and reading and talking with others” – that is significant for the intended audience (p. 40). Because of my stance as a Black feminist scholar-activist, my positionality is evident in my data analysis as I identified themes and patterns that reflect my own lived experiences. Critics argue that narrative research can reify the interior self, pretend to offer an authentic voice – unalloyed subjective truth, and idealize individual agency (Riessman, 2005). It is easy to over-personalize the personal narrative. I have worked against this by continuously checking my reflective notes and analytic memos to make sure I am focusing on the participant and the research questions that are driving my

study. I have only devoted certain sections of my research to my story while keeping the focus of my study on the narratives of my participants.

Partnerships and Rapport

In addition, I have attempted to form partnerships with my participants in hopes that it spurred a healthy dialogue about their experiences – past and present. I recognize that the researcher is linked to the participant. Collaboration between researcher and participant is a major part of narrative inquiry and will allow me to understand participants' experiences through their stories lived and told (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Both experiences can change as a result of their interactions with each other (Ellis, Kiesinger, and Tillmann-Healy, 1997).

I fostered open and authentic relationships with my participants – being available if they needed my assistance for any reason. Rapport is built on the ability to convey empathy and understanding without judgment – respecting the participant and conveying to them that their knowledge, experiences, attitudes and feelings are important (Patton, 2002). Being mindful of rapport throughout the interview is essential in helping to create for the participant the feeling of being respected and of being genuinely heard (Madison, 2005). My position as a young, Black, feminist, scholar, activist, educator was at the forefront of my mind. I understand that researchers' multiple identities impact their scholarship; it is not an objective endeavor – void of the interrelationship formed and maintained by the researcher and participants (Jeffries & Generett, 2003).

Throughout the process of interviewing my participants, I was pleasantly surprised that all of my expectations were met. From the moment that I reached out to the participants, I was welcomed into their lives with open arms. Each generational group

was similar in their reception of me and the role that I played within this study. The older women both were thankful for my interest in their stories. They initially trusted me and invited me into their homes to be interviewed. I found that my humble and appreciative attitude towards the sacrifices that they made for my generation helped us foster a friendship. Asking them questions about their childhood and how they came to understand their identities opened up a space for rich conversations. It was like talking to my grandmothers for two hours. They had been interviewed on numerous occasions but most researchers wanted to know solely about their SNCC experiences. They both also wanted to be active participants with the construction and delivery of their narratives.

The younger women were similar in that they both were surprised that they were contacted for this study. Unimpressed with their own accomplishments, it took them a while to come to terms with fact that I was interested in hearing and telling their stories. I instantly connected with these two women because we were close in age – about a ten-year difference. One woman even said that the interview with me was like she was having a conversation with her older sister. As I opened up about my experience as a student activist, the young women became more comfortable identifying activities and experiences that they didn't necessarily consider activism.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I stated my positionality and presented the theoretical considerations and methodology that I have brought to this project. Secondly, I explained how I recruited the research participants and introduced each participant individually. Thirdly, I explicated the methods of data collection and analysis used in this study.

Finally, I stated reasons why partnerships and rapport between participants and researcher are important.

Chapter three explores the historical and contemporary perspective of Black female student activism. I chronicle the major events within the CRM (1960-1966) and contemporary movement (2002-2012) and show how Black female students exercise their activism. I also discuss what is seen as a generational divide between the activist of the CRM and those in the contemporary movement.

Chapter Three

My Story II- Have I done enough?

Attending an HBCU, I learned very early in my educational career that it was my obligation as an educated African American to return to my community to educate, inspire and uplift. My experiences at Albany State are what motivated the continuation of my education and activism. I am blessed to have continued a close relationship with many of my professors, the president and other administrators at my undergraduate institution. They supported my career aspirations by writing recommendation letters for graduate school and encouraged me by sharing their experiences as educators. To show my gratitude, I give back to the institution by donating my time, talents and money to programs and events and annually returning to speak with students about my education and career path.

As an undergraduate student at Albany State University (ASU) in Albany, GA, I began the journey of becoming a scholar-activist through my many campus activities inside and outside the classroom. My tenure there has filled with active participation in campus policies and student politics - serving as the president of my freshman residence hall, a Executive Secretary of Student Government Association, president of the sophomore and senior class, Senior Ambassador for College of Business, tutoring and mentoring local youth, among various other community activities. I had the opportunity to participate in my first American presidential election in 2000, registering students to vote and petitioning the county for a voting site on campus. In the year 2000 I was a junior and emotions were high in response to the Bush and Gore presidential race. I had benefited from the Clinton Administration (1992-2000), receiving additional financial

assistance for college via scholarships and grants and understood the gravity of the moment. I, along with many members of my generation, felt a more kindred connection with Gore because of his politics on protecting the environment and promoting the development of information technology. With the turn of a new century and an election year, this was an exciting time to be young, full of energy and ready to work for something I believed in. My fellow co-eds and I were successful in getting a voting precinct, registering hundreds of new voters, and getting more students concerned with and involved in local politics. It was devastating when the election ended in the voting/ballot controversy.

Although I was known as a student leader and seen as a student activist, I grappled with the title of activist because of the historical legacy of the term. Attending undergraduate college in Albany, GA, I was surrounded by many of the activists who participated in the Albany Movement in 1961-62. Charles Sherrod, Bernice Johnson Reagon, Rutha Mae Harris, and others would visit our university on occasion and tell stories of how they fought against the racist regime in Southwest Georgia. Listening to the stories of their experience working with SNCC as student activists – being jailed, physically and mentally tormented, expelled from their institutions – I felt like I was not worthy of the title. I had missed out on that time in history. Just because I organized voter registration rallies, created a mentoring program between college girls and middle school girls, was a member of NAACP, and served on several campus organizations that participated in community service – didn't mean I was in the same category as those students that put their lives on the line for the freedoms that I am privileged to have today. Or was I? But these students not only had threats on their lives but also their

educational career. What was I sacrificing? What was I doing that deserved to be in the same category as the student activist of SNCC?

This apprehension of not feeling like I or the work that my peers and I were doing was worthy enough to be in the same stratosphere as the CRM, was not only mine but the attitude of many alumni that came back to visit the University. I would often hear elders begin their critique of my generation with the phrase “When we were in school...”, which was followed by a comment of how we were not doing enough with the opportunities that we inherited. I thought then and still today – so what did the generations before them think?

Black Feminism: In the Beginning

Black feminist consciousness in the U.S. dates back to mid-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries; such women as Sojourner Truth (1797-1883), Harriet Tubman (1820-1913), Ida B. Wells (1862-1931), Mary Church Terrell (1863-1954), and Anna Julia Cooper (1885-1964) are considered original Black feminists. Many strategies employed by Black female student activists today can be traced back to the experiences of Black women abolitionists. Yee (1992) writes:

The abolitionist movement provides an opportunity for understanding further the complex ways that race and gender have simultaneously and inextricably been interwoven in Black women’s lives, for it represented the context in which free Black women laid much groundwork for a distinct pattern of Black female activism that would become important a century later in the struggle for civil rights. (p. 2)

Subsequently, Black feminist scholarship and activism of the past twenty years has been influenced by the CRM and the mainstream feminist movement of the late 60s and early 70s (Brewer, 1993).

Further extending the ground-breaking works by Toni Cade Bambara, Ntozake Shange, Angela Davis, Toni Morrison, June Jordan, Alice Walker, Audre Lorde and other Black women who broke silence in the 1970s, Black women in the 80s, 90s, and the new millennium developed a voice, a self-defined, collective Black women's standpoint about Black womanhood (Collins, 1996). These voices came from classrooms of higher education, newspaper and magazine articles, novels, and lyrics of our favorite songs and poems – all to “survive in, and/or oppose prevailing social, economic” and political injustice (Collins, 1996, p. 9). More recently, hip-hop feminist pedagogy offers a space for Black women to understand, critique and use the knowledge and experiences of their everyday lives, which largely includes but is not limited to the culture of hip-hop (Brown & Kwakye, 2012). The issue now is not if African American women have a voice and are engaging in activism rather how they can sustain the power of their collective voice and how that power will be used and passed on.

Feminism and activism for Black women have been inextricable parts of their social and cultural identity; although for some Black women identifying themselves as feminist has been complicated due to them not being able to identify with the first and second wave Western white feminist movements (Collins, 2000). It is not my intention to suggest that all activism by Black women is “feminist” or that all activism is “political”. However, I am firmly standing by the fact that all Black women's activism is somehow personal which inherently is influenced in some way by one or more of their intersecting

oppressions – race, gender, class, sexual orientation, etc. There is a larger problem for Black women as a collective which is the power of “a stigmatized label (i.e. being identified as a feminist) to shut down radical protest and keep young Black women from learning their own history for fear of being labeled feminists” (Collins, 2006, p. 190-191).

In this chapter I explore and chronicle the experiences of Black female student activist during the CRM (1960-66) and the contemporary movement (2002-12). This chapter also identifies similarities and differences within the historical and contemporary perspective of Black female student activism. I choose to focus on these particular time periods for several reasons. First, the 60s were a pivotal time for Black female student activism with the formation of SNCC in April of 1960. Second, the first few years of the new millennium brought about a renewed concern with social issues and distrust of the political process in the U.S. Third, 2010 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the formation of SNCC. Fourth, since I am looking at contemporary activism I wanted to stay within a ten-year span of students that are currently in college, which also includes my scholar-activism.

I want to be clear that this chapter is not meant to be a full course, rather just a sample of what Black female students were involved in during the CRM and contemporary movement. I will offer only a few examples of what can be considered activism for Black female students. I am aware that activism is viewed differently for each generation. The circumstances that caused Black women to act during the 60s were much different than the current social/political issues that cause them to act today.

Activism at the core is the action to bring about change – be it in opposition of or support of a social, political, environmental issue or issues (Urrieta, 2005).

Historical Perspective: Black Female Student Activism

The historical relevance of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) to the Civil Rights Movement (CRM) is one that has fascinated many historians. The impact that these students made within the movement will forever be revered and recognized as an essential aspect of the success that the CRM had in the early 60s. The movement of the 1830s and 1840s were led by white New England abolitionists, but the “new abolitionists” of the CRM were different (Zinn, 1964/2002). The CRM garnered participation from an array of people – people from the North and South, white, Black and Asian people, young and old. SNCC was no exception, attracting white, Asian and Black students from the North and South to become freedom fighters. Gloria Richardson Dandridge (2010) explains the significance of the student movement and the need to share their stories to the next generation:

It’s necessary for people to have some kind of historical record of what went on in the student movement, because maybe the next time people will have a structure around which to plan better. The history of our struggle is deliberately withheld from our young people, because they are the most likely agents of radical change. The heart of the Movement that turned the South around came out of elementary, high school, and college students, but most young people today don’t know that.

(p. 295)

These young rebels committed themselves to the movement and the fight for justice and equality for all people. We are forever indebted to the civil rights generation for

“releasing the idealism locked so long inside a nation that [had] not tasted the drama of a social upheaval” and for making us look at young people with a newfound respect (Zinn, 1964/2002).

Sit-Ins of 1960. The first act of resistance from students came on February 1, 1960 when four students from North Carolina A&T orchestrated a sit-in at a Woolworth lunch counter in Greensboro, NC. They waited at the lunch counter without being served until it closed. Expecting to be arrested or at worst physically harmed for their civil disobedience, they were ignored by whites and reprimanded by the Blacks that worked there. However, most importantly they “discovered a tactic that not only expressed their long-suppressed anger but also apparently did not provoke server retaliation from whites” (Carson, 1981, pg. 10). This act of resistance ignited a firestorm of protests among other Black students of various colleges and universities in cities along the South. Although four young men carried out the Greensboro, NC sit-in, there were other young Black women, like Angeline Butler of Fisk College who had previously participated in less publicized sit-ins (Holsaert et al., 2010). She explains,

In October and November of 1959, small groups of students who attended the [nonviolent workshops in Nashville] also held test demonstrations and sat in at lunch counters to see what would happen and to bring the results back to the workshop for discussion. When we were threatened with arrests, we would leave peacefully. (Butler, 2010, p. 42)

Soon after hearing about the Greensboro sit-ins through the news and other sources, students organized sit-ins in cities ranging from the Mid-Atlantic to the Deep South over the next several months (Giddings, 1984). Most of the demonstrations were peaceful and

nonviolent in nature, with just a few resulting in verbal assaults from bystanders and arrests by police for trespassing.

In the midst of all the excitement, one woman understood the significance of the moment and decided to do something about it. Ella Baker a secretary for SCLC, saw the potential of the student movement and believed, with a little structure they could make a big difference in the CRM. Baker convinced the SCLC to donate \$800 to finance the Raleigh, NC student conference. In April 1960, nearly four hundred students from seventy-five colleges in the North and South and several representatives from other organizations met at Shaw University in Raleigh, NC during the Raleigh Conference held on the campus of Shaw University in Raleigh, NC. The Raleigh Conference was initiated by southern Black college students aggravated by the segregationist regimes and discontent with the living conditions in their communities. At the close of the conference SNCC was officially established as an organization. Few students in 1960 rarely belonged to political organizations and of those who did were affiliated with NAACP (Carson, 1981).

SNCC was known as an organization formed by young activists, who worked together in an effort to move the country towards equality and justice for all people, through a non-violent movement. This group of young people formed an organization independent of any other civil rights organization. Their autonomy meant they could move beyond the operational methods and perspectives of older civil rights groups (Giddings, 1984). Formed with the basic philosophy of non-violence, SNCC is often credited with introducing many of the strategies that helped the CRM move their agenda forward; for instance, staged sit-ins, jail no-bail, and singing freedom songs.

Students went through intense training workshops on the fundamentals of nonviolence, civil disobedience, and other strategies that proved to be beneficial to the CRM. For instance, the jail-no-bail strategy came about because the bail or fines for the demonstrators – usually paid by family members or NAACP officials –were becoming too expensive and a strain on the CRM (Giddings, 1984). The first to test out the jail-no-bail strategy were SNCC members Diane Nash, Ruby Doris Smith, Charles Sherrod and Charles Jones – the Rock Hill Four. This took place about a year after the first sit-ins. These students voluntarily served thirty days hard labor in horrible conditions (Giddings, 1984). It took a toll on them emotionally and physically. Ruby “contracted a stomach ailment from which she never fully recovered” and contributed to her early death (Giddings, 1984, p. 278). To pass the time they read books like *The Ugly American*, *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi* and sang freedom songs like “We Shall Overcome” (Zinn, 1964/2002).

The founding members were intentional about eliminating the bureaucracy, top down, and male dominated leadership style that describes most organizations’ operations. “Both the structural nature and the goals of SNCC propelled women into the forefront of the struggle in a way that was not possible in more hierarchical male-led organizations” (Giddings, 1984, pg. 277). This is not to say that SNCC didn’t have its problems as it relates to sexism within the organization; however, many observers and participants have insisted that SNCC was more progressive than the rest of society on the questions of gender roles (Greenburg, 1998). Jean Wheeler Smith, a Black female student activist in SNCC, elaborates on the place of women in SNCC:

I don't usually get into setting the record straight; I usually don't worry about the record, but there is this one point on which I have some strong feeling and that is the common notion that women were oppressed in SNCC. I just was not oppressed in SNCC. I wasn't subordinate, I was high functioning. I did anything I was big enough to do and I got help from everybody around me for any projects that I wanted to pursue. And I know we can put shadows to it and so on, but I wanted to strongly make this point and then maybe move to the shadows...Stokely gave me my first ticket south. I think Stokely respected me. I think his comment about women, the position of women being prone, was humorous; he's a funny guy, and there was a lot of sex in SNCC. We were twenty years old. What do you expect? I think Stokely respected me and respected the women he was working with at that time. I think he might have wanted to be a successful male chauvinist, but I just don't think he could have gotten away with it. (Wheeler, 1998, p. 136-137)

Although SNCC was an organization where Black female students thrived, it is unknown how many Black female students were in attendance at the Raleigh Conference. It is documented that Marian Wright, Diane Nash, and Angeline Butler were among the first Black female students to serve as student delegates (Carson, 1990). The first meeting was run by majority Black male students, such as Marion Barry, Henry James Thomas, David Forbes, among others.

It is important to recognize that Black women during the 60s and 70s were not as conscious of their gender (or concerned with gender equality) as they were their racial identities. It wasn't until the Civil Rights Movement began its decline into the Black

Power Movement that Black women began to focus more attention on sexism (Giddings, 1984). Many members felt as though SNCC opened the door for the feminist movement, using a similar style and structure and many strategies they learned in the CRM.

Hands on the Freedom Plow: Personal Accounts by Women in SNCC (2010) is one of few books that recounts the struggles and personal experiences of young (college age) women fighting for justice during the 60s. With over 50 women sharing their experiences of being a part of the CRM and members of SNCC, this collection of narratives offers a different vantage point of the CRM. Many of the narratives suggest “Black educational institutions and their surroundings provided fertile ground for the growth of the CRM, even when the administrations vigorously opposed their students participation” (p. 34). The majority of these students attended Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) known to be apolitical in the midst of the civil disorder. Although the administration at these institutions was against students participating in the movement, there were many faculty members that encouraged participation. Gwendolyn Zoharah Simmons explains her involvement started through a history and American literature class with northern white liberal faculty members, through which she became acquainted for the first time with protest writings. Howard Zinn, head of Spelman’s history department was one of the faculty members involved in the movement and encouraged students to do what they could to help. At Spelman she “met others who fanned the flame of Black pride and identity” (p. 14).

There were many Black female student activists involved in SNCC that put their lives on the line as freedom fighters. Many of these Black women were just teenagers – 17 to 25 – defying their parents and educational institutions to be a part of the movement.

Students known to be involved with civil rights demonstrations found themselves in hot water with college administrators – leading to their suspension or expulsion from school. Like Simmons, most students tried to keep their involvement a secret from their families and schools but found it difficult to do so when they were sometimes beaten, spat on and even jailed during demonstrations. Annette Jones White tells her story of being jailed and expelled in *Hands on the Freedom Plow: Personal Accounts by Women in SNCC* (2010):

The arrest began in the morning and continued for hours. At one point all the women were placed in the men's bullpen, a huge, filthy cell with steel bunks almost to the ceiling. About three o'clock some white men in business suits were allowed to look us over. While they were there, someone in another cell called out, 'Miss Albany State is in here,' and my fellow prisoners cheered...later a trusty served us a meal of cabbage, beets, and Spam that she crammed into one cup per person with her hands. I refused to eat it... We talked and sang all night, cheering as prisoners refused bail that had been posted by loved ones. The whole time we were in the jail, we had no privacy from either the male prisoners or the white policemen. The male prisoners averted their eyes, but the policemen kept coming back to look us over. We held up our coats in front of us whenever we used the toilets... One week after the mass arrests we were all released on bond. When I went back to Albany State to arrange to take the exams I had missed while I was in jail, I was asked to leave the campus. (p. 111-114)

If some students were lucky they were afforded the opportunity to transfer to other institutions. For example, Spelman, Morehouse and Clark Atlanta – a part of the Atlanta University Center - offered scholarships to those who were suspended and expelled from

Albany State (Jones-White, 2010). Jones-White ended up attending and graduating from Spelman College.

Freedom Rides of 1961. On May 4, 1961 the first group of SNCC students embarked on a journey that would once again change the course of history forever. The Freedom Rides were initiated by James Farmer, the founder of Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), and served as a means to challenge the segregation policies of interstate transportation terminals in the South (Giddings, 1984). This wasn't the first time an individual or organization formed a group of freedom fighters to challenge the terminal facilities. The earliest on record was in 1906 by Reverdy [sic] Cassius Ransom and in 1947 the Journey of Reconciliation was organized by CORE (Fleming, 1998). Ransom was a bishop in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, who traveled from Boston to Alabama by train in a sleeper car. He was allowed to travel in a sleeper car, located in the white's only section of the train because he was an interstate passenger. By the time he reached the South he was forced to move to the colored section for the remainder of the trip (Fleming, 1998). The Journey of Reconciliation was a more strategic attack on segregating the interstate buses with an interracial group of sixteen participating in the ride.

The bus trip for the 1961 Freedom Rides left from Washington, DC and traveled through seven states (Virginia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana) down the southeastern coast of the country to New Orleans. CORE had organized an interracial group of riders consisting of thirteen volunteers (Fleming, 1998). SNCC was one-year-old and was functioning with only two full-time workers in the Atlanta, GA office and sporadic communication with the affiliate SNCC

chapters all over the South (Zinn, 1964/2002). Most of the full-time workers were paid by donations from SNCC supporters. Not a lot of SNCC students participated in the first freedom ride. However, the students who did participate in the first freedom ride were veteran sit-in protesters trained in non-violent protest. They made it through the first two states (Virginia and North Carolina) with little to no trouble. However, when they arrived in Rock Hill, SC, a group of white thugs met them at the bus terminal. The police watched as the men attacked the protesters then eventually stopped them.

They continued the Freedom Rides through Georgia into Alabama where they ran into more trouble. By the time they made it to Anniston, Alabama, the word was out about their protest ride and the opposition was determined to put an end to it. Before the group made it to the bus station right outside of Anniston, AL, the bus was met by a mob of white men. They slashed the tires and set the bus on fire. The next Freedom Ride bus that arrived in Anniston, AL was attacked as well, when eight white men climbed on board the bus beating the passengers and dragging them off the bus. Numerous Freedom Riders were hospitalized briefly for smoke inhalation and head lacerations, but the riders assembled again and took another bus into Birmingham, AL (Zinn, 1964/2002).

When the entire group of Freedom Riders arrived in Birmingham and decided to continue the trip to Montgomery, no bus driver was willing to take them the rest of the trip. They waited for hours to no avail. The group ended up flying the rest of the way to New Orleans, LA. That ended the first Freedom Ride. When a group of students in Atlanta, GA and Nashville, TN learned that the Freedom Rides had been canceled and the non-violent protesters had been defeated, they could not allow the opposition to win. Diane Nash and Roby Doris Smith, prominent Black female student activists, were

among the first students to reorganize the Freedom Rides. Smith was unable to go on the second freedom rides because she couldn't raise enough money for transportation; many of the friends and family she asked thought it was too dangerous (Fleming, 1998). The group of SNCC students left Nashville on May 17, 1961 headed to Birmingham, AL but they were arrested before they arrived on the outskirts of Birmingham. They spent the night in jail then were driven to the state border of Alabama and Tennessee by Chief of Police Bull Connor and let out in the middle of nowhere.

After the Freedom Riders made it back to Tennessee, they decided to regroup and start over again with even more SNCC students, including Smith. By the time the SNCC students made their second trip to Birmingham, Smith flew from Atlanta to Birmingham to join them. She states:

I was alone... When I got to Birmingham I went to the bus terminal and joined the seventeen from Nashville. We waited all night trying to get to Montgomery. Every time we got on a bus the driver said no, he wouldn't risk his life. The terminal kept crowding up with passengers who were stranded because the buses wouldn't go on. The Justice Department then promised Diane that the driver of the 4:00 a.m. bus would go on to Montgomery. But when he arrived he came off the bus and said to us: "I have only one life to give, and I'm not going to give it to the NAACP or CORE!" (Zinn, 1964/2002, p. 45-46)

These students thought that if they didn't continue the Freedom Rides that violence could overcome nonviolence (Zinn, 1964/2002). However, this Freedom Ride took a turn for the worst when it became a political firestorm. Concerned with the inevitable violence, Diane Nash contacted the Department of Justice to ask for protection on their journey.

The Justice Department said they couldn't give the riders protection but that if anything happened they would investigate (Zinn, 1964/2002).

The Freedom Riders finally boarded a bus headed to Montgomery, AL. To their surprise on the way to Montgomery their bus was escorted by state police troopers and a helicopter by federal order. However, shortly after the bus made it to the city limits the escort disappeared. As they arrived to the Montgomery bus terminal, the students saw a massive crowd, visibly angry and agitated by the presence of the protesters. The students were attacked as they got off the bus with fist, sticks and harsh language – “Nigger,” “Kill the nigger-loving son of a bitch” (Zinn, 1964/2002). The police eventually dissolved the crowd. Some of the students needed medical attention while others were able to escape the crowd. After reports were released of how slow the local authorities came to help the Freedom Riders and the lack of response by Governor Patterson, the Federal authorities got involved.

Later that evening the Freedom Riders attended a rally at Ralph Abernathy's church, where Martin Luther King Jr. spoke to over 1200 freedom fighters. They sang and reenergized for the next city. A few days later, the Freedom Riders left for Jackson, MS. When they tried to use the “Whites Only” facility in the bus terminal, the students were quickly arrested. Smith spoke of her experience in the Mississippi jails:

It was a nice set-up. When the windows were open we could talk to the fellows.

We sang. We wrote Freedom Songs. A Negro minister from Chicago sang:

“Woke Up This Morning With My Mind Set On Freedom” so everybody began singing it. It started there... Other songs were composed – “I Know We'll Meet Again” was written by a fellow I knew from Nashville and Rock Hill. We would

do ballet lessons in the morning to keep ourselves fit. There were different people from different areas. Somebody was giving Spanish lessons. But then, after about two weeks, we were awakened at 4:00 a.m. to find out that we were all going to Parchman State Penitentiary... It was a long ride in the night. We sang Freedom Songs... (Zinn, 1964/2002)

Many disagreed with the Freedom Rides by this time, saying that it was causing too much trouble and distracting from the other civil rights issues like the voter rights act. For the next two months (i.e. June, July and August) students and others made the trip to Jackson, MS to join the others in protest against the segregated terminal facilities. By the end of the summer the number of arrested protestors grew to over three hundred (Zinn, 1964/2002). After the Freedom Rides came to an end, SNCC students focused their attention on Voter Rights in Mississippi.

Albany Movement of 1961. The Albany movement began the Fall of 1961, mobilizing thousands of southwest Georgia's residents, and drew national attention to the small southern city. It was initiated by SNCC members Charles Sherrod and Cordell Reagon who came to southwest Georgia to set up a SNCC office for a voter registration campaign. The Albany movement was the first large-scale protest by Negroes since the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955 (Zinn, 1964/2002). It set the precedent for mass demonstrations in the South for years to come. The Albany crisis also "revealed clearly for the first time the reluctance of the national government to protect constitutional rights in the Deep South" (Zinn, 1964/2002).

Contributing to the strategies and tactics that the movement would continue to use, the Albany movement and the local SNCC organizers were thrust to the forefront of

the CRM. Its effort was to desegregate Albany's public facilities and implement the voter registration campaign but failed to accomplish its goal because of a determined chief of police, Laurie Pritchett. He carefully studied the CRM strategy – which was the ability to mobilize mass protests – and developed a strategy to disrupt it – mass arrests. Janie Culbreth-Rambeau (2010), a Black female student activist at Albany State, shares her story of being arrested:

When we reached the jail, we were herded in like cattle. People were being pushed, and from time to time someone would trip or be pushed to the ground. One teenage girl was literally dragged across the graveled way. Inside, a white policeman shoved her into the iron bars. Her head bled profusely. We looked on helplessly. Although we were wet and cold, nobody wanted to leave. (p. 94)

In most cases, the crowd became too massive for the local police to corral and arrest – overcrowding the local police precinct and jail; and sometimes this caused the situation to turn violent – with the police assaulting the participants. To avoid the overcrowded jails, Pritchett arranged to use county jails all around southwest Georgia so that they could arrest more protestors. Through this he was able to defuse the mass protest before it received media attention. But the threat of being arrested didn't stop the mass demonstrations and didn't deter the people from gathering, marching, singing for their civil rights.

The impact and influence that Black women had on the Albany Movement proved to be an advantage for the movement. Although the major organizational forces in the CRM (i.e. SCLC, NAACP, SNCC, CORE), including Martin Luther King, were all involved in the Albany Movement, “it was the women of Albany who remained in the

forefront” (Still, 1962). As the movement persisted and the residents of Albany continued to push against the boundaries, majority of the participants at the demonstrations were women. “In addition to leading the prayer marches, walking the picket lines and attending the nightly rallies, Albany females, young, middle-aged and elderly, rendered yeoman service behind the scenes, providing homes, cooking mass meals and mobilizing the crowd for meetings or jail-ins” (p. 24). These women played a pivotal role in the movement, making decisions and promoting activities that changed the course and character of the civil rights struggle (Payne, 1993, p. 3).

Singing was a major part of this movement. Freedom songs were written and song during marches, sitting in jails, and in meetings. Bernice Johnson Reagon, a Black female student activist from Albany, GA, tells her story of how singing got her involved in the movement.

Singing in the Movement changed the way I sang and why I sang. I took a breath and started “Over My Head, I See Trouble in the Air.” As I moved down the first line, I knew it would not be a good idea to sing the word *trouble*, even though I knew we were in trouble, but did not think it would help. So instead I put in *freedom*, and by the second line everyone was singing. The singing tradition in the Albany Movement was primarily congregational. When people asked you to sing a song, they were not asking you for a solo, but for you to raise a song – to plant a seed. The minute you started the song, the song was expanded by the voices of everybody present. No one had to say, “Come on and sing.” Everybody joined in; there was a wonderful sound expansion. (p. 149-150)

Bernice later became a founding member (along with Cordell Hull Reagon, Charles Neblett and Rutha Harris) of the SNCC Freedom Singers and traveled the country singing and inspiring a movement.

The March on Washington of 1963. SNCC played more of a key role in the March on Washington (MOW) than they are given credit for. Not only were there active SNCC members that gave speeches on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, there were many young people who helped organize the event and stood in the audience of more than 250,000. They also created a little controversy with their radical ideology – as usual. John Lewis was ostracized by some of the MOW organizers because of the content of his speech. He was one of the SNCC members who was vocal about the lack of support (i.e. of the SNCC protests and Freedom Rides) by the federal government and had angry rants riddled throughout his speech. He was persuaded to tone down the divisive language in his speech and to be more celebratory. But in the end he still challenged President Kennedy and the federal government to do more for jobs and freedom of Black and poor people.

Gloria Richardson Dandridge – not a stranger to controversy – was basically escorted by event officials from the ceremony. She was an older member of SNCC helping with the Cambridge, MD movement and organizing high school students. Given notice some weeks prior to the MOW that she along with a few other women would be honored at the event, Gloria posits, “really it was only at the last minute that march organizers decided to seek women’s participation” (Dandridge, 2010, p. 288). Largely due to her radical stance on the CRM and disbelief in non-violence in the face of

violence, she was thrown shade¹¹ by some of the more conservative members. She believe that some of the white folks helping to organize the event put pressure on the NAACP and the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW) not to include her in the event (Dandridge, 2010). They left her waiting in the tent for speakers and dignitaries while the others were on the platform being honored. By the time she got to the platform her seat had been removed and her Cambridge banner removed from the stage. They eventually called her to the stage to speak but before she could utter a word the microphone was snatched from her hand and she was ushered back to her seat. She and Lena Horne (i.e. famous jazz singer) were eventually escorted from the march back to their hotel because they were telling the media and others that Rosa Parks was the person who started the CRM not Martin Luther King, Jr.

The first thing most people think of when talking about the 1963 March on Washington is the “I Have A Dream” speech by Martin Luther King, Jr. It is rare that we talk about the inspiration behind the speech. The title was actually inspired by Prathia Hall, a Black female student activist who worked with SNCC in southwest Georgia (Hall, 2010). Originally from Philadelphia, Hall moved south to help with SNCC and became the field secretary for the Albany office. Known for her oratorical skills, she would often fire up the crowd at mass meetings. One day at the site of Mt. Olive Baptist Church in Terrell County, GA (i.e. one of the churches that had been burned down by the KKK), Hall expounded on the theme “I Have A Dream” which she had often used in her speeches (Hall, 2010). King admired her oratorical skills, saying once, “Prathia is a platform speaker I would prefer not to follow”. He remembered the power of her prayer

¹¹ Footnote: Shade is an urban term/slang used by young Black women and means given the cold shoulder, to talk trash about, to publicly denounce or disrespect.

and the imagery she painted with her words and used it as the basis for his famous speech at the MOW (Hall, 2010).

Mississippi Freedom Summer of 1964. Mississippi – the magnolia state – was known for its violent treatment of its Black citizens and extreme enforcement of the segregation laws. If there was a state that needed to be changed, Mississippi was it. But this only was possible because of the foundation laid by SNCC members in McComb, MS from 1961-1962 and Greenwood, MS in 1963. Although voter registration was known to be a milder act of resistance than sit-ins or Freedom Rides, the SNCC members were still met with resistance from local Black residents (Zinn, 1964/2002). Afraid and/or threatened with job termination, SNCC members could not count on the older residents to help them organize. Their strategy was to recruit and train young people with no economical responsibilities that could backlash on them (Zinn, 1964/2002).

In the summer of 1964, students from all over the country participated in a statewide campaign registering disenfranchised Black Mississippians to vote, integrating public spaces, establishing Freedom Schools, and organizing/mobilizing a network of local freedom fighters that would carry-on the torch. These student volunteers went through an intensive interview and once selected journeyed to Oxford, OH for an extensive orientation. Over seven hundred students – most of them white, Jewish and northern – were given a realistic picture of the dangers they faced, taught how to protect themselves non-violently, and discussed passionately and in depth their hopes, fears and dreams (Zinn, 1964/2002). The staff that worked with them was mostly SNCC or CORE members and mostly Black students from working-class families.

It was dangerous in Mississippi. So violent that soon after the Freedom Summer got underway, three activists came up missing – Michael Schwerner a white CORE organizer, James Chaney, a Black CORE activist, and Andrew Goodman, a white summer SNCC volunteer – after being arrested for a traffic violation. They were eventually found dead – shot point blank and mutilated – in a shallow make-shift grave. Many were outraged because it took the Federal government too long to investigate, and only then because two white men were missing. Denise Nicholas (2010), a Black female activist and a member of the Free Southern Theater, remembers how she felt about the news:

By the time I arrived in Jackson, James Chaney, Andy Goodman, and Mickey Schwerner were missing. We were afraid, but I think because everybody believed very much in what we were doing, we tightened up and we just kept going. We went all over Mississippi that first summer, performing in seventeen cities. They found those boys on August 4. I remember, from pictures of television, seeing these white sheriffs with body bags, like Vietnam body bags, bringing in the remains. I have that in my head, right with Emmett Till photo. Those visuals never, ever go away. There were other unforgettable moments when Rita Schwerner, Mickey Schwerner's wife, who was also working in Mississippi that summer, came to a number of our performances and spoke at the churches where we were. Her fragile appearance contrasted with her strength as she stood there assuring us that she would not leave Mississippi that summer but would stay and do the work we all had come to do. (p. 259-260)

The atmosphere in Mississippi was quite intense, putting many of the residents and volunteers on edge. However, it didn't stop them from working together and fighting for freedom.

For many of the white students it was the first time they had worked and lived in close quarters with African Americans and southerners (Fleming, 1998). This wasn't the first time that white and Black students have worked together in SNCC, rather, the first time such a large influx of white middle and upper-middle class northern students volunteered (Fleming, 1998). Before Freedom Summer, SNCC's staff was quite small, close knit, and made a conscious effort not to focus on race. Needless to say, the learning experience for the Freedom Summer volunteers didn't come without its problems.

There were a lot of racial and gender politics going on between white and Black women. Black women's assertive and brash character, which is normal in the African American community, was often misunderstood. Their unwillingness to conform to Western notions of womanhood caused people (i.e. inside and outside the movement) to question their femininity. Women were not supposed to be assertive or aggressive, speaking with authority or exercising power over men. However, this type of attitude was typical for Black women in SNCC and the 1960s movement as a whole. Oftentimes the Black woman took on two demeanors: one of assertive and independence in the workplace and passive and pleasing at home (hooks, 1981).

With it being very hot and lack of time to focus on their appearance (e.g. hair, nails, clothing, makeup), female students in SNCC struggled with issues of physical appearance, femininity and self-image (Fleming, 1998). But this was an issue that Black female students struggled with even before Freedom Summer, while it was new for white

women along with other issues of identity and self-worth in a sexist society (Fleming, 1998). Relations between Black and white female students also flared because of the sexual relationships between white women and Black men.

Black female student activists were often confronted with issues of class, when working with White female students. They were oftentimes annoyed by white female students' ignorance and lack of exposure or understanding of some African American and southern culture (Fleming, 1998). The white students were oftentimes unaware of their subtle and not-so-subtle racist and negative stereotyping of Blacks, largely due to the rampant racism in American society (Fleming, 1998). Although the SNCC students made a concerted effort not to focus on race issues within the organizations it was hard not to. Black female student activism found it quite difficult to understand the white woman's plight.

Shift to Black Power Movement. SNCC began to morph into a different organization after 1964 Mississippi Freedom Summer. There was a major debate internally about the direction of the administration – whether the staff should stay relatively small or hire many of the volunteers from Freedom Summer. Several position papers were written and discussed at various meetings about internal issues. One position paper concerned gender discrimination within the organization. There was even talk of a SNCC women's strike in order for their voices to be heard. Although members had different opinions about gender issues within the organization, Black female students' actions were quite contradictory at times. On one hand many stood with white women and complained about the stereotypical roles they were being track into. But on the other hand, they stood in solace with Black men, supporting, comforting and protecting them

because of the victimization they received from American society. The quote by Stokely Carmichael that is often quoted – “the position of women in SNCC is prone” – is one that still angered many Black women trying to break away from those images.

By 1965 the issues within the administration had worsened. There was a shift in ideology – from non-violent to a more militant approach. At the Kingston Springs, TN meeting in May of 1966 new officers were elected – Stokely Carmichael as Chairman, Ruby Doris Smith Robinson as executive secretary, and Cleveland Sellers as program secretary. Carmichael had already received criticism for his involvement with the Lowndes County Freedom Organization, an independent political party with the emblem of a snarling Black panther. SNCC separated themselves even more from the non-violent ideology of the civil rights movement during a march in Greenwood, MS, where he revved the crowd by chanting “Black Power”.

The Black Power Movement (BPM) was the response to America’s continued oppression of African Americans despite a well-orchestrated campaign of non-violence. Many historians say that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s assassination was a catalyst for the BPM (Carson, 1981). After his death there was little hope of the non-violent ideology to the race problems in America. The BPM was formed out of Black radicalism, which focused on self-reliance and racial dignity for Blacks as well as economic and political independence. Black Power was a slogan as well as the movement expressing a new consciousness of pride and identity.

Angela Davis, Elaine Brown and Assata Shakur were all notable women involved with the BPM and all battled issues of sexism within the organization. As a young philosophy professor at the University of California, Los Angeles, Davis devoted so

much brilliance and fire to the fight for equality in America through her work with SNCC and Black Panther Party (BPP); she was even jailed and trialed for her alleged involvement with the 1970 Jonathan Jackson courtroom shooting. However, it is her beauty and iconic Afro that she is most remembered for (hooks, 1981). Brown garnered the top leadership position of the BPP after Huey Newton was exiled. In her 1992 autobiography *Taste of Power: A Black Woman's Story*, she detailed many of her sexual escapades with other members. Brown is most known for her ideas on sex and sexuality, because of her claims of having slept with most of the top men in the BPP and not for the activist work that she did for the organization.

Assata Shakur, born JoAnne Byron, got involved with political activism as a student City College of New York. She was affiliated with the Harlem branch of the BPP briefly, until she took her activism underground – working with the Black Liberation Army (BLA), an offspring of BPP – because of police harassment and surveillance (Perkins, 2000). She came into national attention when she was involved in a shooting with a New Jersey State Trooper and two other BLA members; the officer and one of the BLA members were killed, Shakur was seriously wounded. She was charged with murder, attempted murder, armed robbery, bank robbery, and kidnapping, but was acquitted of all but murder. She served six years until her successful escape from the Clinton Correctional Facility for Women in New Jersey in 1979. She was granted political asylum in Cuba, where she continues to reside today (Perkins, 2000). She has been on the FBI Most Wanted list since 2005 and was added to FBI Most Wanted Terrorist list May of 2013.

Contemporary Perspective of Black Female Student Activism

Much like Black women of SNCC, today's Black female student activists are hard at work balancing the pursuit of education, social activism and understanding themselves as Black, female, students. There is no doubt that Black women and other women of color in the hip-hop generation are steady at work in their communities. It has been a steady stream of action on the part of young Black women since the CRM (Durham, 2007; Pough, 2006). However, U.S. public discourse has not yet recognized a large-scale social movement (Clay, 2012). When I first decided to include a contemporary perspective of activism in this dissertation, I had mixed feelings about it. I was unsure of where to start and what to focus on. Once I made the decision to focus on Black female student activism and compare the narratives of two generations, I began to ask myself a number of questions. What is contemporary activism? What does activism encompass? What does activism represent for this generation? This section will look at contemporary activism through the eyes of young Black women from the hip-hop generation. I have organized this section in chronological order based on key events, organizations, and campaigns that focus on young Black women and/or girls and their activism and issues pertaining to their intersecting oppressions (i.e. gender, race, economic status, sexual orientation).

As stated before, I operationalize contemporary activism to encompass a myriad of strategies the post-civil rights generation use to express concern and action towards true democracy and social justice within their community, nation and around the world (Moola, 2004). This action could be self-determined, grassroots, community organized, organization led, or a corporate-led global movement. For this dissertation, I focus my

demographics on Black female students – what they are doing in their communities and how they are organizing. Somewhat different than Black female students of the CRM, contemporary Black female students have found several outlets and forms for their activism. This movement is as diverse as the women that makeup the contemporary generation.

There are more Black women within the hip-hop generation (i.e. post-civil rights, generation X and generation Y) college educated than any other generation before. These women are not only making quantum leaps within their fields of study but also carving out spaces to talk about and act on social issues they are passionate about and/or issues that affect them personally. Despite the gains this generation has made, there are still devastating deficiencies within the communities of these young women – extreme poverty, broken educational systems, drugs and violence. In *The Hip-Hop Generation: Young Blacks and the Crisis in African-American Culture* (2002), Bakari Kitwana suggests that the persistence of racial segregation and discrimination in the wake of civil rights gains has contributed to the current crisis for hip-hop generation.

Although the literature and the overall discourse surrounding contemporary activism falls short in exposing the wonderful work that Black female students are doing, there is a growing contingent of scholar-activists working to tell their stories. There is no one book or source that is dedicated specifically to contemporary activism about Black female college students. Hence, over the course of this project I have sifted through numerous sources including several book chapters, articles, song lyrics, blog posts, and Youtube® clips that give a snapshot of Black female student activism.

Although the contemporary movement of Black female activism can be traced

back to the 80s and 90s, I have chosen to focus on the years 2002 to 2012. In the wake of the 2000 debacle (the Bush-Gore presidential race), the 9/11 attack, and the start of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, protests and activism among Americans were at an all time high. Songs like Goapele's "Red, White & Blues" were being written and released in protest to the 9/11 attacks and brewing war. At the time a new soul singer, Goapele was a recent college graduate and activist in her own right. Her politically activist parents – her father a South African exiled political activist and her Jewish mother who has participated in protests since the age of 12 – helped her develop her musical talent (Goapele, 2010).

Protests. On February 15, 2003, anti-war protests were underway in over 600 cities across the world, millions protested and marched making it the largest protest in history. Not since the CRM and the March on Washington has there been a protest in the nations capital – Washington, DC that garnered that much participation. There were millions of college students that marched in the protest and it is impossible to account for how many Black female students participated. Shani Jamila's (2002) article "Can I Get a Witness?: Testimony from a Hip-Hop Feminist" speaks to the hip-hop generation's dichotomy between being disappointed that they missed the CRM and broadening their definition of activism. She posits, "I used to think I had missed my time" (p. 382). "I thought the flame lighting the hearts of activists had been snuffed...but liberating my definition from the constraints and constructs of the sixties opened up my mind to a whole new world of work and progressive thought" (p. 393-394).

Black Tuesday. The efforts of the anti-war protest and peace rally prompted other student-led protests that year. Howard University in Washington, DC hosted a Black

Tuesday – a massive protest organized by students from Black student organizations from majority schools and HBCUs to express dissatisfaction at the attacks on affirmative action on April 1, 2003 (Johns, 2003). Six thousand students gathered on the steps of the Supreme Court and some even slept there overnight to make their presence known and prove their sincerity. Organizer and Black female student activist, Andrea Van Dorn comments on how contemporary student activism is powerful, stating: “I’m tired of hearing people say that the civil rights movement is dead and that this generation is doing nothing to help...we are here to show the world that we are united and there are still activists” (Johns, 2003).

Spelman College vs. Nelly. Soon after the efforts of Howard University and Black Tuesday another HBCU made headlines by organizing a protest against a well-known hip-hop artist. This protest was specific to Black female student activists, therefore I feel its important that I spend more time explaining the details of this protest than my previous examples. In 2004, Spelman College – one of the top HBCUs in the nation and one of two institutions dedicated to educating Black women, erupted in protest when they learned that Nelly was planning a charity event for bone marrow registry (Willens, 2004). This protest was sparked by the rapper’s music video “Tip Drill” (2003)– a video where Nelly can be seen sliding a credit card through a woman’s backside among other degrading acts. His misogynistic lyrics and x-rated music videos portray Black women as hypersexual and are extremely explicit. Nelly’s foundation was scheduled to hold a bone marrow drive on campus to help his sister who suffered from leukemia.

The student organization at Spelman called Feminist Majority Leadership Alliance (FMLA) spearheaded the protest, hoping to confront the rapper once he got to

campus. FMLA is a feminist activist group – a part of a larger nationwide organization, Feminist Majority Foundation – that helps students build and sustain pro-choice activism by using discussion-based meetings and action-planning meetings (Feminist Majority Foundation, 2013). Theirs wasn't an isolated protest; some students at Howard University had protested in front of the Viacom building to show their outrage against the video a few months prior (Bailey, 2004). The SGA president, Asha Jennings, and the president of FMLA, Moya Bailey, both Black female student activists, were in conflict on whether to go through with the protest being that Nelly was coming to campus for an important cause for his sister – another Black woman. But, they couldn't pass up the opportunity to address a very important issue affecting *all* Black women – the negative and degrading portrayal of Black women in music videos and popular culture (Bailey, 2004). They found a lot of support by other young women at Spelman as well as older scholar-activists such as: Dr. Guy-Sheftall, Pearl Cleage and Jill Nelson.

Not everybody – especially Nelly – thought it was appropriate to use the event as a forum to express their disdain towards that type of rap music (Willens, 2004). Some students from the nearby campus of Morehouse College – an all male HBCU – felt as though it was not fair to focus on the rapper's video and not honor their commitment to the bone marrow drive. Morehouse senior, Kenneth Lavergne, argued that, “these are grown women...I'm putting the blame on the women” (Willens, 2004). Another male student from Clark Atlanta commented on the credit card swiping saying that the woman had to allow the act to happen and that it is unfair to put the total blame on the rappers (Willens, 2004). Two days before the actual event Nelly and his foundation decided to cancel the event because they could not come to an agreement to allow a forum where

Spelman women could express their concerns with Nelly (Bailey, 2004). Once the media learned of “The Nelly Controversy” it went national, being featured on news outlets such as MTV, CNN, Dayton Daily News, USA Today, local Atlanta radio stations, *Essence Magazine*, as well as among other various websites, blogs and discussion boards (Bailey, 2004).

In a protest of Nelly’s visit to campus, the women of Spelman College embraced the true ideals of Black feminist work – action. Their goal was never to prevent the importance of spreading awareness about bone marrow testing and donation among African-Americans; nor was it to demonize the women who participate in these videos – understanding that it is financial situations that lure women into this industry. It is also not true that the protesting women were not fans of Nelly or rap music – they are a part of the hip-hop generation and can appreciate how it has contributed to pop culture. However, this protest was much bigger than Nelly; it was about protecting the image of Black women in the media. Nelly was just “the spark that ignited the need for a public critique of how we as women are being portrayed” (Bailey, 2004). Bailey (2004) further explains the importance of this protest by saying:

I see “Tip Drill” in the broader context of a racist, capitalist, patriarchal system that has a vested interest in feeding stereotypes of both Black men and women as hypersexual in the quest for the almighty dollar. It is because I love hip-hop that I critique it and as part of the hip-hop generation, who better than I to bring the music back to what I loved about it in the first place?

Many Black female student activists all over the country – including myself – rallied behind the women at Spelman College. Although we enjoy listening and dancing to the

music of our generation, we could not and will not stand by while music executives, rappers, and even other Black women who willingly participate – control the images of Black women and continue the powerful ideology of dominating structures (Collins, 2000).

Jena six. In September of 2007, Black students once again took to the streets in protest for the Jena Six. On December 2006, six Black teenager boys – ages ranging from 14-18 – were arrested and charged with attempted murder of Justin Barker, a white classmate at Jena High School in Jena, Louisiana. Weeks prior, a number of events took place around the assault of Barker that fanned flames of racial tension. These events included the hanging of nooses in the school’s courtyard, a fire in one of the school’s buildings, and two violent altercations between white and Black students. This case sparked national attention because the students were initially charged as adults with attempted second-degree murder (but later the charge was reduced to aggravated battery). Many thought that the charges were excessive and racially motivated. One of the students, Mychal Bell, age 18, was charged as an adult, largely due to his previous criminal record and that he was believed to have initiated the fight. (Gallacher, 2007)

On the 20th of September nearly 20,000 protesters marched to the courthouse in Jena, LA, which was one of the largest mass protest since the CRM of the 60s (Gallacher, 2007). Rev. Al Sharpton, a prominent civil rights leader and rally organizer, said, “this could be the beginning of the 21st century’s civil rights movement to challenge disparities in the justice system” (Associated Press, 2007). Information about the case and protest rally was promoted through Black websites, blogs, radio stations and publications and contributed to the large turn out at the march (Associated Press, 2007). Womack (2010)

suggests, “the protest [was] waged in an underground fashion not by longstanding civil rights organizations – not at first anyway – but by a coalition of little-known human rights groups and black college students who leveraged what may be the first major civil rights protest launched through the Internet” (p. 15-16). College students made up a large number of the protesters, traveling from all over the country on charter buses. Tina Cheatham, 24-year-old graduate of Georgia Southern University, said she missed the civil rights marches of Selma, Montgomery, and Little Rock but had no intention of missing another brush with history (CBS, 2009). Many Black female student activists marched that day and would continue to devote their time and energy to social justice, not only for issues that affect women but young men as well.

Trayvon Martin murder. On February 26, 2012 Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old Black male, was shot and killed walking home from a corner store near his father’s house. His attacker was 28-year-old George Zimmerman, a mixed-race (Caucasian American and Hispanic American) male. Trayvon was visiting his father and his father’s girlfriend at their home in Sanford, FL for the weekend. He didn’t live with his father fulltime, but frequently visited him. As Martin was walking back from the corner store where he purchased a drink and some candy, Zimmerman – self-proclaimed neighborhood watch volunteer – saw him walking through the neighborhood. It was raining that early evening, so Martin was wearing a sweatshirt hoody. Zimmerman called the police to report a suspicious man walking, and stated that he would pursue the suspect. The 911-operator repeatedly told Zimmerman not to pursue and that the police were on their way, but he ignored the orders. In the end, Zimmerman shot and killed Martin, claiming that it was in an act of self-defense.

It wasn't until weeks later when the tragic incident made it to national news. People were in an uproar not only about the murder of another innocent young Black boy but also about the *Stand Your Ground Law* that allowed the defendant to go free. Protests in support of Martin and rallying for the arrest of Zimmerman were held by the Dream Defenders in Sanford, FL, and other groups of students in New York City and on numerous college campuses. This shooting struck a nerve with a lot of young people because it was yet another example of racial profiling and injustice against young Black men. Many of the rallies were called "Million Hoodie March" to show that many people own and wear hoodies and despite what Geraldo Rivera (i.e. Fox News reporter) suggests, shouldn't be profiled as a gangster for doing so. Young people took to Twitter®, Facebook® and other social media outlets to voice their concerns. They changed their profile picture to a picture of Trayvon or of them wearing a hoodie in solidarity; they discussed facts and exchanged commentary on what was being said in the media. Roland Martin (2012) stated that without the thousands of protesters across the nation that took to the streets there would not have been the chance for justice for Trayvon.

I am Trayvon, became the slogan that protesters chanted at the rallies and posted on their Facebook® and Twitter® pages. Black students – and young women in particular, once again rallied together and marched for justice to be served. Jean Ross (2012) for the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* reported that more than three thousand people attended the protest rally held at the Georgia State Capital and most of them were students from the Atlanta University Center (AUC) – Spelman College, Morehouse College, Clark Atlanta University, and Interdenominational Theological Center. A Black

female student activist who was a classmate of mine traveled to Sanford, FL with other students. She said that the protest was electrifying. There were young and older activists marching and speaking to the rally. This rally – like Jena Six – “stands apart from others as [one] of the first major new millennium protest involving grassroots organizations, Black college students, and news media while capturing mainstream attention” (Womack 2010, p. 16).

As I write this dissertation, the trial for Zimmerman is taking place in Sanford, FL and yet again young people are firing back through social media. On July 13, 2013, after deliberating for 16 hours the jury found him not guilty of manslaughter or second-degree murder. Uproar of protest has taken place all over the US in response to the not guilty verdict of George Zimmerman. Over the last 16 months young Americans – Black, white and in between – have been closely following the case and engaging in conversations about race, stereotyping, racial profiling and the like with friends, family and anyone who would listen. These young folks have taken to social media to express their concerns, tweeting, facebooking, instagraming, blogging about their experiences of resistance and activism. College students all over the country have mobilized with existing organizations like Black Youth Project© and organized with new organizations like Dream Defenders.

Genie Lauren, a young Black female and an activist in her own right, started a protest to stop one of the jurors from the Martin/Zimmerman case from signing a book deal with a publisher. Appalled at how soon after the trial Juror B37 came out to announce the book deal, Lauren thought it was opportunistic and decided to take to twitter® to voice her concerns. She posted the name and number of the publisher on

twitter® and encouraged her followers to voice their concerns too. Days later the publisher rescinded the juror's book deal.

Online campaigns. While mining through several online blogs, social media sites, and videos I came across several groups and online campaigns that were created by young Black women for young women of color. Although contemporary activists might feel pressure to take on similar roles as the activist of the 60s, they are finding ways to define their own activism (Clay, 2012). These women are smart, creative and resourceful in their pursuit of education and social justice. Black women have come to understand that in order to see the full spectrum of Black women in the media, they will have to create, control, sell, and disseminate their stories in mainstream and new media spaces (Jarmon, 2013).

In the midst of creating a space for others to congregate and talk about what is happening in the world that upset them, these Black women have also found it is necessary that they continue to center themselves and offer space for self-care (Bailey, 2013). So often Black women devote more time and energy to family, work, school, community and forget about themselves which leads to health problems and even premature death. The communities that these women have built are just as much a place of solace for the creators and contributors as they are for the fans. Bailey writes:

We take risks. We put our sex lives on the table, lay our politics bare. And in doing so we remind ourselves, that part of the work is the self. We often do pieces on self-care and though not always well received by our audience, they reflect our intention to document and share how we take care of ourselves and each other. Behind the scenes we have emergency dissertation phone calls, we prescribe rest

and cake, we send each other care packages, we show up for each other. This work is the least visible but some of the most important because it's what sustains us in the hard times. (CFC, 2013)

Taking a phrase from bell hooks (1988), these Black female activists are “talking back” and creating alternative spaces for information, organizing, and activism.

Crunk feminist collective (CFC). In 2004, just a few miles away from Spelman College at Emory University, a group of students – which included Dr. Britney Cooper and Dr. Susana Morris – started a support group for Black female graduate students to help each other through the arduous process of their doctoral studies. Their mission was to create a community of scholars that would commune and converse intellectually about things that were affecting them in the classroom and personally. They called themselves the Crunk Feminist Collective (CFC) – “influenced by the southern music ethos of Atlanta but also by their willingness to get crunk as a form of resistance to the racist, sexist assaults they were routinely experiencing” (Bailey, 2013a). The word ‘crunk’ is a combination of the words crazy and drunk and is used to describe people or situations that are extremely hype, “out of your mind”, or belligerent (CFC, 2013). Revived in 2010, the Crunk Feminist Collective mission:

aims to articulate a crunk feminist consciousness for women and men of color, who came of age in the hip-hop generation, by creating a community of scholar-activists from varied professions, who share our intellectual work in online blog communities, at conferences, through activist organizations, and in print publications and who share our commitment to nurturing and sustaining one another through progressive feminist vision. (CFC, 2013)

Much like “crunk” music, this group was created on the notion of resistance, shock and being on the cutting edge of pop culture. By combining the terms crunk and feminism and all the cultural, gendered and racial histories that come with them, this group creates space for scholar-activists to connect with the non-academic community to talk and work together (CFC, 2013). Created by young Black women for women of color, they “resist other’s attempt to stifle [their] voices, acting belligerent when necessary and getting buck when [they] have to” (CFC, 2013).

Although CFC is committed to discussing issues that pertain to feminism and popular culture, the blog contributors are multi-ethnic, male and female, professors, graduate students, and journalists from various disciplines. Some of the contributors have been featured on other media outlets and webcasts as expert panelists, such as: MSNBC’s *All in With Chris Hayes*, *HuffPost Live* with Marc Lamont Hill, *Ebony.com*, *Essence* magazine, Mark Anthony Neal’s webcast *Left to Black*, and the *New York Times* among others. CFC has over 15,000 fans on Facebook®, 10,000 followers on Twitter®. CFC covers topics from “Why do dead black men mobilize communities in ways that dead Black cis and trans women do not” to “Who’s really having our say?: Black women and the politics of representation” (CFC, 2013).

Quirky Black girls (QBG). – Quirky Black Girls is a blog that was created by Moya Bailey and Alexis Pauline Gumbs, both Black female scholar-activists. Geared towards removing the box that society has placed Black women in, QBG is an online forum for Black girls who relish in their uniqueness. This support group and safe space is reserved for Black girls (and women) who may look, walk, talk, act in ways that are not reflected anywhere (Bailey, 2013c). Through online mediums such as a blog, Facebook®

group, community gatherings, a reading group and more, QBG “allows a diverse group of self identified Quirky Black Girls to build bravery and challenge each other’s thinking” (Bailey, 2013c). Inspired by the eccentricity of women like Audre Lorde, Octavia Butler, and Janelle Monáe, QBG engage in intelligent and honest conversations about Black feminism in relation to popular culture and present these conversations in a off the way, quirky kind of way.

FAAN mail (Fostering Activism and Alternatives Now!). Created as a resistance to the negative imagery and media representation portrayed of Black women, FAAN mail is a media literacy and activism project formed by young women of color in Philadelphia (FAAN, 2013). FAAN Mail’s purpose is to deconstruct and challenge hegemonic representations and messages within media and Black women’s everyday lives (FAAN, 2013). FAAN was co-founded by four Black female scholar-activists – Moya Bailey, Nuala Cabral, Chakka Reeves, and Alicia Sanchez Gill – as a way to talk back to the media, create and promote the alternatives they wish to see, and engage their communities through education, dialogue and activism (FAAN, 2013).

Truth.Be.Told (TBT). The Internet has provided a way for people to launch projects that would have normally taken several people and several years to promote. Black female scholar-activist Katina Parker, an instructor with the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University, has been kicking up dust and making major noise within the contemporary movement and around social media. Parker has two Indiegogo®¹² fundraising campaigns underway as of 2013. Truth.Be.Told, is a webseries (soon-to-be episodic TV series) that highlights Queer Black Visionaries and their work in

¹² Indiegogo is a crowd funding site where anyone can raise money for film, music, art, charity, small businesses, gaming, theater, and more.

their communities and beyond, (Bailey, 2013b). With this docuseries, she “seeks to provide a platform for Black LGBT people to tell their stories of challenge, radical self-inquiry, transformation and triumph” (Brown, 2013). Taking full advantage of how the Internet and social media can create a movement of sort, TBT raised over 10,000 to help fund the project and spread the word about upcoming episodes. In addition, Parker is the curator of the “One Million Strong” photo exhibit, which encompasses the marches of the Million Man March of 1995, Million Woman March of 1997, and Million Youth March 1998. “Through her work she speaks to the multi-dynamic possibilities of technology to spark social and cultural change for voices and communities that are under-represented in media” (Parker, 2013).

#Blackgirlsarefromthefuture. Hashtag campaigns are quite common among young people and contemporary activists. A hashtag is the symbol #, which is used with a word or phrase with no spacing in between (Twitter, 2013). It is commonly used on social media sites like Twitter®, Facebook®, and Tumblr® for the purpose of categorizing and searching related topics. Ranina Jarmon, a Black female student activist, started the #blackgirlsarefromthefuture in 2010. The hashtag campaign was birthed out of a comment from a friend in which she asked if Jarmon was from the future because of the eccentric outfit she was wearing. Jarmon suggests that the #blackgirlsarefromthefuture is an oppositional standpoint and theory based on the day to day lived experiences of working class Black girls who dare to be their true authentic selves (Jarmon, 2013). The #blackgirlsarefromthefuture has been used by Black girls/women all over the nation to talk about their daily struggles of navigating sexism and racism at a very young age.

Organizations. There are a few organizations that are dedicated to serving Black female students and celebrating their activism within their community. Social sororities like Alpha Kappa Alpha, Delta Sigma Theta, Zeta Phi Beta and Sigma Gamma Rho and other localized campus organizations support and encourage Black female students involvement within their communities. However, for this study I would like to focus on two organizations, one that celebrates young Black women on an annual national televised awards show and another that has become the modern day SNCC and has been the leading voice in youth organizing.

Black Girls Rock® (BGR). Black Girls Rock!©, founded by Beverly Bond, is a non-profit youth empowerment and mentoring organization established to promote the arts for women of color aged 12-17 years old (BBR, 2013). Through mentorship, arts education, cultural exploration, and public service this organization promotes positive self-image and a strong sense of awareness in these young women (BBR, 2013). While working with these young women, Bond felt the media's message to women of color was imbalanced and saw the need to honor more role models and community activists. Most recently, Black Entertainment Television (BET) partnered with the organization to produce the BGR awards program, bringing the organization to a national and international audience.

Over the last three years the BGR award show has honored numerous Black girls and women for their achievements in entertainment, politics, and community organizing. Among the notable actresses, activists, educators, executives are: Ruby Dee, Shirley Caesar, Dionne Warwick, Angela Davis, Iyanla Vanzant, Kerry Washington, Taraji P. Henson, Alicia Keys, Missy Elliot, Raven Symone, Keke Palmer, Maj. Gen. Marcelite J.

Harris, Laurel Richie, Imani Walker and Malilka Saada-Sear. BGR holds a special contest for an award M.A.D. (Making A Difference) dedicated to young Black female activists. In an interview with Michael Livingston (2012) of the *Washington Post*, Bond states, “it’s important for us to honor young community advocates...It’s important to recognize our young leaders and to see young women do these amazing things. That’s what I tell my girls, to use your platform to make a difference.” Some of the Black female student activists who have been honored in the past two years are:

- Mari Malek, a 24-year-old Black female activist born in Wau, South Sudan co-founded the “Southern Sudan Initiatives”, a organization that provides clean water, access to health care and educational assistance to lost boys and girls who had to flee Sudan during the civil war.
- Dyci Manns, a 22-year-old Black female activist who started two non-profits while attending the University of Georgia – “Book bags with the Basics” and MODEL26. “Book Bags with the basics” was started after returning home from a study abroad trip to Belize where many of the children didn’t have adequate school supplies. With the help of friends and family she collected book bags full of supplies for over 1,000 students. MODEL26 (named after Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states everyone has the right to education) is a program that provides college students financial assistance, counseling, and access to volunteer programs abroad.
- Tiffany Bender & Alize Beal, young Black female activists, both returned to Harlem, NY after graduating from college to find their neighborhood in

disarray with gun violence among young teens. They started a non-profit called “Yung Harlem” designed to end youth violence and build future leaders in the Harlem community.

- Yasmine Arrington, a Black female student activist motivated by her own struggles as a child of an incarcerated parent, started a non-profit – ScholarCHIPS - to help other children with incarcerated parent(s) with college preparation and scholarships.

Younger Black teenage girls are also honored for their commitment and service to their community at the award show. The women that I profile above are either current college students or recent graduates.

Dream Defenders (DD). The Dream Defenders is an organization that is dedicated to bring about social change by training and organizing youth and students in nonviolent civil disobedience, civic engagement, and direct action while creating a sustainable network of youth and student leaders to take action and create real change in their communities (Dream Defenders, 2013). It could be said that this organization is the rebirth of SNCC – citing an identical principle of nonviolent youth organizing. This organization is a resurgence of young, energized, conscious, angry-as-hell freedom fighters.

Based out of Florida, DD began with 60 students on a 3-day, 40-mile march in response to the Trayvon Martin murder. Once they arrived in Sanford, FL they locked arms blocking the entrance of the Sanford police station in a civil disobedience demonstration demanding the arrest of Zimmerman, calling for Sanford Police Chief to resign for his mishandling of the case and that board of community members be formed

to oversee the police department (Dream Defenders, 2013). All of their demands were met and the group went on to official form the DD. Within a year, the organization had spread to eight colleges across the state of Florida organizing on a range of topics. Beginning in June of 2013, the DD began a 31-day sit-in at the Florida State Capital demanding to meet with Gov. Rick Scott. They wanted the Governor to hold a special session of the legislature to enact Trayvon's Law, which would repeal Stand Your Ground, ban racial profiling, and end the school-to-prison pipeline (Dream Defenders, 2013). They received support from several members of the CRM – Jessie Jackson slept in with the students and Harry Belafonte visited the students.

Literature. For Black women there has been little change in the U.S. and all over the world in the area of race and representation since slavery. In many parts of the world, Black women's bodies are still on display to be gazed upon, consumed, and judged (hooks, 1992). Black women in contemporary America are still trapped in a “crooked room” - “bombarded with warped images of their humanity” (Harris-Perry, 2011, p. 29). These images are even more prevalent with the influx of television shows like *Housewives of Atlanta*, *Basketball Wives*, *R&B Divas*, *Hollywood Exes*, *Love & Hip Hop Atlanta* that feature Black women arguing and fighting, living superficial and lavish lifestyles, oversexed and abused. “Corporate America bombards Black youth...at the crucial stage of adolescence where identity exploration develops, with propaganda that demeans people of color” (Love, 2012, p.107). Some women tilt to align themselves to the “crooked room”, while others try to find ways to navigate their way through it (Harris-Perry, 2011).

Consequently, there has been much change in the development of knowledge and exposure of Black women's collective points of view (hooks, 1992). There has also been more focus devoted to shining a light on the wonderful work that is being done in the community by Black women. More now than ever before, Black women's ideas and experiences have achieved a visibility unthinkable in the past (Collins, 1996). African American women have award shows, movies, sitcoms, books, magazines, music, and art dedicated to celebrating the brilliance of their beauty, intelligence, and lifestyle. They sit at the top of major corporations, banks, and educational institutions; they are entrepreneurs, community organizers, educators, homemakers, and politicians among a myriad of other professions. For the first time ever, the First Lady of the United States (FLOTUS) is indeed an African American woman. It has been a long time coming, fighting for equality and justice for the Black woman.

However, Black women are still constantly fighting against systemic racism, sexism, and reductive ideas of Black womanhood. It is also the case that these issues (i.e. systemic racism and sexism) permeate the minds of Americans through manipulated images and stories by the mass media (i.e. reality TV shows, movies, and news outlets that exploit and hyper accentuate the minority and create caricatures of Black women and girls). It is unfortunate that Black women are still fighting against the "welfare queen", "mammy", "jezebel", and "sapphire" stereotypical images that have been placed on them by a society that refuses to understand the complexity of their collective and individual identities. Although Black women have made great strides in countering these ideas, they are still fighting against systemic racism, sexism and classism that is deeply embedded in the U.S. social, economic, and political structures. They are no longer fighting

significantly against individual bigotry; rather, the fight has shifted towards structural oppression. Black women's economic positions are still at the very bottom of the American capitalistic economy; although, a handful of Black women have been able to gain certain tools as a result of tokenism in education and cooperate America, their advancements potentially impede them from effectively fighting oppression (Eisenstein, 1983).

“Activism among contemporary feminists is often overlooked because it does not adhere to traditional definitions of activism and takes place in the everyday lives of these feminists” (Sowards & Renegar, 2006, p. 61). Pough, et al. (2007) *Home Girls Make Some Noise: Hip-Hop Feminism Anthology* is a wonderful example of women of color within the hip-hop generation sharing their personal experiences fighting against identity and sexual politics in pop culture and in a male dominated music industry. An excellent anthology of hip-hop feminism, it uses various forms of communication and self-expression – like essays, poetry, songs, narratives, and artwork – that allow these women to further push the envelop of creating space for and dialogue with young Black women in the academy. Not only is this collection a wonderful example of Black women's personal experiences as worthy and credible sources of knowledge, it redefines activism and shines light on what is considered contemporary activism. Although I was unable to identify a specific chapter solely focused on Black female students, it is apparent that many of them focused on the experiences of young Black women.

In *The Hip-Hop Generation Fights Back: Youth, Activism, and Post-Civil Rights Politics*, Andreana Clay (2012) examines how youth activists are addressing issues of inequality that affect the hip-hop generation. She also asks the question whether these

“activities, values, tools, and identities that the youth have created indeed constitute activism as it is defined in popular and academic discourse” (p. 153). Although this book focuses on the activities of high school students of color, it gives a really good idea of how the contemporary movement is defined. In many cases society has idealized the cultural image of activism and many of the activists of the 60s (e.g. imprinting their image on t-shirts and posters) (Clay, 2012). Although this is a way that the media and popular culture show reverence to the political or social ideology of these activists and link the two generations, it also has the potential to downplay the struggles of the past generations (Clay, 2012). “Public figures such as Malcolm X and Angela Davis have become abstract, almost perfect images of what it means to be an activist”, which makes it difficult (and undesirable) for young activists to live up to (p. 13-14). Clay found that because of this some contemporary activists would rather not be called “activist,” rather just known for the work that they do.

Many contemporary activists identify with role models within hip-hop because of their ability to connect to young people and keep it real (Clay, 2012). They also find social media and social networking a major tool in strategizing and organizing their activist activities. Social media has also allowed their activism to become more multicultural and globalized. In the end, Clay (2012) suggests that although the contemporary activist admire and respects the past generation of activists, they are “less concerned with painting one picture of activism, rather focused on carving out their own understanding of social change, organizing and activism” (p. 164) Contemporary activism looks different because it is less likely to be centered around one event or cause, rather it is a combination of individual acts of resistance.

Music. Music has always been a medium that I used to uplift and inspire me. Music has also been an important part of the CRM and a strategy they used to energize and encourage people that participated in demonstrations and protests. One of the most significant contributions that the hip-hop generation has made to pop culture has been conscious rap and neo-soul music. Hip-hop has always been viewed as a source of resistance and radical change, however, rap music – its message and loudness - can often be misunderstood and frustrating. The art form of rap gained notoriety in the late 70s and since then has cycled through many phases, from unity rap, political rap, gangsta rap, party rap, and so on. Throughout these different segments of rap there have been a few artists who had a social conscious and inspiring message. Much like the popular music of the 60s (e.g. Aretha Franklin’s “RESPECT”, Sam Cooke’s “Change Gonna Come”, James Brown’s “Say It Loud, I’m Black and I’m Proud”, Bob Dylan’s “Only a Pawn in Their Game”, Marvin Gaye’s “What’s Going On?” and “Inner City Blues”), the hip-hop generation has a soundtrack that speaks to their social and political situation. In this section I will only focus on songs that pertain to Black women.

In 2004, Talib Kweli and Jean Grae wrote and performed a song entitled “Black Girl Pain” as an ode to the Black woman and her experience in America. The opening hook says:

My mama said life would be so hard
 Growing up days as a black girl scared
 In every way, still, you’ve come so far
 They just know the name they don’t know the pain
 So please hold your heads up high

Don't be ashamed of yourself know I

Will carry it forth 'til the day I die

They just know the name they don't know the pain, black girl. (Greene, 2004)

This song by one of hip-hop's more socially conscious artists, speaks to the young Black girl and her struggles in a society. Kweli wrote the song for his daughter. It is a song of inspiration and encouragement. I first heard this song while I was living in a very rural town, attending graduate school at a predominately white institution, and for the first time being the only Black female student in my classes. Oftentimes I felt out of place being there; and I would use this song to help me through tough situations.

India.Arie Simpson, a Grammy Award winning singer/songwriter, released a song entitled "I Am Not My Hair" which was the first single from her third studio album *Testimony: Vol. 1, Life & Relationship* (2006). Black women's hair has always been political; and by political I mean "involving both power struggles and negotiations" (Haanyama, 2013). Whether worn straight/relaxed, coiled, kinky or in an Afro, hair is a representation of one's identity and signifies a certain message – whether intentional or unintentional – to those inside the Black community and to those outside. Angela Davis and her infamous Afro during the Black Power Movement in the late 60s is a perfect example. Deemed radical by Whites and older Blacks, the Afro not only was a popular style among young Blacks, it became a way to reconnect to their roots by wearing their hair in its natural state and in a certain way, rejecting the concept of assimilation and integration. Fifty years later, young Black women are once again choosing to reclaim their roots (pun intended) and take pride in their natural hair. India.Arie sings:

I am not my hair, I am not this skin

I am not your expectation, no
 I am not my hair, I am not this skin
 I am a soul that lives within
 Good hair means curls and waves
 Bad hair means you look like a slave
 At the turn of the century
 It's time for us to redefine who we be
 You can shave it off like a South African beauty
 Or get in on lock like Bob Marley
 You can rock it straight like Oprah Winfrey
 It's not what's on your head
 It's what's underneath. (Simpson, 2006)

India.Arie's lyrics are a powerful affirmation that Black women are beautiful in any hairstyle and that we take back the power of defining who and what we are and why we choose to do what we do.

Recently Janelle Monáe Robinson (2013a) released a single entitled "Q.U.E.E.N." featuring Erykah Badu. Both of these artists are a product of the hip-hop generation and are both known for using their artistry as a platform for activism. The song is a great example of young Black women being proud of being who they are, whether that's being quirky and going against the grain or finding beauty in another Black sister. She sings:

Am I a freak for dancing around?
 Am I a freak for getting down?
 I'm cutting up, don't cut me down

Yeah I wanna be, wanna be Queen. (Robinson, 2013)

Near the end of the song she breaks into a rap:

I ask questions like this

“Are we a lost generation of our people”?

Add us to the equations but they’ll never make us equal.

She who writes the movie owns the script and the sequel.

So why ain’t the stealing of my rights made illegal?

They keep us underground working hard for the greedy,

But when its time to pay they turn around and call us needy.

My crown too heavy like the Queen Nefertiti

Gimme back my pyramid, I’m trying to free Kansas City.

Mixing masterminds like your name Bernie Grundman.

Well I’m gonna keep leading like a young Harriet Tubman

You can take my wings but I’m still goin’ fly

And even when you edit me the booty don’t lie

Yeah, keep singin’ and I’mma keep writing songs

I’m tired of Marvin askin’ me, “What’s Going On”?

March to the streets ‘cuz I’m willing and I’m able

Categorize me, I defy every label

And while you’re selling dope, we’re gonna keep selling hope

We rising up now, you gotta deal you gotta cope

Will you be electric sheep?

Electric ladies, will you sleep?

Or will you preach?

Is this a call to action? She later tweeted a statement about the inspiration behind the song. Janelle Monáe's tweet states, "Q.U.E.E.N. was inspired by private discussions between Erykah & me. [It is meant to make you] JAM. DANCE. FUNK OUT...dialogue later" (Robinson, 2013b). Q.U.E.E.N. is an acronym for queer, untouchables, emigrant, excommunicated, and negroid. She says, "Its for everyone who has felt marginalized and ostracized...I have as a woman, as a Black woman...I wanted to create something for people who feel like they want to give up because they are not accepted in society" (Benjamin, 2013).

Janelle Monáe is known for her eccentric fashion style, futuristic musical sound, deep lyrical content, and innovative music videos. I wasn't surprised to find her music video for this song was just as cutting edge as the song itself. It not only grabs the audience's attention with the baseline and the lyrics of the song but the visual art pays homage to past freedom fighters. The video takes place in a museum and begins with a prelude explaining the concept of the video. The narrator states:

It's hard to stop rebels that time travel, but we at the time council pride ourselves on doing just that. Welcome to the living museum where legendary rebels from throughout history have been frozen in suspended animation. Here in this particular exhibit you will find members of Wonderland and their notorious leader, Janelle Monáe along with her dangerous accomplice, Badoula Oblongata. Together they launch "Project Q.U.E.E.N." a musical weapons program of the twenty-first century. Researchers are still deciphering the nature of this program

and hunting the various freedom movements that Wonderland disguised as songs, emotion pictures and works of art. (Robinson, 2013)

Well there is no question that Janelle Monáe is challenging young Black women to step outside the modes that society has created for us and fight for freedom for all.

A Generational Divide?

There have been generational differences that have existed throughout history, most which could be attributed to rapid cultural change with respect to music, fashion, and politics, among other things. There are others that believe the issue between generations has more to do with a class-conflict – where the old dominate and exploit the young, and the young wish to replace them (Friedenberg, 1969). In this cast the young are adamant about not wanting to accept the roles their parents held when their time comes (Friedenberg, 1969). I believe that the generational divide is a theory that is oftentimes misunderstood; individually we do differ in some aspects and disagree on some things but in the big picture we collectively work together for the greater good of humanity.

In Post Black: How a New Generation is Redefining African American Identity, Womack (2010) tackles the debate of whether there is a generational divide. She concludes that for Blacks we no longer follow the tradition of being unified by race, culture, and politics through the church and community organizations; we are now more apt to align through personal interest, points of view and lifestyle. We are moving away from the idea that Blacks are monolithic, having a universal experience, to a more multicultural, multiracial, multiethnic, multigenerational era (Womack, 2010). Largely due to President Obama, the Obama Administration and what it represents. Clay (2012) suggests, “making social change accessible and connecting with other people are

important tools in contemporary activism” (p. 159). Technology (i.e. the internet, social media, mobile devices) is heavily relied upon by youth activists, to voice opinions on certain issues, to connect with peers, and spread the word about events.

Although it is evident that there are differences between the generations, when we take a closer look there’s a mutual respect for each other. In April of 2010 SNCC celebrated the 50th anniversary of the formation of the organization. Over eleven hundred people attended the commemorative conference, which was held in at Shaw University in Raleigh, NC. Many of the SNCC students who were actively engaged in activist work during the sixties attended, along with hundreds of college students and other historians and activists. The four-day conference was packed with panels featuring SNCC members discussing their time in the movement as organizers, students, young women and men and for some of them living in the South for the first time. They shared with these young people, their stories of courage in the face of fear, the strength and wisdom that they gained through their activism, and hopes for the future. There was a panel that consisted of some of the members of SNCC children. They shared lessons they learned – directly and indirectly – from their parents and other SNCC activists that crossed their path (SNCC, 2011a).

The final day of the conference was dedicated to discussions about the past, present and future. Bernice Johnson-Reagon addressed the audience with spoken word and song. She begins by acknowledging that she is forever indebted to those that stood and fought before her. She states, “I am standing on ground plowed by people before I came into being” (SNCC, 2011b). The audience young and older activists listened closely when she sang freedom songs and suggested that those freedom songs are a connection to

the contemporary struggle. She states, “you will not be able to get through your life if you dismiss the ground you’re standing on” (SNCC, 2011b). One of my students that I mentor had the privilege of attending this conference and she said it was an experience of a lifetime. Listening to the stories of the SNCC members’ experiences and talking one-on-one with them, she had a newfound respect for the sacrifices that they made. I too, had a chance to attend one of the anniversary conferences – the 50th Anniversary of the Southwest Georgia Movement. It was truly a memory that I will forever cherish, meeting the ASU alums that helped springboard the Albany Movement. Much like Jamila (2002), I thought I missed my moment for activism. However, I realized that each generation has their moment. We show appreciation and draw inspiration from those who served and fought before us. With each generation we broaden the definition of activism to fit our needs. Jamila (2002) states:

Now I draw strength from the knowledge that people have been actively combating sexism, racism and other intersecting oppressions for a long time. Many of those icons I respect are still on the scene actively doing their thing for us. That knowledge is my ammunition as I join with them and my peers to continue fighting those battles and the other fronts unique to our time. We can’t get complacent. The most important thing we can do as a generation is to see our new positions as power and weapons to be used strategically in the struggle rather than as spoils of war. (p.394)

Although the generations may not agree on certain issues, it is evident they are aware of one another’s activities. Recently Alice Walker – feminist writer and activist – released an open letter that voiced her concerns about Alicia Keys (singer and activist)

performing in Israel, stating that she is supporting apartheid by performing there. The letter reads:

Dear Alicia Keys,

I have learned today that you are due to perform in Israel very soon. We have never met, though I believe we are mutually respectful of each other's path and work. It would grieve me to know you are putting yourself in danger (soul danger) by performing in an apartheid country that is being boycotted by many global conscious artists. You were not born when we, your elders who love you, boycotted institutions in the US South to end an American apartheid less lethal than Israel's against the Palestinian people. Google© Montgomery Bus Boycott, if you don't know about this civil rights history already. We changed our country fundamentally, and the various boycotts of Israeli institutions and products will do the same there. It is our only nonviolent option and, as we learned from our own struggle in America, nonviolence is the only path to a peaceful future... I have kept you in my awareness as someone of conscience and caring, especially about children of the world. Please, if you can manage it, go to visit the children of Gaza, and sing to them of our mutual love of all children, and of their right not to be harmed simply because they exist.

With love, younger sister, beloved daughter and friend,

Alice Walker (Walker, 2013)

In a statement to The New York Times, Alicia Keys stated: "I look forward to my first visit to Israel. Music is a universal language that is meant to unify in peace and love, and that is the spirit of our show" (Itzkoff, 2013). Despite differences in age or opinion, Black

women have a shared history of oppression and resistance. We must recognize that each group has a certain perspective on their own experiences as well as perspectives on the other group (Collins, 2000). It is necessary that we build coalitions with one another in this quest towards social justice.

Conclusion

Activism for Black women looks very different than it does for White women because Black women are one of few groups negatively affected by multiple/intersecting oppressions (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991). It is also true that activism for the hip-hop generation looks very different than it did during the CRM of the 60s. Although the hip-hop generation has grown up during a time of legalized abortions, affirmative action, and gay rights, this generation is still combating issues of racial profiling, sexual assaults, and homophobia. Black female student activists' "actions were nurtured by the support of countless, ordinary African American women who, through strategies of everyday resistance, created a powerful foundation for [today's] more visible feminist activist tradition (Collins, 1989, pg. 745).

Given the increasingly troublesome social context affecting Black women as a group (Harris-Perry, 2011; Morgan, 1999; Springer, 2002) such solidarity is essential. Collins (2000) posits that Black women's activism is complex "because the structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal domains of power that work together to produce particular patterns of domination" (p. 203). Patterns of Black women's activism reflect less about their preferred social or political choices and more about existing opportunities (Collins, 2000). It is in the everyday activities and experiences of Black female students that activism is enacted.

In this chapter I presented a vast description of the experiences of Black female student activist during the CRM (1960-66) and the contemporary movement (2002-12). I also identified similarities and differences within the historical and contemporary perspective of Black female student activism. Lastly, I began the discussion of whether there is a generational divide between the two generations.

Chapter four, I present a collection of narratives from four women – Annette, Doris, Erika and Jayanni, all Black, and all former or present day student activists. This chapter focuses on the research questions, *How did/have women develop(ed) ways of knowing about self and community through activism and education, What were/are the cultural and historical factors that drove/drive each woman to activism, and How do Civil Rights activists (1960-1970) and contemporary activists (2002-2012) characterize one another?* I use Labov's (1972) model of structured narrative analysis to code and organize the data. Chapter five focuses on the analysis of the data using Collins (2000) Black feminist epistemology.

Chapter Four

“Until the lion has her own historian, tales of the hunt will always glorify the hunter”

~African Proverb

Ms. Erika Turner¹³

The Early Years

My name is Erika and I am a 21-year-old senior, attending a prestigious women’s college on the northeast coast of the United States. My major is religion and I hope to someday venture into a career as a political writer. I would like to share with you my experience as a contemporary Black female student activist. Most of my activism is centered around community organizing and community building for Black women/girls in the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer/questioning (LGBTQ) community. Yes, I am a Black Queer Woman! I feel like my institution as well as my advisors, administrators and some of my professors support what I do. As for my family, I think as an individual they are proud of me for the things that I do like being outspoken and involved. However, as for my specific activism they aren’t really that involved. They don’t really know what I do.

I am originally from Las Vegas, NV, where my mother reared my younger sister and me mostly as a single parent. My father was in my life but he and my mother separated when I was young. I don’t think that I can say at what point that I recognized my socioeconomic class. I have always been pretty much aware that I have no money.

¹³ Throughout this dissertation I will be using the participants’ real name. However, for the contemporary students I will not identify their educational institution.

But just from the way in which I grew up and my mom was never quiet about the fact that we were struggling. Because I didn't grow up with a lot of money I am focused on making sure I am financially stable so that I can one day take care of my mom and the family that I may choose to have in the future. Sometimes I feel like I should go in to non-profit work, except I would never do that because I don't want to not have money. For entirely selfish reasons I don't want to not have money. I rationalize this by quoting Audre Lorde, "caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare." I am interested in politics because of how my activism informs what I find important. I believe this career choice could allow me to treat the disease instead of putting a Band-Aid on the festering wound.

My race has always been something I was aware of because of the way people treated me in school. I remember in the first grade we were eating cupcakes and there was this skinny white boy that I never really liked. He said in the middle of the whole class, "Erika is such a messy eater...she has chocolate all over her". Everyone laughed at me. I was so irritated, so mad. What do you do at that age? I really didn't understand what that meant, because that was how I always looked. I couldn't do anything except be upset and made to feel ashamed for something that I couldn't control or didn't know that I was supposed to control. That is something that I still remember and that was a major point in which I was made aware of my race.

In school, I was always one of perhaps two Black students in my classes, which looking back on it was interesting and problematic. Las Vegas has a large Filipino and white population, so my schools were mostly white, Asian and some Black students. Oftentimes I was looked to speak on behalf of Black people, especially if we were

reading a book that focused on Black characters or themes of racism, which was very frustrating. This affected how I interacted with people and how I made friends. Most of my friends, especially in high school, were white or half Mexican but identified as white. A lot of the Black students at my high school referred to me as an “oreo” (i.e. Black on the outside, white in the inside) because of the way I spoke and acted. The white students and some teachers at my high school would tell me that I was not like most Black students, that I was different. I didn’t realize how it affected in a lot of ways how I saw myself. I felt like I had to prove my Blackness to people but at the same time trying hard not to be a typical Black girl. But a certain part of me liked that I wasn’t “stereotypical.” I tried very hard to play into the idea of existing beyond my race. I vaguely remember telling my parents that Black people were stuck in the past and needed to get over things that we had been facing, which is funny now because I definitely don’t think that anymore.

College Life

I remember attending an event for an organization that I had received a scholarship from. I remember feeling different from the other Black students not because of the idea of being an “oreo” but specifically because I was gay. I didn’t know any other Black gay people, so I felt as though I was different. This made me feel disconnected from my race in a lot of ways. It was specifically when I went to these events that I was around a number of Black people. Then having conversations about gender roles for Black women in the Black community, I realized that I experience those roles differently because I am gay. I was so irritated with the conversation about how Black girls learning

how to close their legs and not be so swayed by a Black man with swag¹⁴ and money. All I was thinking was, don't we have other things that we could discuss about young Black women?

I became aware of my sexuality at about twelve years old and fully came out to myself when I was about seventeen, which coincided with when my activism began. I think I got involved with social activism my senior year in high school. That was right around the time Barack Obama was first elected as President and also when Prop 8¹⁵ was passed. I got really involved. I started going to rallies and things like that. This was also around the time the Matthew Sheppard Act¹⁶ was passed through the U.S. Congress, the U.S. Senate and ultimately signed into law by Obama. I got involved, wanting to know more about what was going on in the world and in return I started getting others involved and learning more. This activism and social consciousness persisted through college. By the time I got to college I had already been so involved with activist work, my queer identity wasn't an issue for me. However, I recognized very strongly that I wanted and needed the support of a Black community because I didn't have one growing up.

Upon coming to college I made an effort to seek out support within the LGBT community and Black community. I joined an organization on campus called ETHOS, which is an organization specifically for Black women. From the very beginning I was

¹⁴ Swag is urban slang for the way a person presents themselves. It relates to their style, appearance of fashion or mannerisms.

¹⁵ Proposition 8, known as Prop 8, was a ballot initiative and California state constitutional amendment, passed November 2008 stating that only marriage between a man and a woman is valid or recognized in California.

¹⁶ The Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. hate crimes prevention act extends the 1969 US federal hate crimes law to include crimes motivated by a victim's actual or perceived gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability. It is also the first federal law to extend protections to transgender people.

very open about my sexuality. I was accepted into the POINT National Foundation and received a scholarship for my activist work with the LGBTQ community. I also volunteer for an organization calls Queer Women of Color and Friends (QPOC). I consider my supervisor – a Nigerian queer woman – a close mentor and friend. She encouraged me to create a space for myself at my institution.

I was aware that many Black institution/organizations and the Black community in general is not super open to queer people. So when I joined ETHOS I joined with the intention of hopefully using myself as an example and getting people to be more comfortable. I have established myself as a student leader early, running for the sex and sexuality chair for the organization. I felt really good about the fact that everyone knew who I was but I wondered was I the only one. Was I the only Black gay female student on campus? It was interesting to find out that I had friends who were queer, bisexual, transgender and of African descent. But they were uncomfortable with being out. In general it is already difficult being gay in this society but being gay in the Black community is even harder, in my opinion.

Although I was met with much hesitation, I encourage a lot of the gay Black students to come out. We needed a community of our own. When I got more involved with queer issues and learned more about the queer community, I noticed that the queer community and the “critical queer movement” didn’t really understand race, nor does it try to understand race or the idea of having dual identities. The reason of course is the fact that the queer community is currently “headed by white men” who the only thing that they really have to think about is the fact that they are gay. They are not faced with issues of discrimination because of their race or gender; they are good in those areas. It is mind

blowing when you look at the issues faced by Black queer women. I saw a need to carve out a space for young Black queer women.

It is much like the situation that Black women had to face within feminism and the feminist movement. The queer community without recognizing it or without necessarily knowing how to recognize the fact that when they think of queer people they think of queer people who don't have other issues besides being queer. I recognized that very quickly and met the need for community by starting a student organization called BlackOut. BlackOut is for queer and questioning students of African descent. It has been such a great experience to be around people who look like me and who love like me. However for some reason there are certain people unable to grasp the concept of the necessity to have a space specifically for Black queer women. Some white students asked why don't you want to integrate with the white people?

It is a beautiful thing when you have a group of strong women that recognizes the different issues of intersectionality from the get-go. It makes it so much easier to have other conversations, conversations that don't have anything to do with race, gender, class or sexuality. There is a baseline of trust so we are free to talk about other things. So for me being a Black woman in college has been great and has shaped me in a lot of ways. I love who I am and I don't think that is something I would have been able to say when I was younger. Not to say I didn't like who I was but I didn't have a specific connection to my womanhood or to my race like I do now. My race was just something that was and that others liked to talk about. For me, race was something I was trying not to occupy and wished that people would see beyond.

Since creating a space for Black queer women of color on my campus, I have gained a lot of Black female student activist friends. We roll deep! Most of us having come from PWI high schools, we feel very close to each other. It is a weird feeling of closeness. Its like a spiritual experience to be with other Black women who have gone through similar things in their lives in terms of their identities and who are doing the same work that you are doing in different ways. There is this feeling of solidarity – that is the word, solidarity. When things aren’t going right or when I am feeling tired because I was in class one day and some girl says something foolish, or I am trying to talk to a professor and s/he doesn’t understand where I am coming from or how I grew up and expects me to come with all of these preparations that a white upper middle class student may have that I may not because I am a Black lower middle class student, I know there is a group of women that can be like “I understand.”

The queer Black female student activist. An incident happened my first year in college that made me realize that it is impossible to push one identity away from another. My school hosted a PostSecret¹⁷ exhibit on campus and students were able to anonymously post their biggest secrets on post cards, posted notes, or something fancy. They compiled them and posted them on the wall. There was one PostSecret that struck a nerve with me. It was right off the hills of Prop 8. The PostSecret said something like “it was Black peoples fault that Prop 8 passed”. This person, presumably white, went on to say “they have their own President why don’t they let us have marriage.” It’s funny because it is this small little note on this wall that probably has since been thrown away,

¹⁷ PostSecret, created by Frank Warren, is an ongoing mail art project where people mail in secrets anonymously on post cards or notecards to be displayed on the PostSecret website or in a book.

but when I read it, it was such a big thing for me. This incident shifted my understanding about intersecting identities. Yes I am queer and that is really important but I am Black too. Quite frankly, I put being a Black woman above being gay a lot of the time because I can pass for being straight. I don't have to tell people I am gay. However, they can see that I am a Black woman.

Activism for me doesn't stop with community organizing; it follows me in the classroom. If you are an activist you are always an activist. I can remember taking an "Intro to Women's Studies" course my sophomore year in college. There were only two women of color in the class – myself and a young lady from Tunisia. Oftentimes we would have class discussions about women of color or women in third world countries, which ironically were always put together. There would always be these cases where people would want to speak very frankly about issues a woman of color would face or issues that Black women had to face. These individuals were speaking from theory or speaking from what they had seen in a movie or read in a book.

In the meantime I am thinking do I want to raise my hand and say "actually that is not my experience" or do I not want to say anything because if I keep talking I am never going to put my hand down? I have heard from other Black female students that they have had the same issues in their classes. "Do I want to speak up because this is wrong, this is incorrect, because I am offended or are people just going to see me as yet another loud mouth Black woman who is offended by everything?" So a lot of times it is just better to keep your mouth shut and have tough skin. It is that issue that Black women are already stereotyped as being loud and tough skinned – we can do anything and whatever. On a spiritual level it is something that Black women have to face. Black female student

activists specifically have to deal with it all the time because it is hard to be an activist if you are not outspoken. It doesn't work!

I feel like I have to speak up for myself all the time but then that means I am always strong and always expected to be strong. Which is the issue! I don't always want to be expected to be strong. I don't always want the stereotype of the "Black independent, I can do everything" woman. It's a struggle, my personal struggle. I would love for someone to see me as delicate or see me as someone they want to take care of. Because I am an activist, and a Black woman, and a Black female student activist, I have to continuously put on this mask of "I have every thing together."

There are pressing issues that I need to put my energy towards. If I don't put my energy towards them then things are not going to change. It is not going to change my personal life and it is definitely a life or death thing. Activism is not something I do in my spare time because it is fun. I sacrifice a lot for activist work – time studying, time socializing with friends and family, and spending time doing other things I am interested in like interior design. I do this because I want to live! Based off the circumstances I was put in – as a Black woman, as a Black person, as a woman, as queer person, as a Black queer woman – I am not given the ability to live freely. So being an activist is fighting for that ability to live but at the same time that I am fighting for the ability to live I am almost not allowed to live because of all the energy I put into these things. So it's a sacrifice. As much as I love the things that I am studying and things that I am interested in doing, at the end of the day it is the activism that I am more passionate about.

Connection is Necessary

One of the things that I focus on in my activism is getting people to recognize queer issues as Black issues. I think that if there is a generational divide, it has something to do with that. Things are changing; young people no longer look at themselves in terms of just their race. For example, during the CRM a lot of the change that took place was done because of the work that was done within churches. There was a lot of organizing within the church, which is important. But now there are a really large segment of Black people who are not religious or who are Muslim. There is the issue of religion now and how to reach across the religious divides. Of course issues like sexuality, there is no longer the expectation of someone ignoring or denying their sexuality in favor of their race. Furthermore, there can no longer be the expectation for women to remain silent about their needs as Black women for the sake of racial unity.

For me, the 1960s CEM hasn't ended, its not over. I think the contemporary movement is the continuation of the CRM. We have things we still need to fight for, still things we need in our government, still changes we need in our institutions. However the contemporary movement is piecemealed. It has become more localized and individualized. It seems to be that people might work on instances of racism as they happen on their college campuses or instances of racism as they happen in their state and local government; however, I think it is hard to visualize a comprehensive national civil rights movement. There are times in which a situation may become bigger, like the issue with Trayvon Martin or Troy Davis. Those are individual instances that become national but they are not the only ones. There are hundreds, millions of Trayvon Martins and Troy Davis' that go unheard of.

I think that if people were able to see the numbers or if they were looking at the nuances that they would be much more fired up. There is still obvious racism and such major institutional flaws that still exist. One can look at the prison industrial complex as a great example, also the war on drugs, or feminism to see the systemic racism that exists. No there is no longer Jim Crow laws or public lynchings, racism is actually something that has changed and exist in much more subversive ways. A lot of people have become complacent.

The Internet and social media is a big part of the contemporary movement. I am not sure if it is super helpful because it is hard to really see what is going on on the internet. You click something then you close it and its gone. Unless you see people coming together things don't change, I think. Unless you see the people that you are trying to work with, unless you make yourself visible to the people whose minds you are trying to change, unless you are out there in their face and in each other faces, I don't thing it is going to do any good. Which is not to say that the Internet and social media aren't helpful, they are. Obviously it gets to a wider array of people faster, but there is also the case with the onset of social media and the Internet, people have shorter attention spans. Okay great, it gets to millions of people, everyone is excited about it then once you click the winder closed, they are going on and doing something different. It is not unless you see something, and you see it consistently, and can feel the energy of people changing and what they need, unless you are in the space and can make that space available for others to really show what is going on, I don't know that change will be freely made.

The only connection that I have to the CRM is mostly stuff that I have read in class and the research that I am currently working on. I don't have a person that I could call a mentor who worked with key organizations in the movement. My paternal grandmother is the only person that I can think of that has been a personal inspiration to me. She was one of the first teachers to work in a desegregated school in California. In a recent conversation about her experience she talked about the dangers a lot of students had to face. Many times the white students would show up to class or transferred to other schools. It was interesting to hear her talk and knowing that she went through that. I think that helped me connect to history, my history as a Black person and Black woman a lot more. I find history fascinating and I think that it is important in terms of understanding where we are going. As I go about my activism, I want to continuously remind myself and what I hope to remind others is that the CRM is in and around us all. This history is our family members, our mothers, and our grandmothers who lived through these things. It is not something that we just read in a textbook. I think it is easy to forget because in my case, my grandmother and mother don't talk about their experiences because they live in the present day. But it is necessary to remember that these experiences were very much a part of their lives and upbringing and what shapes them, shapes us.

Ms. Jayanni Webster

The Early Years

My name is Jayanni and I am a 22-year-old recent graduate of a research one institution in the Southeast of the United States. I received a bachelors of arts in College Scholars, which is an honor program that allowed me to create my own program of study. My program of study was Post Conflict Education in Africa. I identify as a contemporary

Black female student activist and I would like to share my experience in this narrative. I consider myself an organizer. My activism centers around intersectionality and organizing folks around emerging and pressing issues as well as cultural issues. My goal is to obtain a doctorate degree in anthropology and public health, pursuing a career as a professor and continuing my activist work in my Memphis community and Uganda.

I grew up in Memphis, TN – a 90s child – with my mother and brother in a single parent home. My mother divorced my dad who was abusive but is no longer abusive and has since then remarried and divorced again. I would see my dad on the weekends. I have four other siblings that I did not grow up in the same house with. I would identify my family as working class. Things were hard for my mom who was the primary care giver of us, although my dad paid child support. It was hard to take care of two kids not having an income that was flexible. My mom never told us anything about our financial situation, so I really didn't know we were poor until I got to college. There were a few times I came home and the lights were out but my mom would say, "Its alright I will get them back on...light some candles." We lived in section eight housing at one point and were on food stamps. I didn't realize that was poverty until I was told that it was. My childhood was characterized by knowing that I didn't want to live like we were currently living. Sometimes I was depressed about not having money but the fact that I didn't want for much I thing helped out a lot.

Gender wasn't a big issue or something that I really thought about. I may have thought about Blackness or not having much money more than gender. There were only two times I remember being upset about gender or being aware of gender. One was when my mom let my brother work to help with bills but would not let me work while in high

school. I thought it was so unfair. I felt like it was because of my gender and because I was doing better than my brother in school. The other was being forced to wear dresses to church when I didn't want to. Back then it wasn't about liberation, the movement, the struggle, and bettering the world, it was about my world and what was going on with me.

I went to a majority Black high school, which technically would be considered a suburban neighborhood that was then urbanized to an extent due to white flight and resources being diverted away from the neighborhood. School felt like a prison and I was ready to get out to never return. We had some good times but it was not the pentacle of our lives. There was gang activity in and around my neighborhood and school. I think my brother was involved in a little gang activity and I am sure he sold drugs from time to time but he was not deep in it. There were times when I was approached by girls to join a gang. I would just say let me think about it and then run around the corner.

I am unsure when I came to full awareness about my race, class and gender because I believe those self awareness(es) come really early in life. I started connecting the dots when I was a teenager. I remember a situation occurring when I was maybe 9 or 10 years old. It was my cousin's birthday party and we were to meet at their apartment complex's pool. They lived in a really nice apartment complex that was majority white. When we got there my aunt and cousin was still getting things ready at the apartment so they told us to go down to the pool. It was my mom, my aunt, my brother and my two cousins. We got out of the car and went to the swimming pool. As soon as we stepped inside this older white woman got up from her chair and said, "Do you have passes." My mom said, "No we don't we are here for a birthday party." The lady said we couldn't come in without passes. My mom said, "Well they will be here in a minute, can we just

wait?” The woman said, ”No you can’t stay here.” So we walked outside the area and sat on the steps leading up to the pool. I guess that wasn’t good enough because the lady called the police.

She called the police on my mom, my aunt and four kids. The lady told the officer that my mom cursed her out and threatened her. He told us that we had to leave and if we didn’t then he would arrest us. I remember getting in the car and my aunt says, “That racist bitch.” At that moment I felt something shift. I remember thinking, I know what racist means; it meant she didn’t like Black people. It became more about just wanting to go swimming. I wanted to cry, I just kept thinking why would she do that and could other people possibly do this because of my skin color?” I was disgusted by it, I was scared, I was anxious and I was very sad.

My family doesn’t really know about my activism. But I don’t really talk to them about it either. It is not just my activism but also pretty much everything I do in life. I had a conversation with my mom the other day and asked her to tell me what I got my bachelors in. She said, “I know what you got it in.” I said, “No you don’t, because you don’t know anything that I am doing.” I know my major is weird but she still didn’t know it. I know she is very proud of me – my entire family is very proud of me. They know I did something, they know I got a degree, they know I went to Africa, they know I have a really high GPA, they saw that I won awards and that is good enough for them.

College Life

Throughout my entire college career I was a member of Amnesty International and the president for two years. I was heavily involved with the Prisoners of Conscience campaigns within Amnesty and the effort to petition the US Supreme Court for a new

trail for Troy Davis. I am a supporter of the Occupy movement and various strains of the Occupy movement like Occupy the Hood. Myself and other activists in my city organize rallies – anti-racism rallies – in remembrance of Trayvon Martin and also to highlight those killed unjustly in our communities due to racism. I tried to start an Occupy movement on my college campus but that didn't work. My institution is supportive to a certain degree, as long as what you are doing doesn't really pose a challenge to the status quo. For example, if I hold an event that raises awareness about human trafficking, that doesn't pose a threat to the actual inter workings of the University. However, if I start organizing a campaign for workers, like janitorial and facility service workers, then that is where you see the shift in institutional support or feeling as if your concerns aren't being heard. I have also organized a critical thinking group called Feminist reading/activity group (FRAG). FRAG was started because we felt the need to create a feminist space.

I practice a lot of “slack-tivism,” but only to a certain degree. Slack-tivism is when a person substitutes real organization and participatory processes for digitally – on the computer – signing things and signing off on issues that they don't really have a nuanced perspective about. Being apart of email list serves is what helps me stay up-to-date with what is not reported on the news or what I don't have time to watch. The list serves that I am on are: NAACP, Amnesty International, the National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty (NCADP), ColorofChange.org, All Out (which is about LGBT people), TNs for Fair Taxation, education groups, immigrant rights groups, the whole gamut really. I don't think being a part of these list servers don't make me an active part of an organization. When I do digitally sign something it is usually because I know more

about the problem then the email has told people. I only practice it to the degree that I actually do it in reality. If the NAACP sends me a petition about the voter suppression laws then chances are I will sign it because I have read all sorts of things about the voter suppression laws and anything that is trying to raise awareness about it – so I will promote. But if I didn't really know about it, I won't sign it.

Instances of racism and gender discrimination towards me have come to the forefront of my activism not when I am actually doing activist work, but through relationships with people who are in the movement outside of events, outside of organizing. Sometimes some messed up stuff is said – racist, sexist, or homophobic language and ideology is used. I realized quickly that just because you are liberal doesn't mean that you are an antiracist. I have learned that to be antiracist you can't be antigay at the same time. You can't organize for Trayvon Martin and turn a blind eye to the transgender Black man that was just killed. I find myself really upset with liberals, Black and white liberals alike. I think they are worst than conservatives because they are supposed to know better but racist/sexist/homophobic shit still comes out of their mouth. For instance, being pro-Obama but saying things like “once you go Black you never go back.” That is so inappropriate. You can't be good with gender and sexuality and bad on race, you need to make sure the whole gamut is covered.

I have noticed a lot about my institution being an aware Black female student. To start, my institution is not a safe campus. This institution and the students here perpetuate rape culture. The campus police offer classes for self-defense, “Women protect yourselves, don't walk alone.” Instead of telling the women protect yourselves, why don't they start a campaign saying, “Don't rape, don't rape or you will be caught, you

will be arrested, we will publicly humiliate you, this is something that we are not going to support.” But it is putting the fault upon the objects of that type of violence. The institution really isn’t concerned about assaults because they allow Frat Row to exist. They report assaults and “try” to do something about it. I do understand that it is difficult to change culture when it comes to gender and race inequality.

I find that race is a problem on my campus too. It is everywhere, from the dumb ass civility initiative, to the N-word being written on the rock, to cotton balls outside the Black Cultural Center (BCC), to why white students don’t come to the BCC, to being the only person of color in class, to not being taught by Black professors, to the scholarships I received. It is constantly in my face. There are never positive discussions about race because there can’t be until we get to the bottom about how race affects students here. I think the institution’s upper administrators are out of touch. They are not radicals, they are not even too liberal about these issues, which is why most of them are hired – to fall in line and mimic what has gone well at other universities and bring it here. When it comes to addressing issues about race and gender the university washes their hands of responsibility by giving much of the responsibility over to the student affairs offices. My problem with the civility initiative is that civility has nothing to do with addressing racism. That is such a very liberal individualism type of thinking in which we feel like it is not about actual racism, it is just that people just do stupid things. It is not about students being civil to one another. If these incidences keep happening then that is a cultural problem on this campus, where we let white supremacy creep into every corner of our thinking. It feels as though the university is not listening to students of color because it is not about them, it is about the university looking good. Students of color are

only needed here because the institution needs the numbers. They need them to do well so they can say that we are doing something for students of color, so they can increase their numbers.

I remember having a horrible experience during diversity training as a student leader for a group on campus. We had been taking a class on student leadership and preparing to lead a group of incoming students. We got to the week where we talked about "diversity" and it was terrible. The facilitators weren't educated on issues of diversity or facilitating cultural discussions around race, class and gender. I was just a sophomore, so I didn't have the language, I didn't have the knowledge. I didn't have my politicized self then to understand what would come out of this situation. When we came into the class, the facilitators had these big sheets of paper posted around the room. They wrote down male, female, or women/man, gay, Black, white, I think Asian was written down, disabled was written down, and then Greek was written down. As if Greek is the same thing as all the rest of the others. I came to college and I decided to be Black (sarcasm). Chosen, completely chosen and the whole culture that goes along with it, but I digress.

The facilitators instructed us to use scrap pieces of paper and write down the first word that we thought of when we saw the word on the larger paper posted around the room. We went around the room, wrote it down, put it in the brown paper bag that was sitting below it. We then came back to the circle, when they called out the word we had to stand up if we identified with the word (not if you were in the category, but if you identified with it). I felt really nervous. They started to call out the words. So male/men was called and everybody stood up. Most people have a dad/brother/friend/boyfriend who

is male. Some things that were called out about male/men that could have been insulting and some were funny, things like beard. Female/woman was called and most people stood up. The sexist remarks started coming. There may have been things that were leveled against men but those things are not tied to a history of patriarchal subjugation. I was getting really nervous. Disabled was called and phrases like “not a real person” were read. I thought to myself “are these the campus leaders that were chosen?” Gay was called out and things like “going to hell” were said. I was so nervous by the time they got to Black.

There were only two Black students in the room, myself and another female student. When white was called everybody stood up but when Black was called only three people stood up, the two of us and a white guy who was gay. Nobody else stood up. I thought, “Have we not been in the same class for the past two mouths, wow!” I felt betrayed. I don’t think I put anything super negative about any of the words in the bag. I remember when white was called I put in the word privileged. When gay was called I put in the word misunderstood. So when Black was called everything from “food stamps” to “can’t let go of the past,” “baby momma,” “thug,” and “rappers.” The word I put in was “me.” It was the first thing I thought of. It is really weird how things work out because the last word that was read was “Nigger.” Of course the white person who pulled it out read it. So I basically said to myself, “fuck you all” because somebody out of the 22 people that were in the auditorium had to have written it. The trust went out the window – whatever friendship we ever had, whatever respect I’ve had in them, my security, my ability to feel safe all went out the window.

By that time I was crying because all of the things were hurtful. I left the room crying and went to the bathroom. One of the facilitators came in and said to me, “You are a strong Black woman, those things aren’t you.” I wish I were who I am today then; I could have saved myself a lot of pain. What she did in that moment was tell me to buck up, to be this strong Black woman myth, and that racism is something you can get over. She told me that my community, in which they talked about, put those words in that bag, was not me. Even if she didn’t mean it, it’s not about intentions...it came out that way. I saw this on an institutional level; the administrators didn’t get it. Hopefully she has learned from that experience, read some stuff, and will never do that activity again. But that doesn’t change that fact that it happened and it happens in other spaces on campus. I felt my gender and my race was verbally assaulted at that point in time and set the stage for the rest of my academic career. I remember there being no discussion afterwards. Class time was up – the facilitators apologized for the time running out and said we would discuss it next week. When we came back the following week to discuss, no one wanted to say anything. Except one white girl that was crying about “slut” being one of the words used to describe sorority girls. The other Black girl and I was pretty much like this is the end of the program for us and I never reapplied to the program. This experience set the stage for my critical activism. I became more involved with Amnesty and more involved with my work in Africa and Uganda.

I sometimes don’t share my experiences because I get emotional. I feel like there has to be some type of emotional care for people of color especially women of color. Our person is assaulted everyday – our hair, our skin color, our body shape – and we don’t talk about it because we are told that we are strong and that we need to be strong and hold

down the rest of the community at the expense of our self-care. The system of white supremacy, patriarchy and capitalism does this to us because we are trying to protect other things and keep this world alive at the expense of our own selves. Of course an African American single mother of two probably won't have the same time as a middle class woman to take care of herself because of whatever historical processes of exploitation and oppression have caused her living situation and environment to which that it is not possible to self-care as often as she would need. I'm a little bit more privileged that it is just me that I am taking care of, that I can practice some form of self-care and that I even consider it valuable to my life.

The radical Black female student activist. I don't think it's enough just to be Black, female, to be gay, to be a lesbian, transgender, or to be poor – all of these categories that have been used to oppress people. I don't think that is enough to be an activist. One has to be politicized and to a further extent for me, I believe an activist has to be radicalized. I am on a very radicalization journey. My race, class and gender are constantly sources of resource and experience that color my activism, especially when I'm working with people/movements that are homogeneous. It gives me more personal stake in liberation. I don't think activism is selfless – it is very selfish. I love the quote by Lila Watson, an aboriginal educator and activist that says, "If you come here to help me then you are wasting your time...but if you have come because your liberation is bound with mine then let us join hands." I know that what I am fighting for helps me out too. I think activism is three-fold: it is 1) consciousness-raising/intersectional political and cultural work in the community centered on a social justice education and empowerment, 2) action work that builds both alternatives solutions to problems and gets people out into

public space together for collective liberation, and 3) personal work where individuals decolonize themselves of internalized oppression and self-defeating behaviors.

Although my gifts lie in envisioning change and working outside of formal systems to create alternatives, I think other people have different yet useful gifts. Like the gift of working within systems to uphold what is working and to transform what is not working (i.e. people in non-profit or state senate). We need everyone for collective liberation. We need the protesters, we need the creators, the people who can imagine what change can look like and we need those working on reform. It's hard for me b/c I am skilled at organizing folks in the moment to resist oppression, and reform (especially policy) is where I have no patience and where I'm skeptical. I think my life path involves me sticking to racial, economic and gender-based community organizing but in a more organic way where I'm a bridge for my community and where we create alternative systems to supplement or undermine those systems that fail us.

Reconciling the Generational Conflict

I participated in the 2011 50th anniversary Student Freedom Rides. I wrote an essay and was chosen to ride the bus with 5 original freedom riders and about 40 other students from 39 states. These students were gay/lesbian and there were Black, white, Asian, mixed raced, Native American, and Latino/a. We had a pretty diverse group of students, attending schools from community colleges to Harvard. This was probably one of the best experiences in my life. I kind of wish who I am now was who I was then.

I got a chance to meet and talk with Diane Nash, who was a very interesting lady. We sat in on a closed session with her. She talked about her experience as an activist and we got a chance to ask questions. But she said something that made all of us say, "What

Diane Nash?" She said, "Well my views on immigration is not as liberal, it is not the liberal view and some people are shocked by that." We were like, please tell us more Mrs. Nash. She explained, "I think that immigration is bad" and that basically people shouldn't come over here. So all of our heads were turning like, "Did you just, did she just say that... Why?" She went on to say, "That is because immigration is the worst thing that has happen to the Black community after segregation because it took jobs away from the Black community for people who were willing to work them for less money." That was her justification. Her other justification was that they should stay in their countries and work on building a movement there so that they won't have to migrate. She said that it was open for discussion and she didn't care if we disagreed with her, if we wanted to stand and say something we could.

One student stood up and let her have it. There were two others who questioned the meaning of home, when we live in a world of arbitrary international borders. What is home? Now, looking back on it if the U.S. would not have enacted NAFTA then there would not be a huge economic crisis in Mexico. If the U.S. would have never trained assassins to take out democratic elected leaders all over South America and put in their own leaders who are going to support capitalistic and structural adjustment policies; then there would be no need or crisis to a point for people to migrate. I think Diane Nash was missing that intersectionality piece. I love Diane Nash and everyone else because I consider that ancestor appreciation, which has a lot to do with my identity as a Black woman. It is just incredible to exist and be in the same space as these activists. I learned a lot about the CRM through the freedom rides. I still keep in contact with a few other SNCC members from that experience: Helen Singleton, who was fantastic, and her

husband Bob Singleton, Catherine Burke, she was a firecracker. She was quick to rant, “white people this, white people that.” She is the one who told Bull Conner, “See you at high noon” shown on the Freedom Riders documentary.

I think of the relationship between the CRM and the contemporary movement as a generational conflict not as a divide. It doesn’t have to be a divide; our differences don’t have to keep us on separate ends of the court. It is a conflict that we need to reconcile in order to move forward. I feel that the issue is that younger activists fail to truly acknowledge the struggle of CRM and the gains from that struggle. The other issues is that the older activists fail to acknowledge the critical voice of young people that critiques what happened then in order to move forward. What I mean by that is that the CRM was everything to some of them – the advancements and freedoms that people of color were able to gain and access that they were able to gain. But they gained access to a system that is not only working against them, it is working against other Brown and Black folks all across the world and we are responsible for that now. So we got the right to vote but now we see the vote is bought. So what do you do now? You can’t tell an older activist that you don’t want to vote. That is not honoring “The Struggle.”

I think that generational conflict does exist and I have had it dealt to me in the most humiliating of ways. I remember I was sitting on a panel and this Black female professor pretty much thought that everything that I said was stupid. I critiqued voting, she thought I was telling her students not to vote and she was mad. I critiqued the system –I said it is not enough to vote – she thought I was anti-America. I think it was because of the age difference. She screamed at me. I think it was because she thought I was young, I didn’t understand where we had come from and where we are now and how we need to

keep moving forward. I mean she was clear about the politics of both parties. I was basically like, fuck the politics of both parties. They both love capitalism. They will screw over people if they have to, to keep power. They have done it and they have kept their mouths shut on things that they should not have kept their mouths shut on. It is evident that they allow corporations to dictate what they do. So voting for the lesser of two evils is pitiful to me. We need to demand better. How dare we let them tell us vote between the lesser of two evils.

I think we just need to reconcile that conflict of honoring the past struggle, learning from it and not putting it on a pedestal for how change happens. We are in a different context right now, where things are far more covert and complex than they were in the sixties. Don't get me wrong things were pretty complex then, capitalism didn't just begin in the new millennium. I think that we torn down those colored and white only signs just to see that the bus is polluting the environment. The intergeneration conflict come in when the young people don't acknowledge history and learn from it. And when older activists don't see that there is something to be learned as well.

Events in history don't happen in a vacuum – CRM didn't just happen nor did the holocaust just happen. Things happen before those events and things happen after. History is continuous. What happened during the time between the CRM and the current racial justice and economic justice movements is that people were fooled about the gains of the CRM. To an extent I think that we had a generation that was eager to get at opportunities that were previously closed off to them, to make a better life for themselves, their family and community. In doing so, we left lingering questions from the CRM and issues open to where they festered and now much of it is really

institutionalized. Racism is covert and that is much harder to fight. Where do I think the movement is today? I think it is struggling. This generation is a generation that goes without much aim. Everything is really aimless, not that we don't have inspired people. I'm talking about where class and capitalism collide with popular culture. We are a generation that thinks that everything we see in front of us today is the natural course of the way things are supposed to be – and we go along with it. What ends up happening is that we don't see a need to rock the boat or to change things. “We just need to tweak the system a bit...we don't need to transform it, this is naturally how it is supposed to be...you cant please everybody.” I feel like that is dangerous, that is dangerous thinking.

To be for civil rights today is to address and critique the structure. This is a problem – in general – in the U.S. People don't have their consciousness raised enough to even think that the system is messed up. Change from within is not working because the system is already unequal. As Audre Lorde says, “The Masters tools will never dismantle the Masters house.” However, I do have hope though. We struggle, but even that can be beautiful and produce wonderful things in ourselves and in others around us. In the moment it seems like a losing battle, but when you look back so much has changed.

The contemporary movement is multicultural and multi-racial more so then the 60s. Social media – Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Change.org – has made it easier and faster to connect with people and organize mass amounts of people. Social media sites helped the people organizing protests around North Africa and the Middle East recently. They were able to communicate with each other faster and easier, until the government shut down the Internet. They can shut it down and keep shutting it down but people find ways around it. It is a communication tool that capitalizes off globalization. You can't

make choices here and expect it not to have consequences somewhere half around the world. However, there are some negative aspects about social media and activism in my opinion. I think it can also break down community with lack of face-to-face interaction and interpersonal relationships. Organizing on Facebook but not forming relationships with the people at the event/march that you organize, defeats the purpose and misses a critical aspect that is needed after the revolution – which is community. It is important to know the people and the lives that they lead because these relationships help build different social, political, and economic arrangements. The pros and cons vary however it is undeniable that social media expands globalization and connects people from around the world faster and easier.

I think the difference between today and the 60s is that racism, sexism, homophobia, class inequality is more insidious today then it was back then. Before the 60s – like in the 20s, 30s, 40s, 50s – there were class based movements. There were unions that got us the 40-hour workweek and that stopped child labor. That problem was in your face. Today we know our clothes are made in sweatshops but that is somewhere else (sarcasm). It is not here. And if you are a child and you have to work that is because your family is poor. But we have to have poor people because everybody can't be rich (sarcasm). So it's not that I don't think our generation is very engaged but they are very fooled by the level of impact that they can have on society.

I want to have a meaningful existence and I want others to have a meaningful existence by knowing simply that we don't have to live like this and that we have the tools to change things. I don't think about concrete accomplishments because the world in which I envision is so abstract that is still hard for me to grasp. But I know that the

way we are living is not naturally how things are supposed to be. Capitalism isn't natural; it is very intentional and controlled. I hope to add to the tide that is trying to revolutionize the world. It's not going to happen in my lifetime. However adding to the tide is like Shirley Chisholm said, "Service is the rent we pay for living on this earth." In the meantime, I want to live a meaningful life and I want others to do that as well, without oppressing people, as little as possible.

Dr. Doris Derby

The Early Years

My name is Doris and I am a retired professor and higher education administrator. I was the Director of African American Student Services for over 20 years at a large state university in the Southeast of the United States. I received my bachelors of art degree in elementary education and cultural anthropology from Hunter College in '62 and my PhD in cultural anthropology from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in '79. During the 60s I was an active member of SNCC and organized numerous events and activities during the CRM. My activism centered around community organizing, educational initiatives, adult literacy, and the arts. I identified as a Black female student/activist/teacher/artist/intellectual, however I considered myself a lifelong activist – I'm still doing activist work.

I grew up in the Williams Bridge community in the Bronx, NY. My neighborhood was very ethnically diverse – Black, white, and various ethnic groups like Puerto Rican, Caribbean, Jewish, Italian, Chinese, and Greek. I am the middle child of three children born to my mother and father. My father was a well-educated man, receiving his college degree in civil engineering from the University of Pennsylvania. My mother was a stay at

home mom. My mother had a high school diploma but didn't attend college. My parents valued education and supported and encouraged my siblings and I to attend college. We all have degrees beyond undergraduate school. My younger brother is a physician and my sister is a teacher with a Masters degree in education. I think our achievements were not just what my family valued but also had to do with the families we interacted with and the environment we grew up in – the people around in the neighborhood and the community. Growing up I looked at the continuum of my extended family upbringing and often reflected on how all of that has influenced my life.

My paternal grandparents were from Boston, MA but moved to Philadelphia, PA to improve their economic status. I remember hearing stories about how when the Irish people came to Boston, MA many of the jobs that Black people had were being given to the Irish. Black men started losing their jobs or finding it harder to find jobs, so my grandfather had to travel during the summer to Virginia and other places to find work. My mother was born in Bangor, Maine and was from a well-to-do family. My maternal grandfather was a very successful businessman and my grandmother was a seamstress and stay at home mother. They were a part of a small middle class community in Maine, made of about fifteen key families. My grandparents had ten children and all who lived through high school, finished high school. The four oldest played in a band together, performing regularly for a local theater. We spent a lot of time with family during the holidays and vacations. I was able to spend more time with my paternal grandparents when they moved closer to my family in the Bronx, then in Long Island. I would sit and listen to their stories about the past, the hard times and what they did to overcome them. They talked about and I saw how they worked together as a family to make things work

economically. I would travel with them on trips to Canada and on other weekend trips with their church. This is how Black people used to broaden our horizons, have a sense of accomplishment and learning even though we might not have had the money to fly here or there or go far away.

The history of my family had a great influence on the way I looked at things. My great aunt Jessie was a missionary in Liberia in the 1930s, 40s and 50s. She would write letters to my grandparents telling them about her work in Liberia as a missionary and they would read the letters to me. So I always knew about the existence of an African country and continent, and what my relatives were doing on the behalf of our race. My father, his father and my brother were boy scouts. I was also a girl scout, so I knew about being active in the community and in the church. The local churches were the hubs for many activities such as weddings, funerals, bus trips, fundraisers, dinners, fashion shows, and bible school and bible study. The NAACP and the boy scouts held meetings at the Episcopal Church. I became a member of NAACP when I was 16 years old.

My father faced discrimination not only as a student of the University of Pennsylvania in civil engineering but also in the workforce. When he got out it was hard for him to find a job and when he did find a job they wouldn't let him put his name on any of his engineering drawings. He decided to get out of the civil engineering field and joined the civil service with the NY State Employment Service. He did well but of course he wanted to move up in the department. When he went to apply for a job as assistant manager, he was denied. He applied a couple of times, and did well on the written exam but the managers would say that he failed the oral exam. After that he took some courses at New York University for public speaking and got A's. He went back to applied for the

job again and didn't get it - failing the oral part once again. After talking to some of his colleagues he found out that many of the Black workers had the same problem. They decided to start a group to fight discrimination within NY civil service and my father was the Vice President of the organization. They used to meet at our house, which is another way I learned first hand about discrimination and organizing against it. It was about 5-6 of them that were the pioneers of that organization which from my understanding is still in existence. Eventually they secured a lawyer from the NAACP Legal Defense Fund – Constance Baker Motley. They won the case. My father was under a lot of stress because of this pressure on the job and also because he worked at night, at home, as a cabinet maker to make ends meet for the family. He passed away in 1960, before they won the case.

When I was in elementary school, I couldn't help but notice that the schools in my neighborhood were predominately white. But when you go from elementary school to middle and high school there was a larger number of Blacks compared to whites. I might have had two or three Blacks in my class, sometimes one, in elementary school. I remember very clearly when we had international flag day, and I would see all these different countries' flags, there weren't any related to Africa. When I was reading books I didn't see Black images, I didn't see Black people. Nevertheless, eventually, I visited the Schomburg Library in Harlem, NY, which had a large African and African American collection. When the family would have social gatherings on the holidays, we would talk about racial issues. In high school I went to meetings, and affiliated with organizations that were doing things for the status and circumstances of Black people.

On the other hand, as I was listening to my grandparents and parents stories, I was seeing that we as Black people were making accomplishments, but I was seeing how hard they were working and what they were doing to make ends meet. I learned through other avenues of information – the library, books my parents/grandparents had, and I listened to a lot of oral history from other older people in the community. I knew that I had a great aunt that was a Missionary in Liberia, traveling and doing all these uplifting things for Black people. I saw married couples working together. I saw women in my family in the home, but I also saw them doing other things. For example, when my father passed away in 1960, my mom went to work as a paraprofessional at a school for the deaf until she was in her 70s. I saw the roll of the woman as strong, taking care of the family, being an aid to the husband – a partner. I wasn't thinking of barriers in terms of being a woman. Everyone works, thinks, shares and creates.

When I was in junior high I auditioned for a dance group at the Harlem YMCA down the street from the Schomburg Library. I auditioned and received a scholarship to study African dance. I went to Harlem on a regular basis, every week to my dance class. This led me to other cultural excursions, and cultural exposure to people who were in the arts. I made up my mind during that time that I was going to take in all of the African and African American arts that I could. From then on I knew I wanted to find out cultural and educational information and share it with other people – I wanted to teach it. I wanted to travel to other places where Black people were learning first hand and get our information (history) out. I was very aware of things being hard for Black people and being in an environment where there could be discrimination, racism, and prejudice.

College Life

While I was a student at Hunter College, I was very aware of things that were happening across the country – the Freedom Rides sit-ins and other demonstrations. A group of students affiliated with the Protestant Association at Hunter decided to take a bus to North Carolina where students in 1960 were getting together and forming SNCC. We met with students that were involved, some of the community leaders, leaders of CORE like Robert Williams and others. When we came back, there was a group called the Northern Student Movement that was formed to support the southern students. Students were participating in various activities in the city with many organizations. We concentrated on more of the activities on our campus to inform students about the sit-ins and the freedom rides. I deferred my graduation six months – graduating January '62 instead of Spring '61, because I became active and spent more time doing things on campus. I delayed my student teaching so that I could stay in school another semester.

My friend Peggy, a campus leader at Hunter, got involved with SNCC and moved to Albany, GA to work with the organization. I had another friend that had moved to Mexico for graduate school. She was an anthropologist and wanted me to come to Mexico to visit her summer of '62. Since I had graduated, I said, "Well I will go and visit them both." Peggy had gotten arrested sometime around June of '62, so I wanted to see how she was doing and check out what was going on in the struggle. I was part of a group that formed a NY SNCC support group, from '62-'63. I made contact with the SNCC office in Atlanta and was told that folks in Atlanta would take me to Albany. I was only going there for a week to see Peggy, and then going to Mexico. The day after I got to Albany I was asked to go out canvassing to register folks to vote. This was happening everyday – I was needed. I would go over to the Albany Movement headquarters where I

met Dr. King, Septima Clark and several other people involved in the movement. I went to visit Peggy but couldn't see her because she was in jail somewhere outside of Albany, GA. So everyday they would ask me to do something else and when I said I was thinking about leaving they asked me to stay another week. I ended up staying the whole summer and I didn't go to Mexico. After the summer, I returned to New York.

I taught 3rd grade for the entire school year '62-'63, When I got back to NY. I worked with the NY SNCC office and I was asked to do a fundraiser, by Charles Sherrod, for Albany, GA. I was able to get canned food, clothes, books and send them to Albany, GA. We also helped organize the March on Washington (MOW). I organized a big fundraising event where the keynote speaker was Bob Moses, who was the head of the SNCC voter registration movement in Mississippi. He asked me to come to Mississippi to teach and work with the adult literacy program - an exploratory program that developed programmed instruction materials to help people who couldn't read very well to be able to participate in the voting process. This program was a spin-off from SNCC's voter education initiatives. I didn't know how we were going to teach them how to prepare to register to vote or do other things they needed to know but I finally agreed to help and was on my way to Mississippi after the MOW in August of '63.

I was the first person recruited for the pilot program. The literacy program didn't start immediately because I had to recruit other staff. My initial job was to be a field secretary for SNCC. I was doing voter registration, going to the SNCC office called the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO), and recruitment for the literacy program. I was doing a number of jobs but when you are in the movement you do things that need to be done – it is not a 9-to-5 job. I was paid \$10 a week, but I had my savings from my

teaching job to help me and I helped others. Initially, we were housed with families in the area. I was shocked when I was in Jackson, MS because I only saw Black and white people in the streets, outside of the others working in the CRM. I didn't see what I was used to, which was diversity – Hispanic people, Indian people, Asian people, etc. That was quite different. I was only supposed to be in Mississippi for one year, but the need was so great for committed competent people that once I got back to NY I was recruited to work on something else and decided I was going to go back. That was the beginning of my becoming a citizen of Mississippi for nine years – working with SNCC and other groups on different projects.

The art educator Black female student activist. I had the opportunity to work with a group called Southern Media, Inc., which was a documentary film group started by two white guys from the West and East Coast. They traveled to Mississippi to make a film about the movement and to train local young people on how to document what was happening politically around them. I had an interest in photography and planned to continue working in the movement so I was asked to be apart of that group. I stayed with them until I left in 1972. I took thousands of photographs during that time. Many years later, as the Director of African American Student Services (AASS) at Georgia State University, I put together a documentary photographic exhibit for several years from the photographs I took during the CRM. I always believed very strongly about the power in having the images from the CRM, kept in the public eye and on the University walls. It is not just the written word in research that is important. The first exhibit that I put together was called “Women in Civil Rights.” I really was interested in depicting the variety of women participating in initiatives being undertaken during the CRM that complimented

the political aspect, such as the educational, the economic development and the healthcare initiatives.

While I was in Jackson, MS I taught a couple of courses in African and African American Art at Jackson State University. It had always been a side interest of mine that I was researching, collecting, and networking in. At that time hardly anyone in SNCC knew much about my interests, but art history was something that I did when I was home in NY – something that I supplemented my education with since junior high school. I knew a lot of artists, I knew a lot of cultural historians, I knew writers, and I used to frequent the theaters off and on Broadway, art galleries and museums, which prepared me to teach these courses in Mississippi. I was a co-founder – along with Gilbert Moses and John O’Neal – of the Free Southern Theater (FST), a community theater group dedicated to stimulating political, cultural, creative and reflective thought among Negroes in the south. Both men had interest in being in theater as a career. I had an interest in seeing that it was a reality b/c of the educational activist opportunities that it afforded Black people.

Many reporters, professors, and grad students come to Mississippi to find out first-hand information about the CRM and people working with the movement to write articles and books. I thought since I was providing so much information for others, I too should publish articles and books. While working with the Southern Media, I ran into one of the men, Bill Peltz, who was a co-founder of the media group. He was now a professor at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) in the anthropology department. Prior to seeing him I had decided that my time in Mississippi was coming to an end. I wanted to go back to graduate school in Anthropology. He and another professor from UIUC – who had a son that was active in the CRM, told me about their anthropology and

African America studies department as well as about scholarship opportunities. I applied to three schools and UIUC gave me the best deal and I liked the fact that it was a straight shot on the train from Jackson, MS. The train was how a number of Blacks from Mississippi migrated to the Chicago area. I eventually received my M.A. and Ph.D. My dissertation research was on the Gullah basket making community in Mount Pleasant, Charleston, SC and my research focused on African carry-overs in the New World in the Arts.

After I graduated, I thought about a being a fulltime professor but I wanted to be in a position where I wasn't just doing research and writing. I wanted to be a scholar-activist in higher education. The position that I recently retired from GSU was perfect because I combined both – faculty and administration. Shortly after I started that position, I found that I was too busy building the AASS and programs department to do both faculty and administration. As founding Director, I built it from the ground up to what it is today. I found that was what I was meant to do and stayed with it for twenty-two years, from 1990 - 2012.

A Continuation of Earlier Efforts

My activism continued after the CRM, not just from the work that I was doing in my career but through the lives that I touched daily in the community. I mentored both male and female students throughout my career. I have been an initiator, an advisor, an assistant, and a supporter for students who wanted to start student organizations. I would say that for the twenty-two years that I was there, we probably started maybe 60-70 organizations. I helped build and recruit student leaders. I have been the advisor for NAACP, National Council for Negro Women, Association for Women in Media, Black

Student Alliance, Minority Pre-med Association, African American Alumni Club, Minority Graduate Student Association, Model African Union, among others. I helped these organizations initiate, find funding and sustain their organizations over the years. If students needed work-study, I lobbied the university for work study slots and additional money to hire students for my office. I mentored some young staff members too.

My relationship with Black female student activists in the CRM was fine. I am a worker, so if they were working and if we had similar goals then we worked together. I didn't have a lot of problems because it was all about the work during the CRM. I was really flexible about what I would do within the CRM. I made some lasting friendships during the movement. Claudia Shropshire, head of the legal arm of the Mississippi CRM and Julia Prettyman, head of the NY SNCC office were close friends of mine and role models to me. Septima Clark also was a close friend of mine, while in Charleston, SC doing dissertation research – after working with SNCC, I stayed with her. We became good friends and she was in a way a mentor to me because I learned a lot about the movement and human relationships from her. I had a great deal of mature role models, influences and exposure before I started working in Mississippi, so I wasn't looking for anyone to tell me what to do. I have always had the mindset that I am going to initiate, I am going to see what needs to be done, figure it out and whoever's interested can help me make it happen.

I think that there are things going on now that are attacking different issues than we attacked during the CRM. Yet, there is a continuation of earlier efforts during the early CRM. For instance, there are still people working in Mississippi that were a part of SNCC in the 60s. They are continuing on with some of the same problems and some new

problems. SNCC people, all around the World, are still continuing on with some type of activist work. That is the older generation. Then you have some of their children who are continuing in their parent's footsteps. There are those of us who are in education that are influencing young people and exposing them to different issues. People who even though they weren't in the CRM, I mean as activists, got ideas from the CRM and decided to initiate and continue those initiatives and strategies in their own way.

I have always thought of the CRM in a very broad way. As mentioned before, I was involved with education and economic development, healthcare extension, head start programs, theatre, the arts, and the media. I see the expansion of those ideas and the continuation of fighting discrimination in many areas, which is part of the CRM as far as I am concerned. Fighting discrimination in employment still needs to be on our agenda. Fighting the problems that are occurring with young Black men being killed or imprisoned is still on our agenda. Prison reform was going on in Mississippi and other places during the CRM. We had much further to go back then, now we have the prison industrial complex that is growing. There were many that got arrested for participating CRM, some against the unjust racist laws of segregations, many who were wrongfully accused of crimes, and others who were in for things that they did. Fighting against those things, that was a part of the CRM. So it is hard to distinguish between then and now because there were so many things that were a part of the CRM. The CRM activists are still around influencing social justice issues. I think that the CRM was the push that got President Barack Obama elected. People stood up and fought against voter suppression this election year. That is a part of the CRM continuing into the contemporary movement.

There are young people emerging as leaders but there aren't the same blatant kinds of circumstances that people reacted against in the beginning of the CRM. We saw leaders emerge with the Trayvon Martin incident but we often don't see that publicity until it hits national news. Activism is happening in communities everyday. Things are shifting from quiet resistance and change to vocal and demonstrative activity in public places.. I do believe in the human reaction against oppression that is going to continue. There is a generational divide (not a complete divide but slight one) because the media has such a strong influence in capturing the minds of young people. There are the powers that be that filter the news to keep people from reacting. Young people are influenced by the digital age, which is kind of scary. The telephone and computer companies coming together and combining technologies, so the phones can see and hear and be all those things for you. I do understand that some new things have to happen – people with new strategies have to deal with new issues. But the old strategies are still being used because everyone isn't on the same level.

There are still people communicating with each other that have strong human values. Young people will learn they have to look at what was needed and accomplished in the past and how those things relate to what is done now. So it is a continual learning dialogue between the young and the old. As the young people get older and they see discriminatory practices occurring, they've got to react. Some will react faster than others.

Even after retiring I am still working, continuing to do what I have been doing. I have been married for seventeen years and my husband is very supportive in every thing I do. He has been a very strong influence on my being able to continue all the things I want to do because he is my partner and we facilitate things for each other. I haven't really

changed; I always have things on my mind. I still help young scholars and artists with different projects. I am working on publishing books of my photographs and about my experiences in the CRM. I have completed two published articles. I have plenty of things to do. The struggle against discrimination, inequalities, inclusion, and equal opportunities continues.

Mrs. Annette Jones-White

The Early Years

My name is Annette and I am a retired educator/administrator. I received my Bachelor of Arts degree in English from Spelman College with a minor in Drama in '64 and my Master of Education degree from Virginia State University in '80. I attended Albany State College (ASC) from '58-'61 majoring in English with minors in Speech and Drama, French and Education. I was expelled from ASC in 1961 for participating in the Albany Civil Rights Movement (ACRM). I was five months from graduating. In 2010, ASU invited all of us who had been expelled or suspended during the ACRM to participate in a series of events throughout the year at ASC in our honor. In 2011, ASC gave us all honorary degrees from the University. During the 60s I was an active member of SNCC and participated in the Albany Movement from 1961 through 1963. At that time, my activism was centered around voter registration and direct action (sit-ins, protest marches) against segregation and discrimination. I identified as a Black female student activist and will always identify as an activist. In later years my activism centered around education – creating multicultural curricula and disseminating information about the civil rights movement in Albany and in general through workshops, speeches, teach-ins,

interviews, written articles and as a contributor to the history book *Hands on the Freedom Plow: Personal Accounts by Women in SNCC (2011)*.

I was born in Albany, GA. I grew up in a house that included my parents, maternal grandparents and my maternal great-grandfather, who was a railroad porter and the owner of a grocery store. He also owned the house we lived in. I learned at a young age the importance of hard work. My father was a carpenter and my mother did laundry for doctors and other white families. We were poor but we all worked together and pooled our resources to take care of expenses. I was the oldest child and it was a long time before I had anyone to play with, so I talked with adults and listened to their conversations. My mother and father didn't try to hide a whole lot of things from me. I knew there were white people and I knew there were Black people but I didn't know what the difference was. The white insurance man came to the door to collect and the white ladies would come to the door to pick up their laundry. The ladies would have their daughters with them, and they would stand in front of them, hiding them. They didn't want them to touch me. We would be smiling at one another b/c we were children, but the ladies would be pulling the child/children away from me.

I grew up in the church, First Mount Olive Baptist Church. In those days children were reared by the community. The church and the community had a lot of influence on me because they cared about me and they looked out for me. I realized that everybody in my neighborhood lived the same way. I didn't know people lived any way different than we did. I remember my mom used to fix my hair in curls like the little actress, Shirley Temple. I would help my mom around the house, and outside on washdays, I put wood under the wash pot to keep the fire going. I would get satisfaction in thinking, "I bet

Shirley Temple is helping her mother." Everything I would do I would think, "I bet Shirley Temple is doing the same thing" and I had no idea that wasn't the case for people outside the Black community or poor community.

One of my earliest memories about race was when I showed my grandmother a card I received in Sunday School where Jesus was pictured with children and all of them were white. I asked her "why can't we be with Jesus?" She told me "that card is wrong, Jesus doesn't care what color the little children are...someone else made this card and they care...they want you to think that Black people can't be with Jesus." She told me the Bible story of Solomon in the Bible who said, "I am Black and I am comely." She showed me her Bible, which had all these Black people in it. I knew of the story of Solomon being the wisest king, but her telling me his story and showing me the pictures made me feel really good knowing Solomon was wise and Black like me.

The first time I witnessed and was the subject of a discriminatory experience was when I was four years old and my mother took me downtown, for the first time, to get new shoes. I had never been that far outside of my neighborhood. We were going to Belk Smith and we had to go to Kress Dime store to get hair pens. We went into Kress and I stared at all of the merchandise and the bright lights – I'd never seen anything like it before – while my mother got the hair pens. Blacks had to wait to be waited on even if they were first in line, but we weren't there first. A Black man was there first, and he was trying to put a bicycle on lay-away for his son for Christmas.

The clerk looked to be about 18 and, as we said at our house back then, was whacking on chewing gum. She had the reddest lips I had ever seen. She was about to get the lay-away papers ready when the man handed her a \$50 bill, and she said, "Wait just a

minute.” She left and came back with two policemen and said, “This here boy tried to put a bicycle on layaway with a \$50 bill.” The policemen said, “Where did you get that \$50 from boy, did you steal it?” I mean it was terrible and even I knew, I was four, I knew something wasn’t right. The man said. “Naw Sir, I never stole nothing in my life, I worked for this. My boss man paid me with a \$50 bill.” “Who is your boss man?” the policemen asked. They questioned him and then called his boss man who verified that he had paid the man with a \$50 bill. When he hung up, the policeman said “Alright you can put it on layaway.” I was just standing there and my mother’s lips were tight, and I knew when her lips got tight that something was wrong.

Although I might not have known what was wrong, I knew something was wrong and that I was not supposed to react in certain ways - if something was wrong you didn’t laugh, carry on or act inappropriately. SO we were just standing there looking at the man who still had the \$50 bill in his hand. He looked at it, put it back in his wallet and left the store. I was four years old but I was so glad...oh I was glad that he left without putting the bicycle on layaway. That was the first discriminatory act that I witnessed. Then my mother paid for her hair pens and we left, heading for Belk-Smith. I was walking with her, looking...and I said to myself, “Well I don’t know what was wrong but something is wrong.”

When we got to Belk’s, I was overwhelmed by the beautiful clothes and jewelry and by the smell of perfume. I was actually going to try on shoes, and I was excited. Before that day, my mother had always measured my dress length and traced my feet on paper and she would shop without me. There were no bathrooms in the department stores for Black people to use, and since I probably would have had to go, my mother shopped

without me. But when I turned four, she decided to take me with her. She had made me go to the bathroom I don't know how many times. I couldn't have anything to drink but when we left for downtown, she had given me a little piece of ice to suck on so my mouth wouldn't be dry. We went in Belk's and I was looking around, I looked at the shoes and I saw a long row of seats on the carpet, but everybody sitting there was white. Some had packages in the chairs. My mother didn't try to go over there and sit, she just looked for the shoes. We found the shoes I liked, a pair of Black Mary Janes. The clerk came over and said, "Can I help you, girl?" I answered because she said girl, I thought she was talking to me. I said, "I want to get new shoes." Then, looking at my mother, she said, "I said can I help you, girl." Then my mother answered, and I wondered why she was calling Mother a girl.

We showed the clerk the shoes we wanted, and she went and got them and brought them back. She didn't help Mother, I had been watching how she would sit on a stool and take off the other people's shoes and how she used what we called a slipper spoon (shoe horn) to put on their shoes. She would help *them* but she just shoved the shoes at Mother. So Mother knelt with difficulty because she was pregnant, although I didn't know it at the time. I just thought she was kind of fat. She told me to hold her shoulder, and I held her shoulder while she took off my sandals. She had made me wear socks with my sandals and I didn't want to wear socks and I had said "I don't ever wear socks with my sandals." She told me that she had to make sure the shoes fit... she made up some thing.

The truth was that the shoe stores didn't want Black people to try on shoes anyway, but they allowed it if Blacks had on socks or stockings. But I noticed that many

of the white women didn't have on socks or stockings when they tried on shoes. We got the shoes and we had to stand in line even though Mother was there first. We had to wait 'til all the white people were waited on. Then I had to go to the bathroom and Mother asked the clerk nicely. "Can my little girl use the restroom? I don't think she can hold it." I remember the clerk saying, "Well, she is going to have to hold it b/c the restroom is for Whites only. SO my mother grabbed my hand and tried to run me to...the Broad Avenue arcade where there were two Black pressing clubs (dry cleaners). I don't know how the Black dry cleaners came to be downtown but they were there and Black people could go there to use the restrooms.

Mother tried to get me there, but I didn't make it. All the white people near me were laughing and children were pointing at me as urine ran down my legs. I didn't understand how grown ups could act that way b/c where I lived grown ups didn't do that. They were the people who helped you when you needed help. They were the people you looked up to. The white people laughing at me were adults and I thought anybody who was an adult or grown would know how to treat children. I had never been treated that way before - laughed at or pointed at. I was devastated. So we went home and that was my first personal discriminatory experience.

I tell people that I was born into a totally segregated city, so I didn't have to join the movement or become involved in the movement. I was born into it. What I did was to become an activist based on feelings and incidents that I experienced. You can not be born into a totally segregated city and not be involved because the only time you feel a little bit safe was when you were at home in your community. There were other events that happened during my childhood that brought me to full awareness of my race, class

and gender. As I got older the things that happened to me were more severe, and I was old enough to see that those things were racially discriminatory. All my life my family had told me stories about their lives and hardships and they all ended with me being told that I had to get a good education and I had to make things better for the next generation.

I remember my mother teaching me how to behave downtown so that I could defy the segregation laws without getting into trouble. She had to teach me survival skills for downtown, things like don't talk to anybody, don't bump into people, don't take clothes to dressing rooms without telling the salesclerk, don't sit on the plush chairs in the customer seating areas and don't bother the mints and nuts set out in those areas. She taught me how to avoid white people who expected Black people to step off the sidewalk and let them pass. Black people were supposed to step off of the sidewalk downtown if there were white people walking towards them. She told me, "if you meet a group of Whites walking towards you on the sidewalk, casually walk over to a store window before they get anywhere near you and window shop until they pass by and that way you won't have a confrontation."

One day when I was in junior high school and allowed to shop downtown alone, I had a confrontation with a group of white kids. I had just bought a skirt and blouse. As I was walking down the street thinking about what belt I would wear with the outfit, I was looking down and didn't notice a group of white kids coming towards me. I didn't have time to *casually* walk to a store to window shop. "Well, this is it." I said to my self, *I am not going anywhere*. The largest of the three looked like a football player from Albany High School, the all white high school. I weighed about 98 pounds. As I walked by he bent his elbow and rammed my arm with it – a maneuver in football called "throwing the

bone.” The blow lifted me up off the sidewalk, but I didn’t fall. He kept walking and so did I. I had bruises on my arm for days just because I didn’t get off the sidewalk to let them pass. I was a proud little girl and I don’t know where I get that from but it was just always in me.

I had asked myself ever since I was a small child, “how was I supposed to make things better?” In junior high I knew that I had to do more figuring out of how I could change things. I started to rebel downtown by drinking from the White Only water fountains. Also by then, I had seen and understood the reasons why my family talked to me about changing things. I had been subjected to prejudice as a child, but I didn’t understand it then. In junior high, I understood, I knew there had to be changes, but I still had no idea what I could do to change things. I felt good about the rebelling that I was doing. I felt that I finally was beginning to do something that would change things for the better. Any feelings of anger or humiliation that being discriminated against caused had long since been pushed back into my subconscious so that I only had feelings about doing what needed to be done.

College Life

By the time I got to high school I started to see what was going on nationally through television. We were the only Black family in that area at that time with a TV. I got to see what was going on in Birmingham, Alabama. I saw Rosa Parks’ act of defiance and I was looking at people marching after her arrest. My family had told me all my life that I had to do something to make things different. So I got a chance to see people taking control of their lives. I saw Black people doing something to help themselves and the next generation; they were refusing to ride segregated buses and were walking and

forming carpools – “if we can’t ride in the front of the bus, then we won’t ride at all” – until finally, after a year or more, the city desegregated the buses. At last I had seen how an individual and groups of individuals could affect change.

By the time I graduated from high school I had started working for Attorney C.B. King, who years later would become a well-known civil rights attorney. I was not able to attend college due to financial reasons. I had partial scholarships from Spelman, Paine and Bennett colleges, but my father couldn’t match them. I had received business and secretarial training through a program in high school, so King hired me as his secretary. After a month, he told me that he thought I had more in me than being a secretary and suggested to me and my father that I look into going to Albany State College (ASC). My father told King that he would go from door to door and see if he could drum up enough business building cabinets, bars and other items so that he could make enough tuition money for me to go to ASC for a year. And he did.

When I got to ASC I had anxieties – whether or not I had the right wardrobe and whether or not all of the kids were going to be smarter than I was. I knew I had to find a way to stay in school. I met Barbara Sanchious, who was Miss ASC, and she became my role model and took me under her wing. I found out that if you were Miss ASC, then you would get a scholarship for the year that you reign as Miss ASC and you get a graduate fellowship when you graduate. I said, “Oh, wow, that is it,” and my whole goal from then on was to get those scholarships. But something happened to me on the way to reaching that goal.

The rebel Black female student activist. In the fall of '59, two friends and I left the campus to get lunch at the Artic Bear, a drive in burger and shakes place. Black and

White customers ordered from windows. There were benches and tables outside for White only – there was no sign but it was understood. Black people would eat in their cars in the parking lot or take their food with them. So this particular day we ordered at the window, nobody was around. I don't know if they had a White window and a Black window because we always would order from the same window and usually no White people were around. We ordered, got our food and the other two headed for the car. I said, "I don't want to sit in the car. Either we have to sit out here in the car and eat or drive and eat. You can't manage your shake – there's no place to set it." Cup holders in cars hadn't been invented then. One friend said, "What do you want to do?" I said, "I want to sit on the bench over there." She said, "You know we can't sit there." "I don't know that," I said. "I don't see any signs that say we can't."

So I walked over there. They were reluctant but they followed me. We sat down and started to eat. The manager, a young White man in his 30's, looked out of the big glass windows and saw us. He was more curious than anything else b/c I don't think any Black customers had ever sat on the benches before. A black limousine came down the street, turned at the corner and kept going. Then it came back around and pulled up to the restaurant. The chauffeur got out and went to talk to the manager who left the building and went to talk to someone in the limousine. Then the limousine left. The manager didn't come directly to us; he went back into the building and waited about two minutes. Then he came and told us "I'm sorry but y'all gonna have to leave. I appreciate your business but we don't get enough business from ya'll to upset our regular customers." I looked at him and said, "Okay." My friends started gathering up their stuff. I said, "Where y'all going?" They said, "Well, you heard what he said." I said, "Yeah I heard him but I'm not

going anywhere until I finish eating.” We sat there and we finished eating. The manager looked out at us, but he didn’t say a word, he didn’t call the police, he didn’t do anything.

When we finished, we cleaned our places and left. There were no sit-ins (nationwide) then: the sit-ins didn’t happen until the '60s. I had never heard of a sit-in. This was just something that came to me because I didn’t want to eat in the car or eat while riding. I was going to sit down like a human being and eat. I felt good about it. I didn’t know why at first. Then I realized I had broken a segregation law and gotten away with it. We went back to ASC and I told a couple of people and they looked at me like I was crazy. I don’t know whether it was because I did what I did or because I was telling them and being happy about it or whether they thought I should have been afraid. Being afraid? I thought nothing of it. At the time I think I was a sophomore in college and a member of the NAACP Youth Council. That was my first really important overt action. Drinking out of a White Only water fountain, that was something but this was even bigger intentional act of defiance!

Then Julian Bond, a student leader in the Atlanta Student Movement, wrote the president of Student Government at ASC asking for support of the Southern Student Movement from all the SGA’s at HBCUs. Our president and vice president of ASU student government went up to ATL and met with Julian Bond, John Lewis and Jessie Jackson and all the other Student Government presidents. I didn’t attend that meeting. I was excited about ASC getting more involved. By then I felt good, like I was really a part of ASC. I was very active on campus. I was considered to be a student leader, voted into many positions: Miss Alpha, Miss Drama, Miss Charm, Miss ASC, President of Women's League, Basileus of Gamma Sigma chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority,

International Club, Who's Who. ASC President Dennis said no we couldn't support the Student Movement, but we did anyway. We started by writing letters of protest to President Dennis, setting up student meetings and protests on campus against suppressive policies, unsanitary conditions and inadequate security. We were just doing things that needed to be done. We were trying to change bad policies on campus.

The movement started on campus and it spread out to the city when SNCC-Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee-came to Albany, to ASC campus and to Monroe High School's campus recruiting students to work in voter registration drives and to employ direct action to removing segregation and discrimination. The college administrators didn't want anyone to be involved. I didn't hide my involvement, which is one of the reasons why I was later expelled from ASC.

I initially got involved with all of the campus activism because I felt an obligation to the students who had voted me into all of my leadership positions. I lived off campus and went home everyday after classes – so the conditions on campus did not affect me directly, but I felt I owed it to the students to try to change those conditions. However, for a short time, I did live on campus and saw, firsthand, some of the things the students were going through. At the time I was pledging a sorority and had to live on campus for a week. We had incidences that occurred on campus where white kids would come through the middle of campus shooting. They would throw rotten eggs on girls going to church. They would throw balloons filled with urine, bags of ice. They burned a cross on campus. A white man tried to drag me off the bridge down by the river, threatening me and saying what he was going to do to me. He offered to give me five dollars and when I didn't oblige he threw his whisky bottle at me. The police was right there and wouldn't do

anything.

A white man came on campus drunk, entered the dorm where I was staying and was discovered staggering near our showers because there were no locks on the girls' dorm. So we (SGA) started planning protests. The Dean of Students at the time was Irene Asbury (Wright). She had just become Dean and was trying to make positive changes and trying to empower students. She told us what SGA was supposed to be like and what rights we had. Before she came, the College would collect activities fees but provide no activities, provide inadequate security and do many other questionable things. All kinds of students' rights violations were going on and we weren't aware of them until Dean Asbury informed us of them. So we started protesting, writing letters, and creating a disturbance. The President of ASC said he was not supporting the Southern Student Movement or anything else we were involved in. Then he disbanded the SGA and put a padlock on the door, but it didn't stop what we were doing. We continued to protest.

When SNCC first came to town they came to ASC and asked for Bernice Johnson (Reagon) and me because C.B. King's brother, Slater, and some other people had told SNCC organizers that we would be good people to get in touch with who would be receptive to their ideals. We liked more of what SNCC was saying than the NAACP. NAACP believed you go to jail, make a case and then get out of jail and go through the courts. SNCC believed in jail-no-bail so that you get a lot more attention to the cause you are supporting. So Bernice and I left the NAACP and worked with SNCC. The Albany Movement was organized on November 17, 1961 when leaders of organizations in the Black community decided to unite, elect officers and work under the name "Albany Movement." There had been other groups in Albany, like the Criterion Club, the Lincoln

Heights Improvement Association - where Black men over the years had tried to desegregate public facilities. They had gone to the city commission and submitted grievances but nothing was ever done. So in 1961, these were the same adults and organizations that formed the core of the AM - The Criterion Club, Federated Women's Club, Masons, SNCC, the Baptist Ministers' Alliance and SCLC. The first mass March occurred on November 27 when hundreds of ASC students and some high school and junior high school students marched to City Hall (nobody was arrested) to protest the trial of five students arrested on November 22 at the Trailways Bus station. NAACP Youth Council members Evelyn Toney, James Wilson and Julian Carswell were arrested and bailed out a few hours later by the NAACP. Blanton Hall and Bertha Gober, SNCC workers, were arrested, refused bail and remained in jail through the Thanksgiving holiday.

I remember protesting at the Fort Valley vs. ASC Thanksgiving game. A large group of us wore black instead of ASC's colors of blue and gold because we were in mourning for Blanton Hall and Bertha Gober who had been arrested for trying to buy tickets on the White Only side of the Trailways Bus Station and were suspended by ASC while still in jail. At the game we sang freedom songs instead of cheers as we sat right behind the President of ASC who was very angry with me, and the President of FVSC. I had just been crowned Miss ASC on November 2, 1961 and not a month later in December of '61, I was expelled.

My whole family supported me in my activism, although my grandmother was afraid that the house would be bombed. My father worked at the Marine base and although he had some worries like when SNCC had a non-violent workshop at my house,

he just was not at home during the workshop. That way he could say he didn't know anything about it and it wouldn't be a lie. My family allowed me to collect food from the community and cook it at our house for 14 SNCC students who came to our house everyday for breakfast and dinner during the summer. Not all of my friends worked with the movement. Some were afraid. However I worked with a lot of other Black female student activist. We fostered life long friendships. I think the Black woman has always been free inside, because she had to be. I remember someone calling the Black woman *the mule of the world*. That was true for the movement. When I looked throughout the movement, I saw Black women, Black girls working. It wasn't unusual for me to see Black women stepping forward working in their communities.

When I was expelled I didn't know what I was going to do or how I was going to finish school. I had lost my Miss ASC scholarship and had to pay back the money. I lost fellowships from North Carolina College and three other universities. During this same time Dean Asbury resigned from ASC because of the way ASC had treated the students. She called a group of us to her house one day and told us that she had been in contact with the Atlanta University Center and that all suspended or expelled students who had the grade point average could transfer to one of the schools there. Some chose other schools in the Center; Bernice, Janie Culbreth and I chose Spelman College. Spelman professor Howard Zinn, historian and activist, secured funding for all of the students' tuition. He became a mentor and friend. When Spelman erred in judgment and fired him, we wrote letters of protest.

While I was at Spelman my activism continued with the student movement in the center. We marched and protest in the city and held meetings on campus. I took a

semester off and I went back to Albany to take the place of my ailing grandmother who ran a daycare center. She was a teacher and the cook but I just became a teacher. I became interested in working with young children when I saw how open their minds were, and how, using the appropriate methods, you could teach them almost any subject. Then a woman from the state came out to the center; she said that she was impressed with me, which made me think maybe I did have something I could do to help change things.. I finished Spelman in '64 and soon after, I married Frank White. A former high school teacher, he worked for IBM and later was an IBM faculty loan participant at Virginia State. I decided to go to the grad school of education there and to work in early childhood education for the rest of my career. The curriculum that I used in my classroom was an African and African American centered curriculum. There was no Black History Month in my class; we had African American history daily as well as multicultural history. I often see parents of my former students (who are adults now) in the grocery store, and they are still thanking me for teaching our history as well as tolerance for other cultures to their children.

Uninformed Generation

I remember when I participated in the 1987 march in Cumming, GA – Forsyth County Civil Rights March – with Hosea Williams and thousands of others. While we went marching through the county an onlooker threw a rock. Normally during marches there is not supposed to be a lot of space between the marchers. You have to keep up because whenever there's a space in between, it gives some crazy person the opportunity to run in and do something to you. That's what happened! Someone threw a rock and the man who was hit had to have brain surgery. Some of the Morehouse men were yelling

back at J. B. Stoner and his group. You don't do that. You keep quiet. You're there marching for a reason. The young Morehouse men had no idea what could have happened to them.

First of all, it was the first time I had ever been protected by the law. The National Guard was there. Without those National Guardsmen, the students who were yelling back probably would've been attacked or killed or responsible for somebody else being attacked or killed. Because they were young brothers, they didn't know any better. They didn't come to the march informed. Even if they were informed, they didn't believe what could happen because they had never experience it before. Some young people don't believe the things that can and do happen now. Just like with the Voting Rights Act in place, some don't believe that voter suppression still takes place, but it does. It's mind-blowing, some of the stuff they don't believe. Anyway, during the march in Cumming, the students kept saying what they would have done in the old days.. I said, "No, you wouldn't have done that, because you would've been reared the same way we were, to survive."

I think a part of the problem with this generation is that we (my generation) didn't do our duty and follow through with information about the struggles of Black people. I tried to teach my children our history, but some people didn't even tell their children about the movement. I feel like you have to know where you've been before you can figure out where you need to go. I couldn't believe that there were people here in Atlanta in the sixties who had never heard of Martin Luther King, but there were. I'm not saying all of them, but some young people – a great deal of them – know every song out, they can text, they can handle complex technology but they have no idea about their history,

how they got where they are, who sacrificed, and who died. I was disappointed in the behavior of some of our students when I was invited to speak in schools during Black History month - well one school in particular. All the Hispanic children were listening but some of the Black children went to sleep and laughed at the freedom songs.

I was disappointed that many seemed to be uninterested in hearing about the civil rights movement. My daughters and other young relatives liked to hear about it, but then they grew up hearing about it from an early age for most of their lives. I feel there's a disconnection between some young people and the movement because nobody has filled in the gap between the generations. I don't feel there has been any stress on the importance of the continuation of the struggle for civil and human rights. I do think there are some young people doing great activist work now. A lot is happening on the Internet. I think the Internet is convenient in some ways but in other ways it's not. I am old fashion – a dinosaur – so close contact and touch means more to me – the look in a person's eyes can convey more than an email. But if we had been fortunate enough to have the technical luxuries that this generation has now – computers, cell phones, etc. – there wouldn't have been a need for much of the time consuming paperwork that went into organizing communities and meetings and planning protests. Most of us didn't even have cameras. I have been asked for pictures of protest marches or picketing and I respond by saying, "I wasn't even thinking about taking pictures...this was about me trying to make my life right or better." I didn't think about making a pictorial record of events. I didn't think anyone would have cared.

Chapter Five

“The connections between and among women are the most feared, the most problematic, and the most potentially transforming force on the planet.” Adrienne Rich

Interpretation of the Narratives

The narratives presented in the previous chapter offer a broad overview of the participants’ lives as Black female student activists. This chapter begins with a brief explanation of how I use Labov’s (1972) structured narrative analysis. Then, I will present my interpretation of the data using Collin’s (2000) Black feminist epistemology. Finally, I offer a broad discussion of the findings.

Structured Narrative Analysis

As stated in chapter two, I use Labov’s (1972) model of structure narrative analysis to code and organize each participant’s oral personal experience narrative. In understanding that stories convey meaning in sequences and structural forms, using a Labovian approach allows me to use the series of events within the participants lives to construct narrative from text (Labov, 1972). With each narrative I focused on key factors that drove/drive their activism, ways in which they developed a sense of self and community, and their perspectives on how they characterize one another’s generation. I used six categories (Table 2) from the model, which address specific questions about the structure of the narratives (Labov, 1972). This allowed me to carefully examine the narratives to identify the key components of these stories. Particularly, I organized the narratives with the components of a well-formed narrative: abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, resolution, and coda (Labov, 1972). Using this model not only allows for the researcher to identify important stories within the narratives but it also

reveals a specific structure of individual narratives that allows for comparison (Patterson, 2008).

Black feminist epistemology

After using Labov's structured narrative analysis to code and organize the narratives, I use Black feminist epistemology as a methodological tool to analyze and interpret the narratives. Previously in chapter two, I discuss my purpose for using Black feminist epistemology as my theoretical framework. In this chapter I will further dissect the narratives using the four dimensions of Black feminist epistemology – lived experiences as criterion of meaning, the use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims, the ethics of caring, and the ethic of personal accountability. Collins (2000) reminds us

U.S. Black feminist thought as specialized thought reflects the distinctive themes of African American women's experiences. Black feminist thought's core themes of work, family, sexual politics, motherhood, and political activism rely on paradigms that emphasize the importance of intersecting oppressions in sharing the U.S. matrix of domination. (p. 251)

These four dimensions offer a set of standards that recognize the connection between experience and consciousness that shapes the everyday lives of Black women and often pervades the works of Black women activists and scholars (Collins, 2000). These standards also offer a link to understanding how women develop ways of knowing about self and community through activism and education¹⁸.

Lived experience as criterion of meaning. Erika, Jayanni, Doris and Annette talked about their knowledge as activists and how their knowledge plus experiences made

¹⁸ I have underlined the research questions in this chapter to indicate where the answers to the question can be found.

them better scholar-activists. “Lived experience as criterion of meaning” is an understanding of the “distinction between knowledge and wisdom and the use of experience as the cutting edge dividing the two” (Collins, 2000, p. 257). Black women have found that wisdom has been essential for their survival because of their intersecting oppressions. Erika talked about her yearning to get more involved and learning about Prop 8 and the Matthew Sheppard Act during high school. By the time she got to college she was equipped with enough knowledge and experience to start an organization and lead other queer students.

Jayanni spoke a lot about her experiences with racism and diversity issues within her institution. After experiencing the hurtful and uncomfortable diversity training incident, she armed herself with knowledge about race, gender, and sexual orientation inequalities to be able to intellectually fight back in those ignorant moments. “Knowledge without wisdom is adequate for the powerful, but wisdom is essential to the survival of the subordinate” (Collins, 2000, p. 257). In retrospect, these women realized that knowledge was good but not enough to sustain their activism. The experiences that Doris had in Mississippi ultimately prepared her for graduate school and her career in higher education. Similarly, Annette’s knowledge and experience she gained during her time in SNCC laid the foundation for her African history centered teaching philosophy. For most African American women, more credibility is given to those who have lived through experiences they claim to be experts about than those who have just read about those experiences (Collins, 2000).

Some of the participants in my study were unsure that their experiences as student activists would be sufficient enough and even considered “activism.” Understanding this

concept of “lived experiences as a criterion of meaning” allowed me to validate my participants’ stories to ensure them that their experiences were credible. Not only were they credible because they lived them, their experiences are important as Black women continue to make knowledge claims in academia.

The use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims. It is rare for Black women to work through issues of understanding self and community in isolation. New knowledge claims are usually developed through dialogues with other members of a community (Collins, 2000). All four women in my study talked about their relationships with other Black female student activists and how those relationships helped in their personal development. Erika talked extensively about her relationship with the members of BlackOut and ETHOS; and how her connection and conversations with these Black women were vital for her survival at a predominately white institution. Jayanni’s interaction with the other participants on the reenactment of the Freedom Rides was a wonderful experience – talking with people from many walks of life. Doris and Annette both said their family, church and community had a big “influence in their lives.”

Erika, Jayanni, Doris, and Annette talked about the importance of “community,” “interpersonal relationships” and “face-to-face interaction” in organizing a movement. They all emphasized the need for connection and communication among the two generations. “African American women may find it easier than others to recognize connectedness as a primary way of knowing, simply because they have more opportunities to do so and must rely upon it more heavily than others” (Collins, 2000, p. 260). Erika, Doris and Annette mentioned their relationships with other Black female student activists and how that sense of connectedness empowered them.

In affirmation of what Collins and others have said about Black women, the participants of this study were eager to share their stories and consequently, engaged in “interactive interviewing” to co-construct knowledge in the interviewing process (Ellis, Kiesinger, and Tilmann-Healy, 1997). Interactive interviewing is a unique process where the interviewee and researcher develop an “intimate and trusting” relationship with one another (pg. 122). Both participate in sharing life experiences throughout the interview rather than just the interviewee sharing. I felt it necessary to engage in this type of interviewing technique in order to produce authentic stories for this study.

The ethic of care. The ethic of care is a familiar theory within feminist research (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1999; Collins, 2000). Collins’ (2000) take on the concept of ethic of caring suggests that “personal expressiveness, emotions, and empathy are central to the knowledge validation process” (p. 263). The emphasis placed on “individual uniqueness,” which is influenced by the value placed on “personal expressiveness” is common among Black women and the African American community. Erika explained in her narrative that although she felt like she had to prove her Blackness and tried hard not to be a “typical Black girl,” she kind of liked that she wasn’t “stereotypical.” Jayanni walked to her own beat too by avoiding falling into girl gangs during middle and high school.

The second component of ethic of caring is the appropriateness of emotions. Emotions can signify an activists’ belief and feelings towards a cause or subject and the validity of their argument (Collins, 2000). Erika, Jayanni, Doris and Annette were visibly emotional when talking about their experiences. During certain moments of their interview the cadence of their speech changed, their voice cracked and one even cried.

Jayanni said, “Sometimes I don’t share my experiences because I get emotional.” Doris “always believed very strongly about the power in having the images from the CRM” to show in her art exhibits at her University. The Free Southern Theater was a way for Doris to stimulate emotion and creative and reflective thought between herself and community.

The third component of ethic of caring is the capacity for empathy. Erika, Jayanni, Doris and Annette got involved with their activism because of their empathy with the population with whom they work. Erika understood that some Black queer girls were “uncomfortable with being out” and the difficulty with “being gay in the Black community.” Annette also empathized with the students at ASC. She stated, although the “conditions on campus didn’t affect me directly, I felt I owed it to the students to try to change the conditions on campus.”

Erika, Jayanni, Doris and Annette all showed honest emotions when talking about their experiences with racism, sexism, classism, etc. I witnessed and experienced myself a range of emotions – anger, sadness, disbelief, laughter, and even indifference – as we talked through those moments of dissonance. As one of my participants cried I couldn’t help but to cry along with her, feeling empathy because I too had gone through a similar experience. The sharing of our stories with one another was painful at times but also therapeutic.

The ethic of personal accountability. Personal accountability refers to the expectation of Black women to be accountable for their knowledge claims – which causes an individual’s character, values and ethics to be evaluated – because all views expressed are believed to come from an individual’s core set of beliefs (Collins, 2000). Jayanni’s example of “slack-tivism” is an instance of lack of personal accountability

among some young people using the Internet for social activism. She makes an effort to inform herself about particular social issues before rallying behind that cause and to assure the cause aligns with her personal belief system. She received lots of support from the community during the months leading up to Troy Davis execution because of her passion for human rights, stance on the death penalty and knowledge about the case.

Collins (2000) suggest, “Knowledge claims made by individuals respected for their moral and ethical connections to their ideas will carry more weight than those offered by less respected figures” (p. 265). For instance, Erika, Jayanni, Doris and Annette are seen as leaders by their classmates, peer activists and college administrators. They connect with their communities because of their core belief system was similar to that of the community with whom they are working. The work that they do, the things that they say and the ideas they have for their communities are connected to their morals. They all expressed the caution they take in order not to exploit the population with whom they work.

When Annette chose to sit and eat her food at the Artic Bear her friends followed and supported her in her act of defiance. “Although her friends were reluctant,” Annette’s tenacity and authenticity was evident so her friends “followed her lead.” Doris was invited by Bob Moses to head a new adult literacy program in Mississippi. This invitation was extended to her based on her work organizing a fundraising event where Moses was the keynote speaker. It was not only her educational background and work ethic that got her noticed by Moses but also her experience within the movement and personal and moral connections to her activism lead him to trust her with organizing this new project.

Rethinking Black Female Student Activism

Limiting definitions of what counts as activism has caused many activities that Black female students are involved in to be misunderstood by higher education institutions. However, Black women's studies scholarship has offered new and different understandings of how Black women face injustices and resists multifaceted oppressions (Collins, 2000). Black women's activism reflects how political and social consciousness can emerge within everyday resistance. The narratives of Erika, Jayanni, Doris and Annette express the power in Black female student activism. Collins (2000) suggests Black women's activism occurs in two dimensions:

- 1.) Struggles for group survival, consist of actions taken to create Black female spheres of influence within existing social structures. This dimension may not directly challenge oppressive structures because confrontation is neither preferred nor possible (p. 204).
- 2.) Struggles for institutional transformation – namely, those efforts to change discriminatory policies and procedures of government, schools, the workplace, the media, stores, and other social institutions (p. 204).

According to Collins' definition, Erika, Jayanni, Doris and Annette's participation in SNCC and other campus activities exemplify both dimensions of Black women's activism – which inherently includes Black female student activism. Their stories offer examples of how they survive experiences of intersecting oppressions and how they develop ways of knowing self and community through their activism. "Self-definition, self-valuation, and movement toward self-reliance" has informed their worldview (p. 201).

Hidden within the white-male controlled academic setting, the experiences of Black female students are often ignored or lumped together with other students of color. Moreover, many institutions often make the mistake of offering a generic support system or promoting a concept of a common culture for all students of color – assuming that all students of color have the same struggles with resistance and survival (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2001). For Erika, Jayanni, Doris and Annette, survival is a form of resistance. The struggle that they endure by providing a safe and empowering space for themselves and others at their institutions and within their communities is the nucleus of Black women's activism. Collins (2000) posits, without an understanding of survival as a form of resistance,

(s)truggles to transform U.S. educational, economic, and political institutions could not have been sustained. Yet, popular perspectives on Black political activism often fail to see how struggles for group survival are just as important as confrontations with institutional power (p. 202).

The suppression of Black female student activists' politics have led them to use sources outside what is considered traditional intellectual activities or viewed as academically legitimate. The women in this study, along with thousands of other Black female student activists, have redefined what activism for Black female students looks like. Erika, Jayanni, Doris and Annette also simultaneously struggle with group survival and institutional power.

Erika, Jayanni, Doris and Annette were very candid with their responses to my questions about the cultural and historical factors that drove them into activism. All four of the women stated that race, gender, class and sexual orientation were the driving force

of their activism. They all told horrific yet captivating stories of childhood memories of understanding race and gender issues. From instances of subtle racism to very overt occurrences, these women survived and learned to fight back. It was apparent the difference in how the women's families influenced their activism. Doris and Annette talked about the powerful examples they saw and the support they received from their families. Doris had examples of activism through her father's civil service fight and her Great Aunt's missionary work in Liberia. Annette's family housed and feed SNCC workers during the Albany Movement, even with the possibility of her father losing his job or the family's house being bombed. However, Erika and Jayanni's families – although proud of them – aren't "really involved" or "really know about their activism." Erika did mention her grandmother as an influence, but her family doesn't really know what she does. Jayanni's family knows that she has a really high GPA and went to Africa for something, but that is the extent of it.

Erika, "the Queer Black female student activist," was very aware of the pressing issues that drive her activism. Aware of her sexuality at a young age, she gravitated towards spaces that aided her survival within her educational institution. She saw the need for a community specifically for Black queer female students, created a student organization BlackOut and encouraged other women to "come out." She describes the cultural connection with other strong Black female students and her movement towards self-reliance:

It is a beautiful thing when you have a group of strong women that recognizes the different issues of intersectionality from the get-go. It makes it so much easier to have other conversations, conversations that don't have anything to do with race,

gender, class or sexuality. There is a baseline of trust so we are free to talk about other things. So for me being a Black woman in college has been great and has shaped me in a lot of ways. I love who I am and I don't think that is something I would have been able to say when I was younger. Not to say I didn't like who I was but I didn't have a specific connection to my womanhood or to my race like I do now. My race was just something that was and that others liked to talk about. For me, race was something I was trying not to occupy and wished that people would see beyond.

Erika not only started BlackOut to support the Black queer community at her institution, but she started as a means of self-survival as well. Through the process of organizing and connecting with other queer students, she learned more about herself and learned to love and appreciate all aspects of her identity. Queer youth of color of the post-civil rights era experience a culture in which homophobia is present and in many ways is as oppressive as it was prior to the gay liberation movement (Clay, 2012).

Collins (2000) suggests, "Understanding the complexity of Black women's activism requires understanding not only the need to address more than one form of oppression, but the significance of how singular and multiple forms of oppressions are organized" (p. 203).

Erika describes the comfort in having a community:

Since creating a space for Black queer women of color on my campus, I have gained a lot of Black female student activist friends. We roll deep! Most of us having come from PWI high schools, we feel very close to each other. It is a weird feeling of closeness. Its like a spiritual experience to be with other Black

women who have gone through similar things in their lives in terms of their identities and who are doing the same work that you are doing in different ways. There is this feeling of solidarity – that is the word, solidarity. When things aren't going right or when I am feeling tired because I was in class one day and some girl says something foolish, or I am trying to talk to a professor and s/he doesn't understand where I am coming from or how I grew up and expects me to come with all of these preparations that a white upper middle class student may have that I may not because I am a Black lower middle class student, I know there is a group of women that can be like "I understand."

Erika and her peers resisted by creating their own self-definitions and self-valuations in the safe spaces they created among one another (Collins, 2000). Annette talked about her friendships with other Black female activists:

Not all of my friends worked with the movement. Some were afraid. However I worked with a lot of other Black female student activist. We fostered life long friendships. I think the Black woman has always been free inside, because she had to be. I remember someone calling the Black woman *the mule of the world*. That was true for the movement. When I looked throughout the movement, I saw Black women, Black girls working. It wasn't unusual for me to see Black women stepping forward working in their communities.

Erika, Jayanni, Doris and Annette's activist work focuses on "strategies of everyday resistance that consisted of trying to create spheres of influence, authority, and power within institutions that traditionally have allowed African Americans and women little formal authority or real power" (Collins, 2000, p. 209).

Although both contemporary Black female students' activism was based on campus, Jayanni found solace in multi-racial and multi-gendered groups. "Because struggles for institutional transformation are rarely successful without allies...Black women's activism relies on coalition-building strategies" (Collins, 2000, p. 204). She organized numerous rallies and protest with peers other than Black women and several organizations. I named Jayanni "the Radical Black female student activist" because of her critical political and social views. She learned first hand how challenging institutional transformation could be. Jayanni describes the difficulty of institutional change:

I tried to start an Occupy movement on my college campus but that didn't work. My institution is supportive to a certain degree, as long as what you are doing doesn't really pose a challenge to the status quo. For example, if I hold an event that raises awareness about human trafficking, that doesn't pose a threat to the actual inter workings of the University. However, if I start organizing a campaign for workers, like janitorial and facility service workers, then that is where you see the shift in institutional support or feeling as if your concerns aren't being heard. Erika, Doris and Annette also spoke of instances of fighting against institutional powers. Annette was expelled from ASC because of her participation in the CRM and efforts to change campus policies. Erika's activism doesn't stop with community organizing; it follows her into the classroom, debating issues of racism and debunking myths of Black women.

While Erika seems to have a support group to help her decompress from the oppressive structures within her institution, Jayanni's support group – although helpful

for institutional change – doesn't offer an outlet for her racial identity. Jayanni explains her experience with racist remarks from peers:

Instances of racism and gender discrimination towards me have come to the forefront of my activism not when I am actually doing activist work, but through relationships with people who are in the movement outside of events, outside of organizing. Sometimes some messed up stuff is said – racist, sexist, or homophobic language and ideology is used. I realized quickly that just because you are liberal doesn't mean that you are an antiracist. I have learned that to be antiracist you can't be antigay at the same time. You can't organize for Trayvon Martin and turn a blind eye to the transgender Black man that was just killed. I find myself really upset with liberals, Black and white liberals alike. I think they are worst than conservatives because they are supposed to know better but racist/sexist/homophobic shit still comes out of their mouth.

Unfortunately, Erika and Jayanni are not alone in their experiences of racism and “liberal multiculturalism” in this day and age. Kincheloe & Steinberg (2001) suggests the need for a critical multiculturalism, which looks at “ways power has operated historically and contemporaneously to legitimate social categories and divisions” and “illustrates how individuals produce, revamp and reproduce meanings in a context constantly shaped and reshaped by power” (p. 25-26). Understanding that education takes place and consciousness is constructed in a variety of social settings, Jayanni and Erika use these opportunities to educate their peers.

Some of the issues that was common for both generations were perceived and handled differently by each woman. Although the strong Black woman stereotype has

been used to oppress Black women for centuries, Black women within the Hip Hop generation seem much more likely to challenge the image and argue in their behalf than women in prior generations (Morgan, 1999). Erika and Jayanni spoke on the strong woman myth that aids in the oppression of Black woman. Erika explained her issue with the concept:

I feel like I have to speak up for myself all the time but then that means I am always strong and always expected to be strong. Which is the issue! I don't always want to be expected to be strong. I don't always want the stereotype of the "Black independent, I can do everything" woman. It's a struggle, my personal struggle. I would love for someone to see me as delicate or see me as someone they want to take care of. Because I am an activist, and a Black woman, and a Black female student activist, I have to continuously put on this mask of "I have every thing together."

Jayanni described a painful experience with racism and being told to buck up and be strong:

By that time I was crying because all of the things were hurtful. I left the room crying and went to the bathroom. One of the facilitators came in and said to me, "You are a strong Black woman, those things aren't you." I wish I were who I am today then; I could have saved myself a lot of pain. What she did in that moment was tell me to buck up, to be this strong Black woman myth, and that racism is something you can get over. She told me that my community, in which they talked about, put those words in that bag, was not me. Even if she didn't mean it,

it's not about intentions...it came out that way. I saw this on an institutional level; the administrators didn't get it.

Collins (2000) suggests, portraying African American women as stereotypical mammies, matriarchs, welfare recipients, and hot mammas helps justify U. S. Black women's oppression. Black female students are confronted with these stereotypes and are forced to navigate a virtual "crooked room" (Harris-Perry, 2011).

Both Doris and Annette had careers in education upon finishing their work with SNCC. Not only did they enjoy teaching but also considered educating children a "part of their moral and social obligations as educated women" (Harley, 1982). Annette stated that because she was voted as Miss ASU, she felt she owed the student to try and change the conditions on campus. All of the participants shared the value of education and the importance of a college education. They also shared the experience of having to supplement their education about African American culture outside of the classroom. Doris, "the Art Educator Black female student activist" approached activism through the arts as a youth. Her narrative demonstrates how supplementing her education connected her to groups that aided in her survival and lead her to the teaching profession:

When I was in junior high I auditioned for a dance group at the Harlem YMCA down the street from the Schomburg Library. I auditioned and received a scholarship to study African dance. I went to Harlem on a regular basis, every week to my dance class. This led me to other cultural excursions, and cultural exposure to people who were in the arts. I made up my mind during that time that I was going to take in all of the African and African American arts that I could. From then on I knew I wanted to find out cultural and educational information

and share it with other people – I wanted to teach it. I wanted to travel to other places where Black people were learning first hand and get our information (history) out. I was very aware of things being hard for Black people and being in an environment where there could be discrimination, racism, and prejudice.

Doris would continue on the path of art education while working with SNCC, the Southern Media group, through her doctoral program and into her career as a higher education administrator. Within the African American community, Doris’ activities as a “cultural worker” were empowering (Reagon, 1987). “Drawing on the model of education as empowerment, many Black women routinely reject models of authority based on unjust hierarchies” (Collins, 2000, p. 218).

Annette, “the Rebel Black female student activist” refused to sit around while the movement took place, regardless of the consequences. She stood up for the rights of her student body and empowered others to act. “Black women’s style of activism also reflects a belief that teaching people how to be self-reliant fosters more empowerment than teaching them how to follow” (Collins, 2000, p. 219). She continued to empower through education, when she became Annette describes the curriculum she used in her classes:

The curriculum that I used in my classroom was an African and African American centered curriculum. There was no Black History Month in my class; we had African American history daily as well as multicultural history. I often see parents of my former students (who are adults now) in the grocery store, and they are still thanking me for teaching our history as well as tolerance for other cultures to their children.

Collins (2000) posits, “Black women used their classrooms and status as educators to

promote African American community development” (p. 212). Doris used her status as an educator to empower young people and promote institutional transformation. She states:

Many years later, as the Director of African American Student Services (AASS) at Georgia State University, I put together a documentary photographic exhibit for several years from the photographs I took during the CRM. I always believed very strongly about the power in having the images from the CRM, kept in the public eye and on the University walls. It is not just the written word in research that is important.

Erika, Jayanni, Doris and Annette’s narratives demonstrate how Black female students develop ways of knowing about education, activism, culture and womanhood through their activism. Each participant indicated in some way that race, class, gender and sexuality contributed to their involvement in the CRM and contemporary movement.

Building the Bridge – Connecting the Generations

Erika, Jayanni, Doris and Annette all agreed that the CRM “has not ended” and that the struggle for civil rights and human rights “continues”. Doris believes, although young people are emerging, “there isn’t the same blatant kind of circumstances that people reacted against during the CRM.” It is evident that the nature of student activism during the CRM was a grassroots effort and drew a lot of attention for these courageous students. Many of these freedom fighters continued their activism after college, choosing careers that reflected their value in civil and human rights. Many of these activists frequently talked about their experiences, wrote memoirs, and sought out opportunities to

share their stories with the next generation. While others settled into a life of seclusion, distancing themselves from all that reminded them of their experiences with the CRM.

Although many gains were made during the CRM, social and economic issues still plague the Black community. Racism that was once overt became hidden within the political, social, economic and educational systems through America. Issues such as racial profiling, stop-and-frisk laws, school-to-prison pipeline, high unemployment, poor housing, and unavailable healthcare have disproportionate impacts on African American youth. Even more disturbing, overt racism has become ever more prevalent with the Obama Administration in office, America's first Black president. There conservative campaign bumper stickers that read "Don't Re-Nig in 2012" and racist commentary by some Tea Party members that reminded the World that racism still exists.

Now, some civil rights activists are asking: When I die is that it? Who will carry the legacy of freedom fighters (SNCC, 2011b)? How will Black youth navigate their generational consciousness regarding issues of race, gender, class, sexuality, and American democracy (Collins, 2006)? The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was important to the CRM because it engaged a group of young freedom fighters who did not taking no for an answer. As systemic inequities and the need for equality persists, who will be the new generation? How are young people organizing? What are the connections to the civil rights activists?

Despite the illusion of a disintegrated CRM, Black female student activism has not disappeared. Instead, it has been consistent with the history of Black women's activism, using what affects us personally as a means for political resistance. Black female student activism has evolved to encapsulate issues of race, gender, class, sexual

orientation/gender identity, environmental protection, and international human rights.

The third research question for this study asked how the Civil Rights activists and contemporary activists characterize one another. During this portion of the interview each of my participants had strong feelings about the characterization of both movements.

Erika, Jayanni, Doris and Annette believe there is a disconnection between the two generations. Erika believes that the generational disconnect could have “something to do with recognizing Black queer issues as Black issues.” There is an understanding that the Black community has not always been supportive of homosexuality and has operated under the “don’t ask, don’t tell” philosophy (Womack, 2010, p. 85). Erika believes the issue stems from the issue of religion and the growing number of young Black people who are not religious or who are Muslim (e.g. understanding that not all African Americans are Christian). A lot of CRM activities took place in and around the Christian church. She states, “There is no longer the expectation of someone ignoring or denying their sexuality in favor of race.”

Erika, Jayanni, Doris and Annette feel as though the Internet and social media is a big part of the contemporary movement. The use of Facebook®, Twitter®, Youtube®, Change.org® and other blogging sites has been instrumental in progression of organizing and strategizing. They all agree that the Internet and social media are great ways to connect people, disseminate information and mobilize large groups of people around an issue quickly. However, the use of the Internet and social media as a means of activism can also “break down community with the lack of face-to-face interaction and interpersonal relationships.” Jayanni nicknamed Internet activism as “slack-tivism” –

signing things or signing off on issues that they are not really informed about and have no intention of participating in organizing.

Although my participants all agreed that the Internet/social media is not the ideal way to build community, it is a great tool for connection and communication. With the use of multimedia outlets such as Facebook®, Youtube®, Twitter®, Tumblr® young scholar activist like Erika, Jayanni and myself can have easy access and contact with older activists. I am “Facebook® friends” with Bernice Johnson Reagon, Rutha Mae Harris, and other Black feminist scholars like bell hooks, Gwendolyn Pough, Joan Morgan, and Bettina Love. The ability to connect and communicate with other Black female student activists and Black feminists of all ages is easier with social media.

Both Erika and Jayanni mentioned the “complacency” of a lot of people in the contemporary era. Jayanni specifically stated, “This generation is a generation that goes without much aim... we are a generation that thinks everything we see in front of us today is the natural course of the way things are supposed to be.” Erika explained that if young people took a closer look at the institutional flaws they would see there was much more work to be done. “They would be much more fired up.” Jayanni believes that much of the apathy has to do with “capitalism” and “popular culture.” It is obvious that more and more young people are getting fired up, as Jayanni says, “it isn’t that we don’t have inspired young people. For example, Dream Defenders (2013) have set forth to bring “a new generation of youth, leaders, and organizers for social change must be identified, engaged, trained and sent back to their communities to build.”

Doris defines the contemporary movement not so much as a youth movement but a continuation of earlier efforts from all people. She recognizes the continued efforts of

CRM activists in Mississippi, in education that influences our children and others doing work around the World. There are the children of the CRM activists who have continued in their “parents’ footsteps.” She, like Jayanni, believes that there is a “generational divide (not a complete divide but a slight one) because of the media and popular culture that has a strong influence in capturing the minds of young people” and “keep them from reacting.”

There are some scholars that believe the possible generational divide and lack of recognition of a large scale contemporary movement could be the affect of desegregation (Collins, 2006; Clay, 2012; Gamson, 1989). Clay (2012) suggests:

The absence of a recognizable social movement may be linked to the largely diffused and dispersed ways that power and oppression operate today...The implication is that true resistance and change have been rendered impossible because power is no longer centrally located or visible. (p. 7)

The importance of community has been the cornerstone of the African American community since slavery. Erika, Jayanni, Doris and Annette spoke of intimate conversations with their parents, grandparents and older activists about experiences with oppression in their lives. With these conversations brought a sense of gratitude for the suffering their ancestors had to endure so that they could live a little better. These conversations also sparked an their interest in learning more about African and African American culture and activism.

Annette takes responsibility for her generation not doing their “duty and following through with information about the struggles of Black people.” She made an effort to teach her children and the children in her classroom. She was disappointed in the

attitude and actions of some Black college students that participated in a reenactment march. The young men didn't understand and recognize the danger and seriousness of the moment and felt as if they would have done more during the 60s. Annette told them, "No, you wouldn't have done that, because you would've been reared the same way we were, to survive." She feels the "disconnection between some young people and the CRM because nobody filled in the gap between the generations."

As we bring the 50th anniversary of this era¹⁹ to a close, it is still evident that much more work needs to be done and who better to carry the torch of justice than the youth? Although the U.S. public discourse has not yet recognized a large –scale social movement, it is apparent through the historical and contemporary perspectives of this study that people – young and old – are still organizing and defending the civil and human rights of all people. At the same time, much can be learned from the individual and collective experiences of the CRM activists and contemporary activists.

The purpose of this study is to make aware the activist work Black female students have been engaged in and to compare the experiences of Black female student activist of two different generations. In addition, one of the main purposes of this research is to argue that the experiences of these women and how they interpret the world should be recognized as a valid source of knowledge within the epistemologies of traditional scholarship (Collins, 2000). However, Black female student experiences of resistance are relegated to "subjugated knowledge," which is the hidden knowledge generated by oppressed groups for the purpose of assisting them with dealing with oppression (Collins, 2000). The knowledge that is gained through their lived experiences

¹⁹ The 50th anniversaries of SNCC 1960, School Desegregation 1955/1960, March on Washington 1963

of racism, sexism, homophobia, classism and through forms of resistance has provided them with survival skills within higher education and can be used within the classroom to empower more students to act.

In this chapter, I offer a brief explanation of how I used Labov's structured narrative analysis to organize the narratives. I follow with my interpretation of the data using Collin's (2000) Black feminist epistemology as my framework. Finally, I offer a broad discussion of the findings. For the final chapter, I offer reflections for the methodological focus of this dissertation. I then propose possible implications of this research and suggestions for future research.

Chapter Six

My Story III - Contemporary Black Feminist Scholar-Activist

My HBCU experience taught me the importance and responsibility we as a generation have of upholding the rich legacy of community activism. Many of my professors followed W.E.B. Dubois' philosophy of using education as a means of social justice and social transformation. I was introduced to social justice education, civic responsibility and service learning through class projects designed to connect the institution to the local community. It was through my everyday experiences that I resist the dominant social structures and external definitions of who I am. It was through my experiences and relationships with my family, friends, social activism and educational institution that led me to my own sense of self.

Once I left the "safe bubble" of an HBCU and journeyed to a predominately white institution (PWI) I was met with a whole new set of challenges. Moving from the South to the Mid-west, walking on campus and into a program that was 95% white, was like walking into a whole new world. I knew in order for me to survive I would have to find spaces that would support me. My faculty advisor, a middle-age white female, understood my difficult transition and was a safe haven for my venting sessions. By the end of my tenure at that institution I had found my voice as a contemporary Black scholar-activist. In an effort to challenge social norms of the program while advocate for a Black male visiting professor, I wrote an open letter to the faculty and students of my program. I felt as if the program was not living up to its reputation of community, cooperative learning, student/faculty relationships, and commitment to diversity, because of the lack of respect shown to the visiting faculty by some of the students. The faculty

thought it was important that I led the conversation, but during the session I felt like they left me out to hang. Once I got in front of the community I found myself totally alone, frustrated by the blank stares and lack of concern from the students; angered by the lack of support from my faculty; disappointed at myself for being put on the spot to talk about the “Big R” – Racism; and spiritually drained by learning that this would be the first of many disappointing experiences that I would have in this profession.

Although I was graduating, I figured I had more to gain by helping bring awareness to the racial issues lying dormant in our program, hoping to spark a movement of self reflection for the students and faculty, and practice what I would I considered to be my philosophy of education – critical multiculturalism. My intention was to create dialogue and give room for Black students’ voices to be heard. As I reflect on this experience, taking lead on the discussion allowed me to finally feel comfortable expressing myself in white settings. By the end of the discussion I was spiritually drained and ready to leave that institution for good. I received some congratulatory handshakes and invitations to extend the discussion; but to my surprise the faculty were taking notes in order to make improvements on the curriculum and make the community more inclusive and welcoming to all students, new and visiting faculty. Their silence wasn’t lack of support rather a devious way of handing me the control of the space. At one time I was disappointed that my last impression of the graduate program was of this situation, however, now that I reflect back on the experience it was a pivotal moment in my development as a black women.

My personal experiences within the academy and in the community have guided me towards the ideals of Black Feminist Thought. I now seek a voice that is personal and

political, individual and collective (Moore, 2009). My work as a contemporary Black feminist scholar-activist is situated within the intellectual and political philosophy of Black Feminist Thought. The activism and experiences of Erika, Jayanni, Doris and Annette exemplify Black Feminist Thought. The collection of their experiences offer a new curriculum for Black female student activists to continue an intergenerational conversation about the intersection of race, gender and class. Their experiences deepen the understanding of Black women's empowerment and continued fight for social justice.

Throughout my writing process, Black feminism has taught me to be resilient, to be creative, and to use my own experiences as tool for liberating others and myself. As I reflect upon the methodology of this study, I didn't know where to begin gathering the data for the contemporary movement. It took months searching in the library for books, combing databases for thesis and dissertations and initially coming up with only a few sources that dealt with young Black girls but not Black college-age women specifically. It wasn't until I was online one day reading one of my favorite blogs when I came across a post about Black college students protesting. Attached to this post were screen shots of Twitter© messages and Youtube© clips of a march they were organizing. At that moment there was a paradigm shift in my thinking, I realized the civil rights movement had not gone away and was not stagnant. It had moved into another era, which caused for a shift in ways in which people resist, organize, and strategize.

The initial gathering of data was overwhelming because of the number of sources that I had to sift through. The effort that went into compiling the historical and contemporary Black female student activism was tremendous. However, once I combed through the data and searched for meaning among the fragmented content of historical

and contemporary movement, the conversation reveled the continued struggle for survival and institutional transformation by Black female students. Much of what these women have done to improve their lives and the lives of others have been lost or ignored. My family sparked the fire for the love of education and community, my undergraduate experience flamed the fire, and now I hold the lite torch. It is my responsibility to pass the flame to other Black female student activists.

Implications for Educators

This study called for candid conversations about race, gender and class for Black female student activists within American society. Although separated by 50 or so years, these two generations have many similarities and differences in what motivates their activism, how they have developed a sense of self and community through their activism and how these women communicate, strategize and organize. This study adds to the research about Black women activism and offers a view of the historical and contemporary perspective of Black female student activism in relation to one another.

One of the most profound stories in this dissertation is Jayanni's story of diversity training and having to experience the troubling and insensitive activity with her classmates. She explains how this situation shows the disconnect between the institution and the students lived experience:

I saw this on an institutional level; the administrators didn't get it. Hopefully she has learned from that experience, read some stuff, and will never do that activity again. But that doesn't change that fact that it happened and it happens in other spaces on campus. I felt my gender and my race was verbally assaulted at that point in time and set the stage for the rest of my academic career. I remember

there being no discussion afterwards. Class time was up – the facilitators apologized for the time running out and said we would discuss it next week.

It is evident from this study that more work needs to be done in the area of diversity and campus climate at predominately white institutions (PWI). There is not likely any other area within higher educational policy that has received more attention in recent years than the issue of race relations and diversity (Hurtado et al., 1998). However, at the same time, many of the policy changes and initiatives that have been developed lack real substances and practical ways to create change. The implications of this study reveal the need to validate Black female students experiences as knowledge to be used to enhance diversity initiatives and campus climate. Validating Black female student activists experiences as knowledge not only empowers Black women but also offers institutions a view into the issues facing students of color and brings light unto the deficiencies of diversity policies.

Multiculturalism has become something that means everything and at the same time nothing (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997, p. 1). From my experiences working in higher education positions that focused on diversity issues and multicultural affairs, I have come to find very few people that really understand how to facilitate conversations about diversity and inclusion. My experiences are much like Jayanni's experience. But by not taking serious the voices of the students, the people who work in these institutions end up repeating the cycle of oppressive actions that further alienates students of color. It's not enough for these institutions to recruit students of color, add a few more programs/services that focus on people of color, and/or identify a building for black students. Although the attempts of forward progress are appreciated, to truly make changes there must be a critical

focus on the students lived experiences at institutions of higher learning. Students of color must be included in the conversation about diversity policy; their voices and their stories have to lead the policy changes.

Erika and Jayanni expressed issues with classroom discussions about race and racism. Oftentimes feeling attacked, misunderstood, having to debunk stereotypes about Black women or having to represent for all Black people, left them tired and sometimes disconnected. More than ever before, Black women are enrolling in institutions of higher education and it is necessary for these institutions to support all learners. In an effort to push against the dominant culture ideology that works to oppress Black women, offering a more cultural relevant pedagogy affirms and empowers the student. Ladson-Billings (1994) argues,

the notion of “culture relevance” moves beyond language to include other aspects of the students and school culture. Thus culturally relevant teaching uses student culture in order to maintain and to transcend the negative effects of the dominant culture. The negative effects are brought about, for example, by not seeing one’s history, culture or background represented in the textbook or curriculum or by seeing that history, culture or background distorted. (p. 17)

The stories of Black female student activists – past and present – shows other Black women students the long history of resistance and uplift through activism and education. This study can also offer an example of how Black women used their classrooms and status as an educator to promote African American history and community development (Collins, 2000).

This study will prove to benefit the young female student engaging in activism today. It offers a new perspective on the ways in which we view Black female student activism. Moreover, these stories of contemporary Black female student activists offer insight into the new and/or continued CRM, “seeking to facilitate the internalization of a value system of use in the transformation of African Americans from a state of psychological, social, political and spiritual disempowerment to one of awareness, knowledge, and empowerment for change (Murtadha, pg. 349). Rather than reducing Black female student activism to sororities, student government and community service/social organizations, this research shows how young Black women are redefining activism and creating space for their diverse array of voices.

This research also offers a counter narrative to the images that we see in the media of young Black women. Oftentimes the appropriation and representation of black culture reinforces the ideology of white supremacy, resulting in the entrenchment of white privilege and domination (Haymes, 1995, pg. 123). My mission is to contribute positive images of black culture, support mainstream media that contributes positive images, and challenge those sources that don't. This study follows scholars like Collins (2006), Love (2011), and Brown (2009), who stress the need for research that aims to diversify the representations of young Black women.

This research argues for the use of stories to create theory. Brayboy (2005) agrees, stating, “theories, through stories and other media, are the roadmaps for our communities and reminders of our individual responsibilities to the survival of our communities” (p. 427). Black feminist theorizing no longer has to be confined to the classroom and confining formal educational institutions, rather can take place in other

spaces where Black women are producing knowledge and putting theory into action. More so now than ever before Black women are speaking for themselves and have become “legitimated agents of knowledge” (Collins, 2000). My intention is for this research to add to the literature of social justice in education and historical and contemporary Black feminism. This dissertation adds to the scholarship being performed by Black women, about Black female students for educators and community activists working with Black women.

Implications for Community Organizers

Erika, Jayanni, Doris and Annette spoke openly about the importance of history and focus on community and collaboration between the CRM and contemporary movement. Having a community of people who understood and supported their activism was essential to their learning process and their survival. My research reconstructs educational history to include Black female student activists’ experiences within the CRM and offer a view into the contemporary movement. It also offers a framework that connects historical and contemporary experiences of Black women. Traditional research frameworks have “ignored the role of social structures in our society” (Evans-Winters, p. 6). History is important and necessary for the empowerment and survival of future generations, but educators have to find a way to connect history to modern times. Tillman (2002) suggests,

educational research and practices that reflect a cultural paradigm emphasize cultural solidarity, education for self-reliance in the African American community, and specific ways in which cultural knowledge, practices, and values

that characterize the historic and contemporary African American experience can be drawn upon to improve the education of African Americans. (p. 1)

This study is not only for scholars within the academy but also people in the community who are interested in the experiences and ideas of Black women. This study offers an intergenerational conversation about the relationship between the CRM and contemporary movement and the need for a coalition in order to develop new models of social change (Collins, 2000). “The community is the basic human unit, not the individual, and as such the concern is for collective survival” (Murtadha, 1995, p. 352).

Lastly, this study also contributes to the burgeoning body of research in Hip Hop pedagogy that looks “to transform oppressive institutions, policies, relationships, and beliefs” in and about young Black women (Brown, 2009; Love, 2011; Clay, 2012). As the narratives in this study shows, Black female students are in dire need of an institutional policy and a pedagogy that embraces their experiences inside and outside the classroom and challenges oppressions. Black female student activists have followed the examples of their foremothers and found spaces where they can vent, express themselves fully and be supported by those alike. Many of the sources I found that represented contemporary Black female student activism were outside of what is considered traditional scholarship. This study takes a cue from scholars like Collins (1998, 2000, & 2006), Harris-Perry (2011), and hooks (1981), who tend to use cultural knowledge and values that are relevant to their experiences and those of other Black women.

Future Research

There are a number of research projects that are needed to continue the investigation of how Black female student activists make meaning of their experiences of education and community through activism. For instance, an in-depth look at how Black female students – who are active on campus and in the community – deal with the emotional baggage from their activist work on campus and in the community. What type of outlets do they have? Many of the Black female students in the CRM used “the arts” as a means of activism, connecting education to the community, or expressing their feelings about the movement. How are Black female students using music, visual art, poetry, dance, and/or digital art to make meaning of their experiences in activism? Another example, it would be beneficial to Black feminism to research the career paths of Black female student activists. How has their activism influenced their educational path and career choice?

It is also important that research continues in understanding the relationship between the CRM generation and the contemporary generation. In this study, I compare the narratives of four women, however there is more work that needs to be done and more voices that need to be heard. As an extension to this study, I would like to gather the CRM activists and contemporary activists of this study as well as other Black female student activists together for a focus group luncheon. This would be an opportunity for these women to talk about their experiences as activists and take part in an inter-generational dialogue, discussing a collective way to combat the generational conflict within the Black community. This would also be a way to foster mentor/mentee relationships between the two generations.

In addition, both Erika and Jayanni talked about the need for emotional care for Black female student activists. The daily attack on Black women's physical and mental bodies takes a toll on the psychology of these women. The myth of the strong Black woman has too often forced these women into silence, forgoing their own needs to serve others. Unfortunately, many Black women have been left to overcome life problems alone and in the end pay a large price when they commit to social justice projects without honoring themselves in the process. Black female students are in need of additional support for the difficult and draining work that they do on campus and in the community.

Conclusion

This study was sparked by my personal experience as a contemporary Black female student activist. Much of my life has been influenced and inspired by freedom fighters from past generations. Although I have had wonderful examples in my life and have had the opportunities to meet and build relationships with activists from the CRM, I realize that not all young people have had the same opportunities. For the Hip Hop generation, the lack of connection to history is not a lack of interest or understanding of the importance of history. The lack of connection to history comes from the lack of relationships between the two generations. In this study I ask, *how do Civil Rights activists (1960-1970) and contemporary activists (2002-2012) characterize one another?* In this study, it is evident they have a mutual respect for one another and the work that they do in the communities. However, there is a lack of opportunities or platform for them to communicate and/or work together. It is not my suggestion that there aren't any partnerships going on between the two generations, but not enough to truly make an impact on the Black community.

There is a lot to learn from the CRM and the young freedom fighters that dedicated so much of their time and energy to the fight for civil liberties. Similarly, there is much to learn from the contemporary student activists who, although not involved in a nationally recognized movement, are committed to continuing the legacy of activism. The purpose of this research is to carve out a space for Black women to share their experiences as student activists. I specifically wanted to compare the experiences of women from SNCC and women from the contemporary movement. Each generation identified several *cultural and historical factors that drove/drive them to activism*. Many of the factors for each generation were similar and some different. The intersection of race, gender and class was a major factor in all of the participants in this study. Although there are similarities and differences in what drove/drive their activism, it is still true that for both generations the “personal is political.”

There are many ways in which the women in this study *develop(ed) ways of knowing about self and community through activism and education*. Through their everyday activities, these women were able to resist oppressive structures within their institutions and larger society. Their relationships with other Black female student activists also aided in the process of understanding themselves and becoming empowered through their activism. Although institutions of higher learning have failed to recognize the experiences of Black female student activists as knowledge, the intellectual ideas that have been produced by these women have found a collective expression that have allowed them to create self-definitions about self and community.

This study isn’t meant to drastically shift social consciousness. I understand radical political change usually happens in increments rather than through dramatically

swift events (Smith, 1983). However, this work encapsulates one intergenerational conversation of Black female student activists, their connection to grassroots movements for equality, and the resources they name that drive their work. This research is one step in the right direction of creating paradigm shift in the Black community and in higher educational institutions. I have learned so much about myself from this process and through the experiences of the Black women that I interviewed. Learning and absorbing from other Black women is part of the process of oral narrative research as carried out by Black women (Vaz, 1997). I desire to continue fostering relationships with activist from previous generations and my own. I challenge my generation to reach across and grab the hand of our ancestors whose shoulders we stand.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Interview Protocol

- I. Background Information
 - a. Tell me about growing up
 - b. When did you get involved with social activism?
 - c. What college did/do you attend?
 - i. Did/do you have/had to hide your activism (participation in the movement from the institution?)
 - ii. Did/does your family support your activism?
 - d. What is your connection to the CRM/Contemporary movement?
 - i. Were you involved in any civil rights organization (e.g., SNCC, NAACP, CORE, Urban League)?
 - ii. Are you involved with any national organizations or current movements? (Trayvon Martin, Jena 6, Occupy Wall Street)
 - iii. What is/was your membership like?
 - e. What or Who influenced you to get involved?
- II. Questions of Identity (Black, Female, Student)
 - a. Tell me about your experience being Black and Female during your college years.
 - b. When did you become aware of your race?
 - i. ...Gender?
 - ii. ...Economic status/Class?
 - c. How has your role as a scholar/student influenced your activism?
 - i. Did/do you self identify as a feminist?
 - ii. Did/does your race, gender and/or class influence your activism?
- III. Questions about Activism
 - a. Tell me about your experience as a Black female student activist. (Balance?)
 - b. How do you define your activism?
 - c. What type of activism do you engage in?
 - d. How has your activism influenced your educational path?
 - i. Do they influence one another? (Academics and activism)
 - ii. Did it influence your career choice?
 - e. What did/do you hope to accomplish with your activism?
- IV. Questions of Generational Influence
 - a. Tell me about your experience with other Black female student activists.
 - b. Did/do you work with other Black female activists?
 - i. Older? Younger?
 - ii. Tell me about those relationships?
 - c. Did/do you have a mentor/mentee that is/was a Black female student activist?
 - d. How do you define the contemporary Civil Rights movement?

- i. How does it differ from the civil rights movement of the 60s?
 - ii. Is it a group effort or individual?
 - e. What strategies, modes of communication, or mobilizing techniques did/do you use?
 - f. Do you feel like there is a generational divide?
- V. Is there anything else you would like to add that I may not have asked?

Appendix B

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

Comparing Their Stories: A Narrative Inquiry of African American Women of the
Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (1960-1970) and
Contemporary Student Activists (2002-2012)

INTRODUCTION

You are invited to participate in a research study that aims to:

- 1.) To fill the huge gap in research about how Black female students' experiences of marginality at the intersections of their race, gender and class have informed their activism.
- 2.) To connect two generations, examine their influences on one another, and offer one intergenerational conversation about Black female student activism.
- 3.) To argue the need to utilize sources outside what is normally considered legitimate scholarship.

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The primary method for data collection will be a one-on-one interview. In most instances, we will complete the interviews in person. If you are unable to meet in person, we can conduct the interview via telephone or Skype®. The interview will last approximately 30 to 45 minutes. Face-to-face interviews will be held at a location comfortable and convenient for you, most likely a work office or private campus conference room. We will jointly agree on a time and place for each of the interviews. Most participants will be interviewed only once. Thus, your participation will span no longer than the summer of 2013. All interviews will be audio recorded by me with your permission.

INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPANTS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE STUDY

If you should chose to participate; your involvement will include the following:

1. Read and sign this Informed Consent Form.
2. Agree to be interviewed by the researcher.
3. Agree to the *option* of reviewing the research findings at a later date to member-check for fair representation of personal insights and historical events and activities.

RISKS

There are no foreseeable risks to participants as methods of data collection are non-obtrusive. Some participants may experience mild anxiety or discomfort during interviews. If they become uncomfortable, they are free to stop the interview at any time. If a particular question makes them uncomfortable, they do not have to answer it.

The rights and welfare of the participants is of utmost importance to the researcher. You, the participants, risk sharing your personal insights, *but* your anonymity will be preserved by the

researcher by the use of pseudonyms and you have the option to review the research findings at a later date to check for fair representation by the researcher.

_____ Participant's initials

BENEFITS

This study will help the researcher understand to a greater extent the effectiveness of course materials and teaching strategies within history and women studies and how issues of race, identity and activism affects Black female co-eds.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Though the researcher will know the identity of the participants and the institutions included in this study, each participant will be given the option to self identify or remain anonymous. Those participants will be asked to provide a pseudonym and all other identifying information will be changed accordingly. Transcripts will only be accessible to the researcher. Digital recordings, but not transcriptions, will be destroyed upon completion of the research project. Transcriptions will be retained by the PI as a digital file to be used in future research related to Black female student activism.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures you may contact the researcher, Tracia Cloud by phone at (678) 570-8175 or by email at tcloud2@utk.edu If you have questions about your rights as a participant, contact the Office of Research Compliance Officer at (865) 974-3466.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

CONSENT

I have read the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Researcher's signature _____ Date _____

Appendix C

Recruitment Letter

Dear Prospective Participant,

I am a graduate student in the school of education at the University of Tennessee Knoxville. I am writing to ask your help in my current research. I have a strong research interest in the role education and activism play(ed) in the lives of Black female students who identify as activists. I am especially keen to interview former SNCC members and current students about their experiences as student activists and how activism has change(d) their lives.

The primary method for data collection will be a one-on-one interview. In most instances, we will complete the interviews in person. If you are unable to meet in person, we can conduct the interview via telephone or Skype®. The interview will last approximately 30 to 45 minutes. Face-to-face interviews will be held at a location comfortable and convenient for you, most likely a work office or private campus conference room. We will jointly agree on a time and place for each of the interviews. Most participants will be interviewed only once. Thus, your participation will span no longer than the summer of 2013. All interviews will be audio recorded by me with your permission.

If you are interested in participating in this study please contact me at 678-570-8175 or Tcloud2@utk.edu and I will send you a consent form. Any interviews I conduct will be under stringent university protocol, which give the interviewee the right to withdraw at any time and to remain anonymous if they wish.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Besides this email, I can be reached at:

Cell: 678-570-8175

Sincerely,

Tracia Cloud

Appendix D

FORM B APPLICATION

All applicants are encouraged to read the Form B guidelines. If you have any questions as you develop your Form B, contact your Departmental Review Committee (DRC) or Research Compliance Services at the Office of Research.

FORM B**IRB #** _____**Date Received in OR** _____

THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE**Application for Review of Research Involving Human Subjects**

I. IDENTIFICATION OF PROJECT**1. Principal Investigator Co-Principal Investigator:****Tracia Cloud**

240 Cleveland Rd. #500

Bogart, GA 30622

(678) 570-8175

Tcloud2@utk.edu**Faculty Advisor:****Dr. Barbara Thayer-Bacon**

1126 Volunteer Boulevard

420 Claxton Complex

Knoxville, TN 37996-3456

865-974-9505

bthayer@utk.edu**Department:**

Department of Educational Psychology and Counseling

College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences, Cultural Studies

2. Project Classification: Dissertation Research

3. Title of Project: Comparing Their Stories: A Narrative Inquiry of African American Women of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (1960-1970) and Contemporary Student Activists (2002-2012)

4. Starting Date: Upon IRB Approval (or October 8, 2012)

5. Estimated Completion Date: April 30, 2013

6. External Funding (if any): N/A

II. PROJECT OBJECTIVES

Specific Aims:

The specific aim of this research is:

- 4.) To fill the huge gap in research about how Black female students' experiences of marginality at the intersections of their race, gender and class have informed their activism.
- 5.) To connect two generations, examine their influences on one another, and offer one intergenerational conversation about Black female student activism.
- 6.) To argue the need to utilize sources outside what is normally considered legitimate scholarship.

Research Questions:

My research questions are:

- 1.) How is the generational divide between the Civil Rights activist (1960-1970) and the contemporary activist (2002-2012) characterized by my participants?
- 2.) How did/have women develop(ed) ways of knowing about self and community through activism and education?
- 3.) What were/are the cultural and historical factors that drove/drive each woman to activism?

Rationale:

The Civil Rights Movement (CRM) is one of America's greatest stories – the fight for equality and justice and the struggle of men and women who dedicated themselves to right the wrongs of the faulty American system. Layered with racist, sexist and oppressive ideologies and practices since the Civil War, America has made strides to overcome its dark past. However, it has not been without the unwavering determination and strength of many freedom fighters, generations of idealistic activists – men and women, individuals and organizations – seeking an equal and fair shot at the American dream.

Two thousand and ten marked the 50th anniversary of the formation of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). SNCC was significant to the CRM because of its ability to mobilize thousands of students so quickly and even more so, the national attention received due to the make-up of the group being very diverse. They were also known for their commitment, creativity, and radical youthful energy. "SNCC became a community for a small but growing number of [young] idealistic activists, Whites as well as Blacks, nonstudents and students, northerners and southerners" (Carson, 1981, p. 1). These young people were energetic and enthusiastic about participating in the movement. Many chose to join the movement in spite of their friends and families and their own concern for their safety. Not only were their lives in danger, these students put their education on the line –

many being expelled from their institutions due to their involvement in the movement. Understanding there were very dangerous times ahead, these students were willing to leave their homes, schools and defy their parents and educational institutions to join the movement. SNCC ushered in a more radical resistance to racism, “uniquely and vividly reflecting the emergent values of an expanding social movement” and attracted many of the courageous young activists (p. 1).

The other unique aspect of the SNCC organization was the number of women students that participated and held leadership roles. Many Black female students left their institutions to work alongside Black men during many of the CRM demonstrations (Hughett, 2010). Black women were in large part responsible for generating support among Blacks in rural areas (Payne, 1993). Among those young activists, female students like Diane Nash, Ruby Doris Smith, Bernice Johnson, and Prathia Hall played active roles in organizing student sit-ins at segregated lunch counters, movie theaters and other movement activities affiliated with desegregation. Although these young women (along with many others) were extremely instrumental within the organization, they are not household names among the general population. In most conversations about women activists during the CRM names like Rosa Parks, Coretta Scott King, or Dorothy Height are more likely to come up as influential during the CRM.

Compared to the amount of literature on civil rights movement, the specific population of Black female students has been ignored within academic scholarship. Issues that affected their development and promote their activism has not been captured in the recent literature. Their experiences have been lumped together with other women and men activists of the CRM. Jewell Handy Gresham’s (1994) book review of *Women of the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers 1942-1965* identified the common mistake of most research of CRM – which is “the tendency to lump all participants together as if all were part of common events and shared common experiences...It is impossible to discuss women of the Southern region and women from the Northern region [Black women and white women, young and old] in the same historical breath without making necessary qualifications” (p. 27). I seek to shine a brighter light on the young women who dedicated so much of their knowledge, leadership, and talents to the movement. Their stories will prove to benefit the younger Black female students engaging in activism today. Moreover, there is a gap in research about Black female student activism between civil rights and present day. So, how do we inspire a new generation of activists when there is – possibly – a disconnection between the generations and a lack of literature? Some of the civil rights activists are asking: When I die is that it? Who will carry the legacy of freedom fighters (Johnson-Reagon, 2011)? With this dissertation, I work to reconstruct educational history to include Black female student activists’ experiences within the CRM and set in motion the study of their experiences within the contemporary movement.

The commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Brown vs. Board of Education (i.e. 1954) and other events in civil rights for African American people have emphasized how movements for social justice helped to define American history and “serve as a catalysts to refocus thinking on how educational leaders have become social justice advocates and activists” (Normore, 2008, p. ix). Today, institutions are redesigning curriculum and creating courses framed with the concept of social justice and several issues including race, diversity, marginalization, equity, access, ethics, class, gender, spirituality, ability and sexual orientation (Normore, 2008). Women make up more than 50% of all college students (i.e. two year and four year institutions). It is also a fact that Black women make up two-thirds of

the African American population of college co-eds (US Census Bureau, 2009). Therefore, it is imperative these institutions of higher learning focus more time and energy on researching Black female student's agency and self-definition. hooks (1992) states "unless we transform images of blackness, of black people, our ways of looking and our ways of being seen, we cannot make radical interventions that will fundamentally alter our situation" (p. 7). Collins (2000) suggests that coalition building is necessary for social justice "because each group possesses a partial perspective on its own experiences and on those of other groups" (p. 247).

This research is important because there are few narrative studies on Black female student activism, and even fewer studies that focus on the historical and contemporary perspectives on how they identify as Black female student activist -educators and how they make sense of their multiple identities – being Black, female, socially active and educated. Specifically, my ultimate goal is to contribute to the intellectual knowledge of Black feminist work, help raise awareness of the good work being done by young Black women at the grassroots level, and offer a medium for older and younger Black activist to communicate and work together.

III. DESCRIPTION AND SOURCE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Sample and Recruitment:

For this dissertation there will be a total of four (4) participants. The participants for this study will be purposely selected – based on their identification as a Black/African American woman and their participation as student activists in SNCC or a contemporary activist organization. The research participants will be identified through the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH) membership directory, University of Tennessee Minority Student Affairs, and Spelman College's student organization called Feminist Majority Leadership Alliance (FMLA). Once identified, these potential participants will be emailed or mailed recruitment letters.

Participants will be recruited in one of two ways. First, participants may be recruited via targeted emails, which will indicate that participation is voluntary (Appendix A). With this method, email addresses will be garnered from each targeted organization. Alternatively, participants may be recruited via a snowball or chain sampling method, whereby participants are identified from people who know people who know what participants may be information-rich (Creswell, 2007).

IV. METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Data Collection:

The primary method for data collection will be one-on-one interviews. In most instances, the researcher will complete the interviews in person. In other cases, interviews will be conducted via telephone or Skype®. These interviews will be semi-structured, using open-ended questions from an interview protocol (see Appendix B) and lasting approximately 30 to 45 minutes. Face-to-face interviews will be held at a location comfortable for the participant, most likely their work offices or private campus conference room. The participant and researcher will jointly agree on a time and place for each of the interviews. Most participants will be interviewed only once. Thus, their participation will span no longer than the summer of 2013. All interviews will be audio recorded by the PI with the participant's permission. The PI will also transcribe all transcripts.

In conjunction with interviews, I will take fieldnotes before, during and after the interviews. I will also complete document and archival analysis to gather data for this research. The documents that will be reviewed could include: newspapers, magazines, multimedia clips, letters from SNCC, NAACP, and other contemporary activist organizations.

Data Analysis:

All interview transcripts will be saved in MS Word format and stored on an electronic flash drive owned by the PI to be stored on the PI's personal computer. The PI will use structured narrative analysis to code and analyze the data to tell one intergenerational story about Black female student activism. All transcripts will be stored for a period of three years in the faculty advisor's work office located at 420 Claxton Complex to be used in future research pertaining to Black female activism and the women of the Civil Rights Movement.

V. SPECIFIC RISKS AND PROTECTION MEASURES

Informed Consent:

Each participant will be informed of the nature of the study upon initial contact from the PI. Prior to beginning the formal interview, informed consent will be obtained using an Informed Consent Statement (Appendix C), as well as consent to audio record the interview. Participants who decline will still be able to participate in interviews. However, in this case the interviewer will take detailed notes.

For in-person interviews, each interviewer will explain the confidentiality policy and the participant's right to withdraw from the study, risks, benefits, and safety measures to the participant before having them sign it. The language used in the Informed Consent Statement will be non-technical and understandable to the average individual. The participant will then be given the opportunity to ask any remaining questions.

For interviews conducted over the phone, verbal confirmation of informed consent will be obtained and recorded. The researcher will read the informed consent form to participants and have them give verbal consent, which will be recorded. The researcher will then note that consent has been given on an informed consent form.

If a participant decides to terminate her interview or participation before the study is complete, she will have the option of deciding what will become of the data collected from her up to that point. These options might include that the data be destroyed, returned to the participant, or used "as is".

All signed Informed Consent Statements will be stored in the faculty advisor's office on campus for a period of no less than three years.

Confidentiality:

Though the researcher will know the identity of the participants and the institutions included in this study, each participant will be given the option to self identify or remain anonymous. Those participants will be asked to provide a pseudonym and all other identifying information will be changed accordingly. Transcripts will only be accessible to the researcher. Digital recordings, but not transcriptions, will be destroyed upon

completion of the research project. Transcriptions will be retained by the PI as a digital file to be used in future research related to Black female student activism.

Risks:

There are no foreseeable risks to participants as methods of data collection are non-obtrusive. Some participants may experience mild anxiety or discomfort during interviews. If they become uncomfortable, they are free to stop the interview at any time. If a particular question makes them uncomfortable, they do not have to answer it.

VI. BENEFITS

Participants are not expected to directly benefit from the study. However, this study will help the researcher understand to a greater extent the effectiveness of course materials and teaching strategies within history and women studies and how issues of race, identity and activism affects Black female co-eds.

VII. METHODS FOR OBTAINING "INFORMED CONSENT" FROM PARTICIPANTS

As previously indicated, participants will be provided a copy of the consent form prior to beginning the interview. The researcher will ask the informant if she has any questions prior to the beginning of the interview. If the participant has no questions, the interview will begin. All signed informed consent forms will be stored for a period of three years **under lock and key in the campus office of Dr. Thayer-Bacon (primary advisor).**

VIII. QUALIFICATIONS OF THE INVESTIGATOR(S) TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

The PI has experience as a qualitative researcher. She has served as the PI on two qualitative studies that have utilized interviews and document analysis as the primary methods for data collection. In addition, she has taken courses on qualitative methods including Inquiry and Assessment and Ethnographic Research Methods I & II, which included concepts and skills such as interviewing techniques, data collection and analysis, **and proper fieldwork techniques.** **Finally, the PI has also passed her comprehensive examination, assumed PhD candidacy, and has been advanced to the point of dissertation. This research will serve as her dissertation project.**

IX. FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT TO BE USED IN THE RESEARCH

Interviews will be conducted at a mutually agreed upon date, time, and location by the researcher and the participants. Most, if not all, interviews will take place in the participant's work office or campus. The researcher will use a digital voice recorder and either a personal laptop and/or journal for note taking.

X. RESPONSIBILITY OF THE PRINCIPAL/CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR(S)

By compliance with the policies established by the Institutional Review Board of The University of Tennessee the principal investigator(s) subscribe to the principles stated in "The Belmont Report" and standards of professional ethics in all research, development, and related activities involving human subjects under the auspices of The University of Tennessee. The principal investigator(s) further agree that:

- 1. Approval will be obtained from the Institutional Review Board prior to instituting any change in this research project.**
- 2. Development of any unexpected risks will be immediately reported to Research Compliance Services.**
- 3. An annual review and progress report (Form R) will be completed and submitted when requested by the Institutional Review Board.**
- 4. Signed informed consent documents will be kept for the duration of the project and for at least three years thereafter at a location approved by the Institutional Review Board.**

XI. SIGNATURES

ALL SIGNATURES MUST BE ORIGINAL. The Principal Investigator should keep the original copy of the Form B and submit a copy with original signatures for review. Type the name of each individual above the appropriate signature line. Add signature lines for all Co-Principal Investigators, collaborating and student investigators, faculty advisor(s), department head of the Principal Investigator, and the Chair of the Departmental Review Committee. The following information should be typed verbatim, with added categories where needed:

Principal Investigator: _____

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Co-Principal Investigator: _____

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Student Advisor (if any): _____

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

XII. DEPARTMENT REVIEW AND APPROVAL

The application described above has been reviewed by the IRB departmental review committee and has been approved. The DRC further recommends that this application be reviewed as:

☐ Expedited Review -- Category(s): _____

OR

☐ Full IRB Review

Chair, DRC: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Department Head: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Protocol sent to Research Compliance Services for final approval on (Date) : _____

Approved:
Research Compliance Services
Office of Research
1534 White Avenue

Signature: _____ Date: _____

For additional information on Form B, contact the Office of Research Compliance Officer or by phone at (865) 974-3466.

Reference

- Carson, C. (1995). *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s*. Harvard Press: Cambridge, MA.
- Collins, P.H. (1998). *Fighting words*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
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- hooks, b. (1992). *Black looks: Race and representation*. Boston, MA: South End Press
- Hughett, A. (2010). Always the backbone, rarely the leader: Black women activists and the reconceptualization of respectability during the 1960 Nashville sit-in movement. *Pursuit: The Journal of Undergraduate The University of Tennessee*
- Normore, A. (2008). *Leadership for social justice: Promoting equity and excellence through inquiry and reflective practice*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing
- Payne, C. (1993). "Men Led, but Women Organized: Movement Participation of Women in the Mississippi Delta. Crawford, V. et al. (1993). *Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and torchbearers, 1941-1965*. Indiana University Press: Bloomington, IN

Vita

Tracia Cloud grew up in Lithonia, Georgia. She completed requirements for a Bachelor of Science in Business Information Systems in 2002 from Albany State University. She worked for Albany State for six months while she prepared for graduate school. In 2003, she moved to Oxford, Ohio and in 2005 completed her Masters of Science degree in College Student Personnel from Miami University. Upon graduating, she moved back to Georgia and started her career in higher education administration at The Women's College of Brenau University in Gainesville, GA. She was hired as the Program Coordinator for Student Activities and was promoted to Assistant Director for Student Life and Leadership one year later. Before pursuing her doctoral degree, she worked as the Coordinator for Diversity and International Affairs for University of Georgia College of Veterinary Medicine. Tracia has worked in the field of higher education for nearly 10 years as an administrator, program development, and instructor. Her work has involved education administration in the areas of recruiting and mentoring – specifically – under-represented minority students, multicultural programing, diversity affairs, international affairs, student development, event planning, managing grants, and coordinating community outreach and development programs. In addition, she has taught courses and developed curricula in the areas of social justice of education, multicultural education, career and personal development, and leadership prices and theory. Tracia completed a certificate in Qualitative Research Methods and specialization in Cultural Studies and Foundations of Education at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville in 2011. Upon acceptance of this dissertation, Tracia will

have graduated with a Ph.D. in Learning Environments and Educational Studies from the University of Tennessee at Knoxville in 2013.