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Structural Violence of Schooling: A Genealogy of a Critical Family History of Three Generations of African American Women in a Rural Community in Florida

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Abstract: Through the lens of structural violence, Black feminism and critical family history, this paper explores how societal structures informed by white supremacy shaped the lives of three generations of rural African American women in a family in Florida during the middle to the late twentieth century. Specifically, this study investigates how disparate funding, segregation, desegregation, poverty and post-desegregation policies shaped and limited the achievement trajectories among these women. Further, an oral historical examination of their lives reveals the strategies they employed despite their under-resourced and sometimes alienating schooling. The paper highlights the experiences of the Newman family, descendants of captive Africans in the United States that produced three college-educated daughters and a granddaughter despite structural barriers that threatened their progress. Using oral history interviews, archival resources and first-person accounts, this family's story reveals a genealogy of educational achievement, barriers and agency despite racial and gendered limitations in a Southern town. The findings imply that their schooling mirrors many of the barriers that other Blacks face. However, this study shows that community investment in African American children, plus teachers that affirm students, and programs such as Upward Bound, help to advance Black students in marginalized communities. Further, these women's lives suggest that school curriculums need to be anti-racist and public policies that affirm each person regardless of the color of their skin. A simple solution that requires the structural violence of whiteness be eliminated from the schooling spheres.

Keywords: African American rural women; schooling; structural violence; Florida

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1. Introduction

St. Mary is a four-room, red-brick public elementary school in Washington County, North Florida. Once a beloved place where Black children studied and played, today it is surrounded by overgrown brush and a satellite tower. A new road slices through an area where basketball courts and a baseball diamond once taught children the joys and sorrows of competition.

Twenty-plus miles away to the East in the same county, another school sits forlorn. Roulhac High School honors Mr. Thomas Joseph Roulhac, a self-taught gentleman, who founded the school in 1938 when Jim Crow policies denied his daughters entrance into the formerly all-white Chipley High school. Black children from St. Mary transferred to Roulhac, the only Black school available to them prior to 1967. This school, too, is abandoned, except when former classmates convene for reunions. With desegregation, Roulhac High school—once the pride of the community—became a middle school, reminding former students that the physical facility was not fit for high schoolers.

Both St. Mary and Roulhac schools are concrete reminders of both segregation and desegregation in North Florida; yet records of the students who attended these once-

segregated schools have disappeared from county archives. All that remain are the students' memories.

Oral histories of the lives of former students at these schools offer us insight into the culture of schooling inside and outside these buildings and their relationship to the Black community that established them.

In this paper, we explore the experiences of three generations of women in the Newman family who attended these schools in order to explore how structural violence influenced the efforts of these women to empower themselves through education. The women are Essie Newman, born in 1927; Essie's daughters Jewel, Bernadette, Ayana and Evelyn, whose births range from 1944 to 1958, and Essie's granddaughter, Tina born in 1981. They are twentieth century descendants of ancestors who lived under a legalized system of captivity in the Southern states of Alabama and Florida.

The women's stories highlight the struggles of Black people to acquire schooling and achieve their fullest potentials in the contexts of a Southern economy under Jim Crow segregation and the subsequent alleged period of integration of schools in the United States. Their stories show vividly how Blacks have sought schooling as a buffer against the suffering and banality of racism, even when the schools they attend are built on racist policies. They have pursued and still seek an education that will help them achieve their personal and communal goals, despite their awareness that education derived from schooling is an imperfect panacea (Anderson 1988; Cottrol et al. 2003; Du Bois 2001; Walker 2001). As the women's stories show, achieving their personal and collective goals can be likened to running an obstacle course.

This story of schooling as resistance against racism and a means to uplift is part of the history of Black communities in Florida and elsewhere. In 1927, Blacks in St. Petersburg, Florida invested heavily to turn Gibbs High, a school building formerly built by the county for White elementary school students, into a high school for Blacks. Prior to 1927, Black students had to travel to other parts of the state to attend high school. The stakeholders of the Black community bought a school bus to transport their students to Gibbs High (Phillips 1994).

Although African Americans had scarce resources, they did not wait for the state to provide schooling opportunities. For example, Hortense Powdermaker, an anthropologist who studied race and caste in Mississippi during the 1930's, found that African Americans sacrificed and contributed to the development of their schools (Fairclough 2001). By 1932 African American parents had contributed 17% of the funds to build more than 5000 schools (Walker 2001). Powdermaker further proposed that beginning with former captive Africans (enslaved people), African Americans conceived of schooling as a means for liberation and were proud of their collective efforts of self-reliance to open their own schools. The White power system, unmoved by the schooling needs of Blacks, left them with no other alternative but to pull themselves up by their bootstraps, if they wanted to advance.

A striking aspect of the history of Blacks and schooling in the U.S. is their desire for empowering and non-discriminatory schooling. History shows that after African Americans were freed from captivity, they initiated schools as a vehicle of self-determination to control Black education (Anderson and Moss 1999). The emergence of the public and common schools in the South were primarily driven by ex-captive Africans' (We use captive African instead of the term slave. Captivity replaces slavery. Blacks and African Americans represent the same people in this paper. Although, we understand not all Blacks are African Americans. However, African Americans refer to themselves as Black often.) desire for liberation (Anderson 1988). Unfortunately, many of those schools rested on a foundation of solicited funds from White northern philanthropists, such as the Rockefeller, Phelps Stokes Fund and Carnegie Funds because state legislatures, such as Florida, inadequately funded Black schools. These dollars came with strings attached. William Watkins writes in the *White Architects of Black Education* that White northerners and White southerners found many agreements about Black schools. He further notes northern philanthropists determined the purpose of Black schools was to provide an education that led to servitude,

agricultural workers and to civilize African Americans (Watkins 2001). Anderson (1988) also writes in the *Education of Blacks in the South* that schooling was designed to produce Blacks as second-class citizens who were skilled for only certain positions. Du Bois refuted the philanthropists' condescending approach that industrial schooling was needed for Blacks (Aptheker 1973). Both Carter G. Woodson, the father of African American ("Negro") History Week and W. E. B. Du Bois argued that the feeling of inferiority which captivity forced upon them [Blacks] fathered an intense desire to rise out of their conditions by means of schooling (Du Bois 1935; Woodson 1919). Thus, Blacks as subordinates characterized a dominant ideology of these foundations during the early twentieth century.

African Americans have continued to seek equitable schooling in the United States (Anderson and Moss 1999). The barriers to schooling often require them to confront these issues through courts cases. McPherson (2011) highlights twenty different court cases from 1935 (*Murray v. University to Maryland*) to 2007 (*Meredith v. Jefferson County School Board*) that to remedy discriminatory schooling. Also, included among case is the lesser-known *Augusta v. The School Board of Escambia County, Florida*, an area of North Florida where the Newman family lived.

In most instances, Blacks have perceived schooling as a tool of liberation and shield against racism. They connect knowledge with power and see schooling as the stepping stone to wealth and respect, a belief that led many Blacks who integrated schools to endure abuse and racism (Poff 2016). African Americans "hope that every personal accomplishment . . . lifts the defamatory veil" to improve the reputation and material conditions of Blacks" (Matory 2015, p. 117). In the *Souls of Black Folks*, W. E. B. Du Bois, one of the founding members of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) during the early 1900s, explains that education could untangle African Americans from their legacy of captivity (Du Bois 1990). Reaching one's full potential, African Americans believe schooling is an anesthesia against the pestilence of racism and white supremacy.

African Americans have found themselves in a chess-like atmosphere (Orfield and Frankenberg 2014). Often when they make a move towards freedom, in both society and government in the United States, they confront counter moves to hold them back. On 17 May 1954, the United States Supreme Court decision explicitly states that the doctrine of "separate but equal" has no place in public education (Morgan 1995). Fifty years later, the Supreme Court membership changed. It became color-blind and adopted principles that forbade government actors to remediate societal discrimination (Guinier 2004, p. 93).

Equity is yet unrealized. Walker and Byas (2009) confirm that White school superintendents in many southern states have *sacrificed* many Black faculty on the altar of desegregation. For example, Byas, an African American principal in Georgia with a Columbia University graduate degree, writes about his replacement by a white principal once his school was desegregated. The same authors note that White teachers supplanted 31,504 Black teachers by 1970. By 2006, 80% of the preservice teachers were White and unaware of the culture of Black students (Irvine and Irvine 2007, p. 299).

Desegregation stands as example of the devaluation of Black expertise and the alteration of the pupil-teacher relationship which has historically been the foundation for [Black] student achievement (Irvine and Irvine 2007). During segregation, Black teachers' high expectations contributed to Black students' achievements (Foster 1990). The destruction of black schools, a year after the Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education*, led Zora Neale Hurston to pen a letter to the editor of the Orlando Sentinel newspaper denouncing the damage done. She theorizes the Supreme Court would have better served the Black community by reinforcing compulsory schooling for African Americans rather than integration (Hurston 1955). W.E. B. Du Bois in a letter warns that Black teachers would become rarer and African American children would be taught under unpleasant and discouraging conditions as a result of integration (Aptheker 1973).

The absence of Black teachers and relevant learning reflect "curriculum violence." Such harm to students reinforces a deliberate systematic manipulation of academic programming that ignores or compromises the intellectual and psychological well-being of learners. This

process has led to the inequality that persists to this day (Ighodaro and Wiggan 2011). A lack of resources allocated for transportation, books, curriculum and other amenities necessary for preparing a well-informed and educated Black citizenry, harms students (Rooks 2017). This inequality remains firmly entrenched in institutional structures as evidenced by both poor urban and rural schools and the disparity in academic performance between groups of students, commonly referred to as “an achievement gap” (Ansell 2011; Kozol 2005a).

In the next section, we situate the Newman family women’s stories within the context of critical family history, structural violence and Black feminist thought in order to show the intersections of their race, class, and gender. These frameworks are then followed by a discussion of the methods we used in this study. We then highlight and detail the women’s stories. We then conclude this paper with implications of the women’s experiences for the larger community.

1.1. Critical Family History: Intergenerational Literacy of Rural Black Women in the United States

The schooling of rural African American women and girls and their achievement have been under-researched areas (Wiggan 2007). Historical analysis of the schooling of African American girls and women reveals that the interactive influences of gender, race and sometimes class on their lives is unknown (Thomas and Jackson 2007). Generally, the research focuses on urban and suburban Black girls (Fordham 2016). A review of Academic Search Premier found a single reference for rural Black girls and schooling in the United States (Felton et al. 2002). JSTOR lists 51,338 articles but many of these studies concerning rural Black women are linked to Africa and other continents. A meta-analysis of the literature regarding Black girls in 2016 concludes that Black rural women and girls have been largely invisible in the literacy, schooling, and research literature. Currently, most of the research addresses the global conditions of Black girls and women with few studies that detail the critical family histories of their schooling and lives in rural communities in the United States (Muhammad and Haddix 2016). A need exists to document the qualitative experiences of rural Black girls and their path to self-actualization in a White patriarchal society that devalues their voices and often views them as pathological.

Our research addresses the dearth of studies of the schooling experiences of rural Black women and girls, contributing to a qualitative understanding of the “intergenerational pursuit of knowledge” through schooling during the twentieth century. Sleeter (2014) coined this concept to encourage family historians to examine their family stories in the context of the global political economy that includes colonialism, racism, cooptation of native lands and other forms of structural inequities. Critical family history often relies on oral histories that provide the foundation of research, reinforced by other sources such as census, wills, land deeds, photos and letters. Critical family history places people in social contexts beyond their families (Sleeter 2008). It shows how a family’s struggle for schooling advancement, and economic conditions interacts with the political economy as they seek to improve their lives. This research bridges historical and contemporary conditions that include both micro and macro factors that affect achievement in a family over three generations. Our analysis provides a contextual understanding of the Newman family’s historical and contemporary schooling experiences. It reveals a legacy of educational socialization toward achievement despite obstacles imposed by segregation and Jim Crow racism.

Critical family history of intergenerational literacy provides a framework that disrupts the national myth of the achievement gap that dominates the schooling discourse. This framework situates Black families such as the Newman family, within the larger political economy of racial and gender discrimination and examines the contextual factors that affect their status and functioning.

In a study on intergenerational literacy and professional socialization of teachers in teaching families, Gadsen interviewed 25 African American elders who lived in South Carolina. She compares the education challenges that both the contemporary generations and senior citizens faced. Though she explores intergenerational beliefs about access, she fails to include youth in her sample and does not examine members of the same family

across generations (Gadsen 1992). Pettit and his co-authors associate parenting skills and mothers' education to cross-generational education attainment among elementary school students (Pettit et al. 2009). However, the documentary, *The Intolerable Burden*, highlights the challenges Mae Bertha and Matthew Carter's children endured when they integrated the dominant White schools in Drew, Mississippi in 1965. This video uncovers how many Whites fled to the private Christian academies, as public schools re-segregated and became conduits to prisons when predominantly White school boards withdrew resources from them (Curry and Prince 2003). An investigation of the intergenerational strength of the Newman family aims to contribute to a critical perspective on family literacy (Chaney 2014, p. 29).

1.2. Structural Violence

Structural violence helps us to explore the ways in which discrimination harms the advancement of the Newman women's lives. Structural violence is a systematic oppression of groups based on the institutional arrangements that deny people's basic needs and opportunities to achieve their fullest potential and the avoidable harm that results (Galtung 1969). Structural violence may be either interpersonal or institutional (Oliver 2001). It facilitates a social structure of inequality and normalizes discrimination, marginalization, and negation (Allison 1995; Buck 2010; Galtung 1969; Klugman 2012; Morris 2004). Almost seventy years after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, schools in the United States remain unequal as a result of Eurocentric curricula (Burney 2012); the negation of African American culture (Dickar 2008; Oliver 1989); the education debt (Gregory et al. 2010; Ladson-Billings 2006); and the segregation and re-segregation of classrooms (Blanchett 2006; Kozol 2005b; McPherson 2011; Orfield and Eaton 1996). Discrimination blocks Black students from advanced placement and college preparatory classes because Blackness is associated with inferiority (Morris 2004). These actions have been legalized and affirmed ideologically.

Structural violence is part of the "social machinery" of social inequality which constrains the economic and social development of African American women by placing them on the margins (Scheper-Hughes 2004). The structure of social inequality is predicated on the dominance of Whites (Allison 1995). Gramsci describes this process as cultural hegemony, recognized through the superimposition of the dominant society over another group by ideologies, laws, beliefs, explanations and values (Gramsci 1971).

Such ideologies and practices harm African Americans, socially, physically, psychologically and economically (LeCompte and Marrias 1990; Orfield and Frankenberg 2014). Specifically, structural violence supports the systemic oppression, exploitation and racism that restrict African Americans' opportunities in school settings (Du Bois 2001; Johnson et al. 2007; Ladson-Billings and Tate 2006; Palmer 2014).

Contemporary scholars have investigated the impact of structural violence woven into many educational policies associated with the oppression of Latinx and African American students (Garcia-Reid 2008; Ladson-Billings 2013; Mustafa 2017; Oliver 2001). These structures exist on principles of inequality while not explicitly stated in contemporary times as they were in pre-Civil Rights days, but operationalized and legitimized in the laws and public policies that affect Black lives.

Ladson-Billings (2013) introduces the *education debt* into the scholarly discourse, arguing that historical, economic, socio-political, and moral components of inequality shape the contours of the United States and prevent Black students from realizing their full potential. The *education debt* facilitates the *achievement gap* between White students and their African American counterparts (Milner 2012; Patterson et al. 2008). It is the most tangible proof of persistent inequalities in spite of the efforts Blacks expend to achieve a quality schooling (Ferguson 2003; Harris et al. 2004).

Class positionality influenced by racial discrimination is a major determinant in the quality of schooling received in various schools. Throughout the United States, schooling is a commodity determined by the worth of one's property. Wealthy neighborhoods with high property value signify well-resourced public schools. Such funding often aligns

with race—wealthy and White, poor and Black (Bruce et al. 2019; Kent and Sowards 2009). Jonathan Kozol's *Savage Inequalities* demonstrates that in Black neighborhoods, some schools have poorly lit squalid classrooms and fetid restrooms and others in well-heeled communities are well-appointed sanitized castles of learning (Kozol 1991). Yet, the United States Supreme Court in 1972 records no harm in tax-based schooling in *San Antonio v. Rodriguez* regardless of funding disparities (Walsh 2018). Housing is the foundation of legalized unequal schooling (Orfield 2005). Despite many litigations to remove property tax as the foundation of school financing, this problem remains and class and race remain mediators for schooling.

1.3. Black Feminist Thought

Patricia Hill Collins's framework of "Black feminist thought" enables us to examine the Newman women's stories in the context of the structural violence of gender intersected by race and class. Collins argues, Black women have a defined standpoint on their own oppression and can articulate how race and gender have structured their lives (Collins 1989). These women's experiences provide insight into their everyday acts of resistance and the resilience by which they challenge a dominant narrative that they are inferior.

Societal structures, especially molded in whiteness, shape how African American women see their world and adjust to the challenges they confront. A ground-breaking article, *Whiteness as Property*, reveals how a structure of violence influences the lives of Black women. White and Black are not oppositional (Cooper 2018). Instead, "White" has incorporated "Black" as subordination (Harris 2012, p. 1710).

The valorization of whiteness, the exclusion of Black women from social validation, and an ideology of true womanhood, determine and shape Black women's standards of beauty, body images, as well as their perceptions of everyday life (Battle 2016; Candelario 2000; Cruz-Gutiérrez 2020; Henderson 2019). Scholars explore how Black women have had to behave, dress and wear their hair in order to be "respected" (Candelario 2000; Mathews 2015; Phillips 2004). Black women in the United States are characterized as "other" (duCille 1994; Hooks 1992).

Fanon (1967) hypothesizes that whiteness keeps the Black person in a perpetual state of deep inner insecurity that either inhibits or falsifies every relation with others. The dialectics of being in a black body means that Black women's sense of self is never washed free of race and gender among the many complexities of their identities, no matter how hard they try. In his landmark book, *The Souls of Black Folk*, W.E. B. Du Bois identifies this process as "double-consciousness." He explains that "one ever feels his twoness, an American, a "Negro"; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (Du Bois 1990, p. 38).

Blacks, as exemplified by the Newman women, struggle to resist the power of whiteness to displace their humanity. In the process they challenge both racism and sexism. We coin the experience of Black women as *double-consciousness squared*. African American women must fight to achieve their authentic working-class selves in both gendered and racial spheres.

2. Methods

Women's oppression throughout the world is reinforced by silencing and ignoring their histories and voices (Armitage and Gluck 1998). In this study, we use oral history, a form of qualitative research, to understand how schooling intersects the lives of six African American women from a rural northwest Florida community and contributes to their advancement, current status and achievement. Oral history is an approach that excavates memories and lived experiences placed in social contexts to understand the history of a group of people (Chowdhury 2014). It permits the participants to tell their stories and researchers to interpret those life stories to emphasize historical connections (Ritchie et al. 1991, 2003). Oral histories additionally serve as a means of giving sound to the unheard

and those who have been denied a place in the historical narratives about life and events in a particular place and time.

The women in this study are descendants of captives who were *worked to the bone*. Much like their ancestors, they never imagined that their life stories would one day be found in print. As such, oral history is an appropriate method for understanding these women's consciousness and their coping strategies (Armitage and Gluck 1998). Oral histories can also express nostalgia which is a form of homesickness and a yearning for something that cannot be replaced. Thus, the researcher must critically analyze these data without dismissing the stories as "false historical consciousness" (Shircliffe 2001, p. 62).

The six women in this study include three generations—a mother, her four adult daughters and a grown granddaughter who all received schooling in the same geographical area of Northern Florida from middle-to-late twentieth century. An oral history of each woman's schooling and how that experience shaped their life, is the core of this paper.

Oral histories include many dimensions and must be investigated with supporting documents to gain an appreciation for the factors that shape lives. Both primary and secondary sources help the researcher establish meaning of narratives in the context of the larger society and time. Supporting documents might include, interviews, photos, participant observations, and archival data. The latter data are essential to the documentation of oral histories because they help place memories and experiences in social contexts (Swain 2003). In this study, archival data used include newspapers, policy data regarding schools, both the Florida and United States Census data, and the online database Ancestry.com. We examined these sources to determine the demographics of the community in which the Newmans reside. Ancestry.com provides information about Essie's parents, grandparents and extended family. Data were also obtained from The Tampa Bay Times newspaper, Florida Memory—the state and Library archives of Florida, the Genealogy Bank, an online data bank of newspapers and obituaries. Among these resources, the State archives also held the World War I draft report of Essie's grandfather and a photo of Essie's mother as a sitter for White children in a preschool.

Semi-structured interviews, the core of the research, ranged from an hour to a couple of hours. They date back to 2007 when I [Evelyn] noticed that fewer educational opportunities for colleges were available to a younger generation of people in her birth community, Riverside. This concern led me to a conversation with my mother, Essie who told me a story about her own grandmother, who in the 1930s wrote a letter to the Florida Governor David Scholtz [1930–1937] to complain about how a game warden forced her husband to return fish that he caught to the river. Essie used that story to explain the importance of schooling. Essie swore that the warden lost his job because of her grandmother's advocacy for her husband who could not read and write. She always said after the warden lost his job, he walked around town "like a butt-headed ox." Ironically, the letter that her grandmother wrote to Governor Scholtz has not been located in the archives.

Conversations with my mother, led me to conduct formal semi-structured interviews with her while she visited with me during the summer of 2007. The interviews between my mother and me occurred over a two-week period, totaling approximately five hours. I later sent each of my three siblings and my niece a letter and followed up with telephone calls and emails. Then I interviewed my siblings and niece. My siblings and niece responded to some of the questions via email. I then conducted interviews over the phone that lasted between one and two hours.

I recorded all interviews with my siblings and niece except Jewel and my mother. These interviews with my mother and Jewel I did not tape-record, to allow for ease, comfort and flow of conversation. However, soon after the conversations, I wrote reflection notes. Occasionally, I jotted down notes during interviews with my mother and Jewel. I sent each of the women, copies of the transcripts of their interviews. Often Essie, my mother repeated poems she learned in schools. The interviews became a form of bonding that extended to my siblings and niece.

Unlike my mother, my sister, Jewel never visited my home. I telephoned her during the initial interview. Then most often on Saturdays, I followed up with her to clarify questions as she either washed clothes, cooked or watched the Rays, her favorite baseball team. If the Rays played, our brief conversations ended after a couple of minutes. Jewel finds no time to engage in social media and other technology except for her basic cell phone. Even when our mama was called “Google Mom” because she consistently searched the Internet, Jewel remained grounded to the analogue technology. Our conversation began over the telephone. Other times we chatted about our schooling during the last week in June during our Annual Family Reunion that she initiated after our young teen cousin drowned while swimming in a clay pit one summer in 1990. My other siblings and my niece responded in emails and telephone conversations.

A list of prompts, along with consent forms, were emailed to each of the participants after which semi-structured interviews took place either in person or by phone.

After collecting the data, I transcribed the interviews and reviewed the reflection notes from discussions and observations. I then sent the final transcripts of the interviews inclusive of the telephone calls and the email responses to each participant for clarity. Finally, I wrote a narrative of their experiences and sent it to them for feedback.

Wangari Gichiru this paper’s second author, asked to join the research and helped analyze the data and identified the following themes: Structural violence and dogged determination as central themes. The following section presents the stories of the women.

The Newman Women and Their Stories

In this section, we present each woman’s story examining the patterns that apply. All names are pseudonyms, except my name.

The women in this study include three generations—a mother, her four adult daughters, and a grown granddaughter. All women received schooling in the same geographical area of Florida from the early to late twentieth century. These women include Essie, the mother born in 1927, her daughters whose births range from 1944 to 1958 and a granddaughter, Tina born in 1981. We are descendants of ancestors who lived under a legalized system of captivity that incarcerated their great-great grandparents in unpaid labor and valued them as three-fifths of a human.

“An illiterate has no power . . . ” Essie (1940s)

Essie, my mother, is a ninety-three-year-old retiree who grew up in Riverside, Florida, a small community segregated by race in both geography and livelihood. Essie lived in Riverside most of her life, except for short stints in the Midwest and other parts of Florida. She has been rooted in the same community that her maternal great-great grandfather moved to after being freed from captivity in Ozark, Alabama. Her ancestors built homes on the land, farmed, fished and worked at sawmills. Pine forests and sawmills drew many to Riverside during the early 1900s. It remained a fairly vibrant community until the 1970s.

This ancestral land marked Essie’s territory until the construction of Interstate 10 Highway and the Choctawhatchee River spilled out of its banks too often for the community’s safety. The interstate and the floods, with the help of FEMA, dispersed the town closest to the Choctawhatchee River in 1990. Only the post office, town hall, community center and a convenience store remain in that floodplain. A decade later, bush reclaims the former homesteads. Only paved driveways and fire hydrants indicate the former homesteads.

After her mother and grandparents died, Essie lived on the land that her grandparents had purchased, less than a half-kilometer away from the home where she and her siblings were born and raised. Both her maternal aunt and uncle and her sister resided nearby. Essie and her husband and four daughters remained there until the construction of Interstate 10 highway uprooted the family and forced them to move to the other side of town.

Essie is a petite, light brown-skin woman with an easy smile and hazel eyes whose face and shoulder-length grey hair belie her over nine decades on earth. Her mind is still sharp. Only her unsteady gait on her walking-stick suggests the years that have passed. When we began our conversations and storytelling, she was more agile. Essie’s stories

bonded us as we sat in my family room in the afternoons after I awoke each morning to the smell of vinegar and newspapers, she used to clean my windows. My mother's visits to me in New England after my semester ended always meant that she would begin deep housing cleaning that would leave me no choice but to join her in the fight against the year's grime on my window. During her two-week visits, work in the mornings ended with stories of the past as the afternoon sun turned the television room a warm orange. In the warm glow of that room set off from the deck, she would retell many stories of her past life.

Essie is the second oldest of five children—the third generation of post-emancipation African captives in our family. Her three brothers died between 30 and 20 years ago. Only her younger sister survives. Essie grew up in an extended household with her mother and maternal grandparents in a compound-like atmosphere. Her maternal aunt and uncle lived close-by—less than a kilometer from the home of their birth.

Essie has steadfastly kept her faith in both marriage and religion. For sixty plus years she stayed married to the same man and actively committed her energies to the Spirit-filled Church of God in Christ church. Along with her husband and approximately ten others, Essie founded the church in 1958. Her dedication to the church often included attending services at least three times a week. The church remains the center of her life.

Essie fulfilled most of the roles expected of an African American woman born before the Depression—wife, mother, churchgoer, and wage-earner. With the help of her husband and extended family, she raised four daughters—Jewel, Evelyn, Bernadette and Ayana.

Essie spent most of her life working jobs historically reserved for Brown and Black persons in the United States. She welded ships during World War II and cleaned homes before northern-owned factories moved to the Sunbelt. Then, she sewed blouses in factories. When those factories moved overseas to exploit the labor of other poor people, she worked in a chicken factory, cleaned people's homes, and retired in 1994 from working in a nursing home. Essie also became a realtor and an insurance agent. Until recent, she served on community boards to give back. She initiated a weekly Wednesday gathering for elders at the town's community center.

Essie's jobs mirror the trends of low paying positions offered to women in rural Florida and the global economy. Essie estimates that her highest salary was approximately \$12,000. Jim Crow and the practices of global capital circumscribed her life, especially the level of education she was able to obtain.

Despite her many accomplishments, Essie struggled to finish high school. At age sixteen she entered the 9th grade. She explained that she did not go to school immediately after she left elementary school due to lack of transportation to the high school that was twenty miles away. This obstacle not only delayed her entry into the 9th grade, but ultimately led to her early departure from high school.

Essie felt a sense of incompleteness regarding her education until in 1970 when she returned to night school to graduate with a GED from the St. Mary's Elementary school that turned briefly into a community center for Black people. All her primary educational experiences existed in all-Black local and county public schools.

Memories of school bring easy smiles and joy to Essie. She remembers fondly the wooden-framed small school in her neighborhood that was later turned into a church for Whites. This school shaped her elementary schooling. Essie recalls:

We walked to school. Our school was in Riverside. We had to take our lunches. Our first years of school, we had two classrooms. Rev. N.B. Blackshear taught on one side and Ms. Cora Goldsmith taught on the other side... There were three schools, St. Mary's school, Friendship school and our Colored school. We had a hand pump under the oak tree. Everybody took his or her own glasses and cups. We had an outdoor toilet. We never got indoor plumbing.

Miss Christine was our teacher after Mr. Blackshear and Goldsmith left. She had the whole school. She would let you do your work. If you told her you were ready, you better be ready. She did not have any children, but she knew how to handle children.

Miss Christine *was sooo smart*. Unlike the other schools, where the parents had to pay for school supplies, such as mops and brooms, she would send us to store to get it from Barry Williams (a White storekeeper). He would charge the county. *She was very smart*.

They closed our school. They turned it into a church. Miss Christine turned her home into a school. *She was smart . . .* I already knew my alphabets before I went to school. I was always up at the head of the class.

My mother, Essie remembers her teachers as having a passion for knowledge and for the community. Her teachers and her mother taught her to recite poems and held spelling bees. Essie brags that she knows how to spell and her timetables.

Every Friday we had a spelling match. Bobbie Wafer, Tensi Lee Couch and I were the smartest. We liked being at the end of the line so we could bump up to the top. I knew all of my alphabets before I went to school. I knew how to spell especially as early as the second grade. My mother taught me my timetables on a cardboard that she placed on the wall. You know we did not have much. I learned my 9 times table. It gets me that students do not know their tables.

I recall when we were young my mother drilled us constantly on our times-tables. We did not use the cardboard but the timetables that were on the back pages of the black and white composition books. Essie went on:

I used to say long speeches. Mama and them would teach me how to say the speeches after I learn the words. You had to learn to say it. I learned to pause and count under my breath to four if it was period. After a common, count to three.

Essie recalls:

I won second place prize in a countywide speech contest for reciting Paul Laurence Dunbar's "Little Brown Baby" when I was around six years old . . . My cousin Josephine, who was 8 years old, won first prize. I won second prize. When school closed, we had plays and dialogues—actual plays like on television. One play I remember was the *Lost Noreen*.

Essie says some lines from the play:

"I hope you won't forget Noreen. Fair well, Fair well." I was the queen.

In the morning close by Spring . . . I shall rise where the golden apple grow.

Then she recites from the Paul Dunbar poem, "Little Brown Baby":

Little brown baby wif spa'klin' eyes,

Come to yo' pappy an' set on his knee.

What you been doin', suh—makin' san' pies?

Look at dat bib—you's es du'ty ez me.

Look at dat mouf—dat's merlasses, I beau t;

Come hyeah, Maria, an' wipe off his han's.

Bees gwine to ketch you an' eat you up yit,

Bein' so sticky an sweet—goodness lan's . . .

After listening to my mother recite these poems, I asked her if she learned them for contests. She replied, "No, it was a part of our lesson. Miss Christine made sure we learned".

Looking through today's cultural lens, the dialect in Paul Laurence Dunbar's poem seems complex for even an adult to learn. But it was not strange to Essie during the 1940s when the majority of the community retained much of the Africanism in their language. (The language in Dunbar's poem uses dialect as a living language to depict the life of rural Blacks).

Despite her intelligence, World War II pushed Essie out of school. When she began to attend high school, her family's precarious financial status could not sustain her attempts. She tells how her mother would not allow the teacher to beat her and her siblings in the hand because they had to use their hands for work. Essie explains the arrangement that allowed her to attend high school initially:

My folks were not able to rent a place for me to stay in Chipley [The town where the high school was located]. So, Miss Campbell [a teacher at the high school] married someone in Ponce De Leon and drove to Chipley every day. I would walk to Highway 90 [main road] and catch them. But when the war broke out gas was rationed. They had to move to Chipley. So that was the end of that.

I asked Essie if anyone ever talked to her about going to college:

Kids around here were not going to high school and college. People did not talk about it or even encourage us to go beyond the eighth grade. Even many teachers did not go to college; they only had an eighth-grade education. All of mama's [her maternal grandmother] sisters were teachers. Eighth grade was max.

I noticed the girls and the boys of my age worked on the railroad. They would work in the office typing out something on the machine. I should have been able to do that.

Instead, I started to work at the shipyard. Carolyn [a friend] was eighteen. We lied about our age, but we got hired.

After that job, her work history would include cleaning other peoples' homes for most of her life until she got a GED. After that, she would become a realtor and participate on community boards. Nevertheless, her annual salary of \$12,000 indicates the long-term effect of her schooling. Although she never attended college, she became a janitor at a community college seventy miles from home and found ways to inspire the black students. Eventually, her own children walked through the doors that remained closed to her.

"He knew me and I knew him." Jewel (Early 1960s)

Jewel is the oldest of Essie's four children and the mother of an adult son and Tina, highlighted in this paper. She is a divorcee currently in her mid-seventies and living in Florida. Jewel attended St. Mary's Elementary School until the eighth grade and in the ninth grade transferred to Roulhac High school. She graduated from high school in 1962, just as the sixties civil rights movement heated up. However, Jewel's life remained relatively untouched by these dramatic events.

Riding on a school bus to school and having running water in the red brick St. Mary's elementary school marked the main differences in Jewel's and her mother's schooling. Second-hand books passed down from White students were Jewel's textbooks, just as they were her mother's. Occupations remained circumscribed by race and gender in Riverside and in many other places throughout Florida during Jewel's early life. The majority of Jewel's classmates either migrated to larger cities or stayed in town where few jobs required a high school education. Black women cleaned houses of White women for slave wages, while young Black men harvested pulp wood, farmed vegetables, worked in construction and turned trees to lumber at the sawmill yards. The few white-collar jobs, such as store clerks, largely remained a sealed-off opportunity in that small town, unless generated by the Black community. Those entrepreneur activities included, construction companies, jook joints and corner stores.

As the oldest child, Jewel cooked and supervised her three younger siblings while our parents worked. Her life's work was forever linked to caretaking. After graduation, Jewel served as a Teacher Aide and a Secretary at St. Mary's Elementary School for four years until school segregation ended in the county. After that job, she migrated to the Tampa Bay area and cooked in various restaurants. Finally, she returned home and worked as a cook in a nursing home until she retired. In retirement, Jewel is known as wonderful cook, who hosts fundraisers for distressed and bereaved families and actively participates in the church her mother Essie helped found.

The foundation of Jewel's schooling are her years at St. Mary's:

At St. Mary's we had 7th and 8th grades together. Mr. Wilson taught that school. Mrs. Russ 4th, 5th and 6th grades. Mrs. White had kindergarten, first grade and third grade.

We always had homework. We always had homework. It was challenging. I made A's and B's.

The school principal and the only male teacher who taught Jewel during those formative years of her early teens, greatly impressed her:

Mr. Wilson [the principal] always had us to do book reports on history. We did not think it had anything to do with anything. He was real rough on us learning poems like Macbeth. Sometimes the information comes in handy when watching *Wheel of Fortune* and other games shows. He also taught us about batting averages. We always listened to the Baseball World Series. He always brought his radio during the playoffs and he taught us about the game.

To understand how the curriculum reinforced the identity of Black students, I asked Jewel if she recalled learning anything about Black History. She replied:

Not really. Some of the people we wrote book reports on were Black. We always celebrated the 20th of May. We did not know what it was about. The community came together. Mrs. Rosie and Mrs. Tine Ola were there.

The Twentieth of May is Emancipation Day for African Americans in Florida. According to the Tallahassee Historical Society, 20 May 1866 celebrated “universal freedom” (Kenneson 2020). African Americans in Florida continue to celebrate 20 May as their “Juneteenth,” not as frequently as previously because Whites control the schools now. The women Jewel refers to are community members who were close family friends to our grandmother. They arrived at the school very early and set up pots to prepare a fish fry. According to our mother, these women organized the celebration. They would go fishing to prepare for this important day that marked Black people’s freedom in Florida. Sack races that required competitors to hop in a burlap bag to the end of a line and other games kept the youth engaged. Although the school opened, no classroom instructions occurred that day.

Although the teachers did not discuss the meaning of the Twentieth of May, Jewel observed that Mr. Wilson encouraged them to know history. She said:

He intended for you to get your lesson. He always wanted you to know your history. He said you had to know history and why things happened. At the time, I did not think it made a difference but now I understand. He really focused on getting your lesson.

In addition to Mr. Wilson, Jewel relates how she really enjoyed her mathematics teacher, Mrs. McElroy: I liked math. She always told us to pay attention and get your lesson. She encouraged you to have a future. Mrs. Campbell and Mrs. McElroy always encouraged us to go on to college.

However Jewel notes, “. . . People over all were not encouraged to go to college We really did not think about school to prepare us for a future beyond. We were just going to school.” Although Jewel and her classmates were sometimes encouraged to attend college, the school offered little help on how to get there. She explains: We made no college trips to see what colleges were like. We did not have counselors. They said we were behind. We did not have books like they had [Whites]. Mrs. White [an elementary school teacher] used to tell us that the books were different.

Howard Milton, a local educator in rural Northwest Florida confirmed Jewel’s statement. He observed, “The black community needed an educational facility which could motivate the high school graduates to aspire for educational opportunities beyond the secondary level” (Smith 1994, p. 213).

Prior to 1961, Florida A & M University, more than a hundred miles away, was the closest university to Riverside that Blacks could attend. Money and distance stood between high school and college for my sister and many other African Americans in many Northwest Florida communities during early Sixties.

Our parents aspired for wider opportunities for Jewel, but their lack of knowledge regarding the college admission process proved problematic. The summer after graduation, they bought Jewel a typewriter and hoped that it would help her to succeed in college. Buying a typewriter was a major sacrifice, given my mother and stepfather’s low-wage jobs. At that time, Essie cleaned the homes of White women, an hour drive from her home, for five dollars a day. Our father made \$1.15 an hour, to care for a family of six. They were proud of Jewel graduating and the typewriter was of symbol of upward mobility and her

going to college. However, they knew nothing about college entrance procedures. My parents took Jewel to Jackson County Junior College and applied for her to enter college a couple of weeks before the beginning of the semester. The college was just four rooms added to the historically African American Jackson Country Training High School whose teachers taught both the high school and college students. This college existed not to open students to a wider world, but to prevent African American students from integrating the then all-White Chipola Junior College, a public college. Jackson County Junior College existed only four years. The first year only 47 students attended.

Our parents assumed the application process for college mirrored that of high school. They sadly learned that the process required both more time and money than they had. The long-expired deadline for the college application and their low-wage jobs did not leave enough money to pay tuition on the spot, after they paid the monthly bills required to live. Jewel moved on and college floated away as a goal, despite her academic promise. However, later after she had children, Jewel ensured that her daughter, Tina's path to college was not blocked.

Jewel recollects how she often intervened when Tina was expelled from the school bus after a young white boy called her "Blackie" and other pejorative names:

Tina was the only black student that rode the bus, except the year when Kiki rode it. She was in 10th or 11th grade when a little boy would always call her "blackie" or "nigger". Then one day he spat in her face. When he did, Tina slapped him. It happened on a Friday. The bus driver told her she was put off the bus. Tina was afraid to tell me. I told her she was going to catch the bus. I told her not to be scared. I would ride behind the bus all the way over there. I told her to tell Mr. Lock (the principal) to make no decision until I get in there.

He suspended her off the bus. I told him that I was single I worked late, and I could not pick her up after school, so she had to ride the bus. That was not an option. I asked him why he did not do anything about the little boy who called her *blackie and nigger*. I asked him to ask the other students about what happened. I explained that the kids had called Tina those names. Why didn't he do anything about that?

Tina was bright and it seemed that she was on a path to college when she received a Bright Futures Scholarships during her senior year. In 1997 the Florida Legislature created this scholarship program, funded by the Florida Lottery. It rewarded students for their academic achievements during high school by providing funding for them to pursue postsecondary educational and career goals in Florida ([Office of Student Financial Assistance n.d.](#)). Jewel's voice rose and her face turned flaming red as she explained the racism that her daughter encountered after receiving the scholarship:

The school never turned the information in to Chipola [the college that did not allow Blacks when Jewel tried to go to school.] I kept calling him and the counselor and they never turned it in. So, I went to the school board after Tina had gone to Chipola and they told her it was not there and that was the last day to register. I called him and I wanted to know why her scholarship was not there. I wanted to know did she earn it. He said she did. After I called the school board, 15 min Tina called me and said that the scholarship was there. There were 5 black students when she graduated. It was never more than 3 kids in her class. I knew him. [The Principal] I would see him at the nursing home. He always complained about something wrong with his mother. *He knew me and I knew him*. I guess it was in him. (She implies the racism was his belief).

Jewel won both of those battles—the battle of returning Tina to the school bus and getting her scholarship. The conditions that Jewel confronted when she graduated from high school may have prevented her from going to college, but she fought to ensure that her daughter Tina was able to attend.

"I crossed the Jim Crow line." Evelyn (Late 1960s)

I am the second of four daughters born to my mother during the mid-twentieth century. I have traveled extensively, but my roots are in the same soil as my mother and siblings.

We came from a rural Black community filled with love more than money. My schooling for much of my life took place in the same buildings where my older sister studied.

Returning to Riverside always causes me to question why so many of the younger generation in the community did not go on to college. The issue of schooling is especially troubling when I consider how many of my classmates from the tiny Black elementary school managed to not only attend college but achieved upper middle-class status. In a class of ten students from that elementary school, we acquired doctorates, worked in the White House, managed people at multinational companies, designed products, ran businesses, and became clerks. Yet none of our parents achieved college degrees. What separated our generation from others? These factors encouraged me to explore my own family's experiences.

I grew up believing in the myth of meritocracy. I heard that if people worked hard enough, they would succeed. Of course, when I became an anthropologist and realized how the political economy affects what we can achieve, I no longer believed that lie.

Yet, very early in my life, my mother stimulated in me an awareness of the world. Before I entered first grade, after my sister Jewel had gone to school and the house was quiet, Mama would read daily to me the Pensacola News Journal. I recall one day she read about people fighting in the streets because they did not want "Negro" children to go to their school. That day, I became aware of anti-blackness, although it was not called that then.

The possibility of going to a school that primarily served White students would not become a reality until I reached my senior year in high school. Meanwhile, I attended first grade through eighth grade at St. Mary's. Like my mother and sister, I consider myself a decent student. I was in the top tier of my 10-member class. However, I found no joy in mathematics. I read. Reading took me to various places far from my rural life.

As I recall those days in first and second grade, I remember reading about Alice and Jerry and their dog Jip. The children's father came home from work with a briefcase while Alice, Jerry, and Jip explored the outdoors. The family lived in a white house, a symbol of what I have come to see as a middle-class suburban life. That depiction of White life was far from my reality, where fathers wore overalls and brought left-over food in tin lunch boxes. In addition, we learned to write on a pad of rough paper with several lines in groups of threes, so we would write the alphabets and numbers within the boundaries of the lines.

Those halcyon days existed in an ensconced Black community. We rode to school in a yellow school bus driven by Mr. Sanders, arriving at our school around 7:30 am, while he continued on his route to drop off the high school students at Roulhac. Once we arrived, morning devotions began with Bible scriptures and songs such as "She'll be Coming Around the Mountain" and "I Wish I born in the Land of Dixie." As I progressed towards the seventh and eighth grade, I was taught the Gettysburg address and poems of Walt Whitman, and read books such as the *Legend of Sleepy Hollow*. And incredibly our male teacher shared with us *The Wretched of the Earth* by Franz Fanon. We read the Junior Scholastic and Weekly Reader in the fifth and sixth grade. The Weekly Reader always had an inset about a child from another part of the world. Mr. Wilson taught us about George Washington Carver and Booker T. Washington. Yet, our text books described Africans as "barbarians" and "uncivilized" and "Negroes" as "underprivileged." None of our teachers addressed the contradiction.

During the spring, all the upper-class students from the sixth to the eighth grades participated in a final play held at the St. Mary's church nearby. I always had a part to learn. The county did not build an auditorium nor a library for our school. I do not know if the White school had such facilities. Our teachers tried to expose us to the theater arts and elocution. However, I realize now so much of their learning approach was based on "the banking method," to use Paulo Freire's words.

I remember going home and telling my mother what we read about Africans. As she sat under the shield of a huge pecan tree, she stopped me and said, "We do not call people barbarians and uncivilized." Later when "Underprivileged" popped up in the lexicon, she

told me, "Stop saying you are underprivileged." She never said that the teachers and the books were incorrect, but she surely did not want me to speak such terms.

For eight years, the ritual of schooling allowed us space to roam on the playgrounds and live within a Black world, except when a county art teacher, a White woman, came and taught us art. She often reminded us of the art supplies that we didn't have. We always knew that we competed with the White students as we studied behind the segregated veil of racism. But in our daily lives, we did not have to contend directly with White people and their racism.

Like my sister Jewel, I transferred to Roulhac High school. On the twenty-mile ride there I had a chance to observe many spaces and businesses that were closed to Blacks. My ninth-grade homeroom teacher exposed me to the Civil Rights Movement up close. Ms. Leontyne, a young Black woman who recently graduated from college, participated in the Selma to Montgomery March. She returned and reported to us what happened. In my eyes, she was courageous. I did not know anyone who had marched and fought openly the discrimination that we faced.

The Klan rode through our neighborhood, while our parents peeped out behind closed curtains with a gun by their side and my sisters and I laid on the floor. I never knew what prompted the Klan's actions. Perhaps, they wanted to warn us not to protest as other Blacks were. In that town, both Blacks and Whites were in the same boat—poor. Only the racial veil separated our condition. They benefitted from the whiteness of their skin. Yet, many of them seemed poorer than the Blacks. Ms. Leontyne reminded us that we had the power to both be smart and confront racism. In response, I took History, Algebra, Geometry, Typing, Home Economics, Chemistry and Spanish classes.

Mrs. Edna McElroy used to tell all her students, "There are some students taking mathematics and there are mathematic students. Which one are you?" I took mathematics. The most memorable event in my high school years was becoming a member of student council and having permission to attend a conference at Raines High School in Jacksonville. That event was a breakthrough to a bigger world and a new all-Black High School.

Consistently my parents denied me opportunities to participate in extra-curricular activities. I was not allowed to attend dances and surely not the prom. Dating was off limits. My parents maintained that Pentecostal church people did not engage in such activities. My sisters and I were on "lockdown." The only social activities included going to church and visiting cousins. No lipstick, shorts, pants and short dresses were allowed. If my mother was home as we rushed out of the door to get on the school bus, she would check to see if our dresses were above the knee. When we protested, her comeback was: "What will people think of me?" In defiance of my mother's rules, once I got to school, I went to bathroom and adjusted my dress to fit the current style.

My parents' strict demands on my life made me an outsider at school. Besides my cousin who was in the same grade, I had one close friend who had recently moved from Germany to the school and had grown up Pentecostal. In our junior year she transferred to Chipley High. In my senior year, I decided to join her since the state offered us a choice plan for schools. Surprisingly, my parents only questioned if this was really what I wanted to do, and my mother told me not to try dating any White boys.

In 1967 during, a year before Roulhac High school closed, I crossed the Jim Crow line and transferred to Chipley High. I was one of four Black youth in my senior class of approximately sixty seniors. My best friend and I entered the advanced senior level class.

Both White administrators and White students saw the Black students who entered "their schools" as interlopers. We met a cold reception that sometimes made us feel like aliens. I felt that both faculty and students tried to make us Black students feel as comfortable as a Florida alligator in the Arctic Ocean. Many White teachers and students routinely called Black students "Nigrars," a code word for "Niggers." During the lunch hour, most White students fled from tables like birds fleeing cats to avoid contact with any approaching Black person. Instead of retreating, the Black students often capitalized on the White students' fears and occupied any table they desired.

Unlike in the segregated Black school setting, affirmation of Black students' intellect was a low priority in the White school, and no attempt was made to veil racism. The White adults revealed their deeply held racial prejudices and often failed to fulfill their roles as educators. I recall two incidences among many.

Annually, the Chipley High School senior speech class produced a play. The speech teacher decided that there were not enough roles to accommodate everyone in the class, especially the two Black students. Therefore, she created roles explicitly for the two Black students in the class—Abebe and me. Despite our Afro hairstyles, the sixty-plus year-old teacher decided that the only roles appropriate for the two Black girls to play were the roles of nursemaids singing with a banjo. The blackface was the only thing missing! The edifices of racism so tightly wound her consciousness that she could only see us as stereotypes. Sadly, for Abebe and me, the speech class was a part of our grades; we had to participate to graduate. Though we both sported Afros, we were not fully self-actualized and did not possess the capacity to tell an aging White teacher that the roles she created for us were blatantly racist stereotypes of Blacks. We did not dare to openly express our disdain for these roles that we did not wish to play.

Before the play, I distinctly remember Mrs. Love, the speech teacher, placing a white and blue-trimmed nursing cap on my head and immediately after touching my hair, looking at her hands and asking for a tissue, as if she had just touched feces. Ms. Love modeled for the other students how to treat Blacks. I failed to share these humiliating experiences with my parents. I knew they had no power to change things.

The day after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Abebe and I went to the principal to complain that the United States had ordered the flag to be flown at half-mast, but our school's flag remained at full mast. We talked before we went and decided not to invite other students to avoid the possibility that the principal would think we might initiate a riot. As we entered the office down the hall from our homeroom, we told the secretary we wanted to see the principal. She asked us to wait a minute, then she ushered us into the room. The principal sat behind his desk without showing any surprise at seeing two Black girls standing before him. I hardly remembered what he said. I remember only that Abebe talked, and I agreed and said how important it was for the school to acknowledge what the president had ordered. He disregarded our concerns and returned us to our classroom.

Both Abebe and I considered ourselves very radical. We read Malcolm X's book, listened to others and debated the news. We developed a stronger awareness of Blackness from reading, debating and her exposure to Upward Bound. Abebe participated in Upward Bound at FAMU and learned about the rising Black Power Movement. On her return to campus, in the fall she shared the information with me and discussed what she learned about the process for applying for college and taking college entrance exams, such as the SAT. I contacted the school counselor and said that I was interested in attending Florida State. She essentially said my aspirations were too high. Instead, she encouraged me to apply to Bethune Cookman College and Florida A and M University. I applied to Bethune Cookman because one of my uncles lived in Daytona. I was accepted, but the tuition prevented me from pursuing that goal. I knew I needed another option, so I applied to Chipola, the local community college. That school opened its doors to me. I discovered a summer job with Upward Bound while working in the financial aid office. That job would help my sisters later and expand my academic opportunities and travels. I entered Florida State after I attended community college, thanks to meeting a Black student who attended Florida State and worked with me as Upward Bound Student Counselor. (She became the first Black who graduate from FSU Law School.) That exposure assured me that I, too, could attend. Eventually this experience led me to acquire a doctorate.

"I felt I just had to hang in there and do good." Bernadette (1970s)

Bernadette is the third oldest daughter of Essie. She is a tall, dark-chocolate, medium built woman who laughs easily but also carries a serious and business-like countenance. As a teen she found creative ways to sell products such as "Love Bands" (headbands she made

from discarded cloth straps). She received both segregated and desegregated schooling. Bernadette completed her first eight years at the all-Black elementary school. When the school board in 1967 transferred all Black and White students to the predominantly White high school to the adjacent community, approximately twelve miles away. Thus, both segregation and desegregation shaped her schooling experiences. After graduating high school, Bernadette attended a private liberal arts college for her undergraduate degree, a public university for her graduate degree and a private divinity school for her Doctorate in Divinity. She married a political refugee, a native of Central Africa whom she met while enrolled in the liberal arts college, where his brother taught as a professor. Together they bore two sons and a daughter; each acquired college degrees. Her sons and daughter hold bachelor's degrees and work in service-related jobs, such as social worker, teacher, insurance claims officer, bail bondman and correction officer. She built a life in the same town where she attended college, alongside her husband. Eventually, they both retired from work in criminology. Today they pastor a church in a coastal community in Florida and invest in real estate.

Bernadette lived her entire life in the *Sunshine State* except for the times she studied abroad in London and in Bogotá and interned in St. Louis during her undergraduate years. She majored in economics as an undergraduate, but became a criminologist and a pastor in a Pentecostal church. Also, she worked in the Savings and Loans industry until it collapsed in the 1980s. As she worked fulltime, she maintained her entrepreneurial activities.

Bernadette graduated from the eighth grade just as the St. Mary's school closed and the students transferred to Vernon High School. In the ninth grade she encountered White students in the classroom for the first time. She entered a world that restricted her contacts with any future Black teachers. Only one Black teacher from Roulhac, Mrs. McElroy, who survived the firing of Black teachers when the schools "desegregated," taught at Vernon High. She encountered not only the one Black teacher in her high school, but also experienced tracking and separation from her Black friends. Bernadette describes the situation she confronted:

The classes I took were college prep. I was usually the only Black. I remember Ms. McElroy, one of two Black teachers at the school. She constantly said, "You can fool some of the people sometime. But you can't fool all the people all the time. Math is the only exact science. Put your thinking cap on".

The Blacks [students] were geared toward Vocational Tech.

Two of her closest friends, "Celia and Zetta went to the Vo Tech. They took up clerical stuff".

I wondered how Bernadette felt being the only Black student in her class. She said:

I wished there were others in class. I felt I just had to hang in there and do good. The other [White] kids in the class were all college-bound. They were looking to leave the area. I wished there were other Blacks to study with. I had other classes with Blacks such as PE and library assistance and journalism. Journalism produced the school newspaper. We wrote articles and decided what went into the paper. All other classes were academic. I took Spanish and French. Few [Blacks] were in the advanced classes.

I went to the Vo Tech school for week until you told me not to go to Vo Tech but to take college prep courses.

I asked, "If the counselor did not guide you, how did you get into the classes?" She replied:

After you told me what it took to get into college, I selected my classes. If you had not told me what colleges expected, I would not have had the necessary courses, such as two years of language, geometry and other classes to attend college.

The atmosphere that Bernadette encountered in high school diverged from St. Mary's. She explained, "The teachers acted more like parents at St. Mary's. They knew you. They punished you right in front of the class." However, she observed at Vernon High a few teachers treated her fairly:

My civic/social studies teacher, Mr. Tyre . . . was cool. He was the one who gave me the name, B.J. I forgot to put my name on the paper. He said I put B.J. When he gave it back to me it had B.J. I liked the way it sound, because there were so many other Brenadettes in my age group. It was a very popular name. I kept that name, B.J. No one called me B.J. until I went to Eckerd. I did not get away from Brenadette until I left Riverside.

Mrs. Hightower, an older and short woman gave us life lessons. She said, "Don't date somebody you don't want to marry. Mr. Tyre and Ms. Hightower were the teachers who impacted me".

Bernadette recalls one teacher whom she thought exhibited racism:

I had one teacher in Vernon who showed her colors, the Home Economics teacher. She tried to make a simple class complex. She was teaching me and Celia how to make hot chocolate. I already knew how to do that. If you were not careful, you could get a C in her class.

Unlike the tension that I experienced, Bernadette describes her interactions as more subdued and less overtly racist. "They kept it hidden." She explains:

I did not feel discriminated against. But I did not feel prejudice or closeness towards them [Whites]. I don't remember any inter-racial dating. If it happened, it happened undercover. Everyone stuck to their kind.

Perhaps, having a significant number of African American students helped to quell any blatant racism. Vernon had a significant body of Blacks from several surrounding towns.

Although Bernadette sat in advanced classes, she wished for career counseling. When asked what she aspired to be, she answered:

I did not know. I just wanted to be a businesswoman, wear a suit, carry a briefcase, have an office and a secretary. There was no career guidance. The guidance counselor told you which classes to take and how many classes you needed to graduate. The teachers did not steer you, either. You decided. A lot of kids were happy to just get high school education.

Thanks to my exposure to the Upward Bound program at Florida Presbyterian College, now Eckerd College, Bernadette chose to attend that school. She admits that my advice concerning my experiences of working there as an Upward Bound Program Counselor, led her to consider that school. She received financial aid and successfully completed a degree in Economics. After working several years and raising her children she returned to school to acquire a master's degree in Criminology in 2000. She also was promoted through the ranks and became one of the few African American lieutenants in the criminal justice department in the county where she worked. She worked with Human Resources to recruit more people of color into the agency. Before she retired from that position, both she and her husband received their doctorates of divinity. She fulfilled her businesswoman wish when she worked for a Savings and Loan company but shifted right before the industry collapsed in the late 1980s.

"I saw things from a Black perspective." Ayana (1970s)

Ayana, is the youngest of Essie's four daughters who graduated high school as the United States celebrated its bi-centennial anniversary. She has a serious disposition regarding justice, yet she easily jokes. She is a divorcee with three adult children, one daughter and two sons. Her daughter graduated with a liberal arts degree and both sons who attended college, also are married with children. Ayana currently works as a logistics specialist for a multinational corporation in another southern state. She resided in California, Minnesota and Florida as she reared her children.

As a child of the late twentieth century, Ayana envisioned being a "Flight Attendant and Lawyer." Later, she wished that she had learned Spanish and acquired a "Master's degree." Yet, she remembers, "The teachers at St. Mary's gave you hope to do the things you dreamed, especially Mrs. Russell".

Ayana, too, attended St. Mary's elementary school until the fifth grade when the county mandated school integration. She describes those formative years a taking place in an ensconced and caring community as "great." She says:

I knew all the teachers and they really seemed to care about each student . . . in a small, close and very personal environment. Mrs. White, Ms. Russell, and Mr. W. were nice.

She then explains that the teachers at St. Mary's taught the basic subjects:

"All I remember is basic information . . . Math, Science, History, English, PE and sometimes Art, were the courses . . . I saw things from a Black perspective. We learned about Harriett Tubman, struggle and survival, endurance, and victory. The example of Harriet Tubman changed a lot, and it gave women hope and the knowledge they can do something and be someone and yet be a woman. They can be someone great. I still believe that."

St. Mary's would be the last time Ayana experienced schooling as a Black encounter.

She recalls the experience of transition to the predominantly White school in the sixth grade:

I felt it was a huge shock to my life and learning because I was not sure how we would be treated in the new school. It was a very difficult process . . . Everybody was scared and did not know what to do. They bused us. We had to stop and pick up White kids between Riverside and Vernon we were angry about that because what we had was taken away. It was years before we blended together. We did not know what to expect. I think it gave us better books, exposure, opportunities that we would not have had.

I asked Ayana if she felt the school was "hers." She responds:

Oh, no. Vernon, Riverside and Ebro kids started hanging out together. I remember as a senior you couldn't be anything because you were Black. I was a class secretary. But it was in name only. What does a secretary do? I went out as a cheerleader. The Black boys played sports but there was not a place for Black girls. [I was made an alternate cheerleader]. All the time I was there, I never cheered—never! They did not want a Black girl cheering! I was determined that I was going to do something. That is why I joined the yearbook staff. The editor was White. The people who had positions were White. We tried to get together the different (Black) groups—the students from Ebro, Vernon, and Riverside for homecoming queen. But everyone wanted their own [queen]. So, in the end a White girl won. There was never a time anyone made you feel pretty. *The best people were White.* They had the best schools and the best teachers. That is why we were there. *You wanted to be White.*

Ayana facetiously exclaimed:

The girls were left out. We really did not get involved in sports. None of the Black kids got involved. I remember I got involved in debate. I was willing to try anything. But I decided I did not like it. One person responds then you may not necessarily respond to that person. Black people do not do organized conversations. *That's way too much control.*

Based on her limited engagement in school extracurricular activities, she decided to seek to become a Watermelon Queen. The county mass produces watermelons. However, becoming Watermelon Queen not only meant navigating the school climate, but also the Pentecostal rules of the church regarding women and their attire. She says:

I decided to go out for Ms. Watermelon festival. I did not tell mama. I had to model in a bathing suit. You know mama did not want us to wear a bathing suit. When I got up on the stage modeling in the bathing suit, I was shocked to see Ms. Vertie Mae, mama's best friend. She did not let the judges know that she knew me and I did not let on that I knew her. But I was scared she would tell mama. I rushed home and told Bernadette she had to help me. What should I do? She suggested, 'Just tell mama.' I did and she acted as it was normal. Anyway, I guess some of the judges decided to throw me a bone and so did Ms. Vertie Mae. I was shocked when I won. All that meant was that I rode on the top of a car with a crown. When the next queen was selected, I was not invited to place the crown on her head. I guess they did not want a Black girl crowning the other queen.

You know, we got the chance to wear pants because mama and daddy could not agree. Mama did not agree with wearing pants but she thought bathing suits were ok. Daddy said, 'If they could wear bathing suits, why not pants.' So that is how we got to wear both.

Ayana explains that none of her classes at Vernon High discussed African American culture and history: “It was a Black teacher in the library for a short period. They did not stay long. At Chipola, I had a Black teacher in history. None at USF”.

However, Ayana is passionate about justice. Often her fierce nature caused her to challenge assumptions. One teacher who was a White and Christian woman reached out to Ayana:

Mrs. Macon told me not to get in any more trouble. You are not like the other children. [I asked her what she meant]. I think she meant that I came from a Christian family and I cannot be like the other kids. She knew mama and daddy were Christians. She really had a good heart. She taught higher grades for science.

I asked Ayana if she was getting in trouble: “No, she just appeared to have been trying to pull greatness out of me.”

A new principal and his wife also helped Ayana feel respected:

The Browns came. They came from Alabama. And people were scared. Alabama was seen at a racist place. But they brought people together. The Browns made a difference. Sports is one thing that they helped get off the ground. Mr. Brown was a coach. He became a principal and then superintendent. One time, Mr. Brown came through a MacDonald’s while I was there. I was in college. He bought me lunch. He was glad to see me. I really appreciated that.

Ayana received an Associate Degree at Chipola College. I asked her if she envisioned going to college. She replied:

“Yes, in our home that was the next step, thanks to you going to school. Besides, I knew that I needed to get out Riverside. I looked around and I saw there were not any opportunities. The guys were dropping out. The girls were getting pregnant. I knew that I could not stay there. The guys went to work in the woods and the sawmills; the girls went to the factories and became maids or worked on the beach.”

Ayana graduated with an Associate degree and transferred to the University of South Florida. After a year there she married, entered the job market with a telecommunication company and began a family. She revealed that she always daydreamed about living a different life from the one she was accustomed to experiencing. She never lived in her birthplace again. Ayana reflected on those days of schooling and offered this reflection:

I came to realize as an adult. I could not understand what I felt as a child—White people teach their children they are superior. Black people did not teach their kids that “no” does not mean “no.” When Black kids hear no, they tuck their tails and move on. White people teach their kids they can. Black people were at the bottom of the food chain. Those who did not fall for it did not feel inferior. LaRisa (her daughter) is one of those. She carries herself in such way, that White people know that cannot try that stuff.

I hate when people ask where you are from, because they will try to put you in a box.

That is why I teach my children not to call people by their skin color. Use another descriptor. Do not reduce them to the color of their skin.

“I have a mama too.” (1990s) Tina

Tina is Essie’s grandchild. She is about five feet nine and fair complexioned. Tina is Essie’s only grandchild who grew up in Riverside but did not attend St. Mary’s. Tina’s mother, Jewel returned to her hometown to live and raise her daughter. As an adult, Tina found no reason to return to Riverside. In conversation, she explains that she swore that she would never raise a child in that community and send her to the local schools.

Currently, Tina lives in metropolitan coastal city in Florida with her partner and their daughter. After she received her bachelor’s degree in Black Studies from USF, she migrated to the District of Columbia and worked for a multinational company. Three years ago, she returned to Florida and continued to work at an insurance company. She explains:

I was born in 1982. I attended Holmes County Schools 4th–12th grade. I never had a Black teacher during these formative years. It was a big deal when cousin Zina got hired to Bonifay Middle School right after college as a teacher and was the only black teacher in the county I believe. I believe she was only there a year and I think I was in Elementary. It was

very inspiring to see someone like me. It's interesting reading some of your stories about St. Mary's and the sense of feeling like family. I think had I had Black teachers it would have felt like I may have had someone to advocate for me. I'll never forget in high school when a me and a group of friends made Black History posters to hang up during Black History Month. They didn't even last 24 hours. We were so proud of them and by the next day they were either ripped down or defaced. We never tried that again, just felt defeated.

Tina continues, "We did not have Black History month. In my class it was six Black students, in the whole school it only about twenty." We learned just the basics, like Martin Luther King, George Washington Carver or maybe a little about slavery; Abraham Lincoln and the Emancipation Proclamation and that was about it.

I asked, if she felt comfortable in her school. Without hesitation she responded, "No, cause a couple times, the students would come with those big trucks with the Confederate flag flying on the back of the truck." I further questioned her what it would have taken to make it feel like it was her school. She responds:

Maybe more Black teachers, more Black students. Like more diversity . . . even like Black history month. We never learned anything in Black history. Except for like history, you have that one small chapter in the book and that is it.

Tina muses, "I was kind of wondering why I was always waiting for a Black teacher. It wasn't anything special. It was a math class in college. I do not know why it was such a big deal to me. I guess because I had not had a teacher that was African American."

I inquired, "When you took your first class in college on African History and African American history, what was that like?" She responds:

The first one that I took, threw me off a little bit because I took African American literature and my professor was White. So, in my mind I felt that Black people should be teaching stuff like that. I still had not had a Black professor yet. She was from Chhattahoochee but she was a good teacher. Later on, I started getting other teachers who were teaching Black history. When I had the African American literature professor who was White, I was thinking she is not going to know enough about African American experiences and what it means to be Black. She ended up being a good professor, so then I kind of realized a Black person does not have to teach Black history.

Tina explains the interactions she encountered with teachers in her high school. As an African American youth, she keenly observed if teachers were fair and not prejudiced. I stated, "When you were in Bonifay, you said you did not have any Black teachers and only the band teacher seemed to be the fair teacher." Tina answers:

Mr. B., I don't think he was prejudiced. He treated everybody the same. He yelled at everybody the same way. I had the same band teacher from the sixth grade and until I graduated. I felt comfortable mostly in the band room. I was in the band room a lot. I hung mostly with the band kids. We could just go in there and hang out in the band room, I think that is why I went there.

"What about other teachers? Were there other teachers besides Mr. B that you remember most, that impacted your life—positively or negatively?" I queried.

I had some positive teachers, Mrs. Motley was real nice. I had some negative teachers, I guess they were not all bad, but they were like . . . It was only six Black people in my grade when I graduated. But only two of us took advanced classes so we could get the scholarship. They rest were not. A lot of time, Tanya and I were in the same class. It always kind of seemed like they did not want to put me in the classes. You know whenever, you go to your guidance counselor and you sign up for your classes. They never . . . Maybe it was all in my mind, but they never just put me in the classes like some of the other students. It was always like—"Are you sure you are going to be able to keep up?" Almost like—"Are you smart enough to be in the class?" . . . I would see some of the White students in the class and I would think, "Why are they in the class?" I do not see anything special that would make them any smarter.

The school environment extends beyond the four walls, Tina learned. "When did you first become aware that you were Black?" I wondered aloud:

That is a good question. I think I really realized it when I started going to school in Bonifay. I really did not always have a good experience. I got in a fight on the bus.

This little boy was calling me Blackie and Nigger and they were trying to kick me off of the bus. I was having certain issues there in Bonifay.

“On the bus, kids were calling you names?” I asked. She responds:

Yes, whenever, . . . I was the only Black person that rode the bus. I was the only Black person that got bussed from Riverside to Bonifay to go to school beside Kyle. But when he got older enough to say that he did not want to go to school in Bonifay, then his mama let him go to Vernon. So, I was the only Black person the bus. Most of the times, I stayed to myself anyway. But there was one little boy. I don’t know what his issue was but he was always bothering me. [How old was he? I asked.] He was maybe like in middle school. He was like 11 or 12. But the little boy was always bothering me. This one particular day, I don’t know what, but I just snapped on the little boy. He called me first “*blackie, blackie, blackie* and then he called me a *nigger*.” So, he was sitting the seat in front of me and turned around and faced me and I got mad. He had his hands on the seat, so I clawed him with my finger nails. So, the little boy started screaming and of course the bus driver acted like it was the end of the world. He went up there and his hand was bleeding and said I had did that to his hands. The lady (the bus driver) said “You are going to hear from his mother about this. I said, I don’t care, I have a mama too.” So, she dropped me off and she said that she was not going to let me back on the bus.

I was scared to tell mama because I was about to get kicked off of the bus. My mama said, “Oh no you are getting back on that bus. The next morning, she took me to the bus stop and the lady was not going to let me back on the bus”. My mama was like, “I will follow you all the way back to Bonifay but she will get back on the bus.” She would not let me get on the bus. So, mama took me to school, and she talked to the people, telling them how the little boy always harassed me . . . The lady had no choice because they did not kick me off of the bus, so she had to let me back on the bus.

The experience of being in an all-white school, motivated Tina to consider attending a Black college. She explains:

I think that’s why during the start of my senior year when a recruiter from Bethune Cookman College [at that time, not a university yet] showed up seemingly out of nowhere looking to recruit for their summer immersion program for careers in the medical fields. I jumped at the opportunity and thought why not. I couldn’t convince any of my friends to go. The recruiter helped a lot with the admission application, financial aid, setting me up to audition for a band scholarship. As a private school, my Florida Merit scholarship wouldn’t cover much of the financial aid and trying for the band scholarship was the only way I could go. So, at the end of the summer, once I completed the program and got my stipend. I left the school and went to Chipola which I only ended up there because FAMU got my application late and didn’t have housing. So anyway, I say all of that, because it was a culture shock to be in school with nothing but Blacks and no Whites. I was not used to being with that many Black people also. I often found that our interests were not always aligned and it took a lot of getting used to. I always felt I had 2 sets of friends, my White school friends and my Black neighborhood friends and they didn’t mix.

Expanding beyond the small community, Tina realized how little she knew about other Blacks from other countries. We talked about meeting other African descendant students from other islands. She said she was disappointed that she did not know that Virgin Island was a part of U.S. and did not recall that being taught in US history course: “I remember we used to call kids, ‘You Haitian.’ I don’t know why we did. I had never seen anyone from Haiti. I used think everybody was Jamaican.” Tina’s social circle is quite inclusive as an adult but growing up in a small town with limited exposure initially reinforced anti-blackness ideas, although she did not have contact with a diverse group of people.

The struggle Tina's mother encountered with the principal ensured that Tina entered in Chipola. Tina graduated with a bachelor's degree from USF after she experienced a largely less than affirming atmosphere in high school.

3. Analysis: Structural Violence

This section explores what we can learn from these women's stories about their early schooling experiences. The first theme derived in analyzing the stories of the six rural women is structural barriers they endured in their struggle for a better life. These marginalized women's stories reveal over time, the underlining effect of systematic oppression because of the institutional arrangement practiced through public policies that shape both their schooling and their lives (Galtung 1969). These practices imposed a negative and prolonged impact on the social, physical, psychological and economic development of the women and to a larger extent African Americans, generally (LeCompte and Marrias 1990; Orfield and Frankenberg 2014). The far-reaching financial hardship experienced by all these women and the schools that they attended heavily slowed down their academic progress and even led to some of them dropping out of school. Attending high school and college proved to be financially daunting as is seen from the entire family's story. For example, Essie could not enroll in the nearest high school on time and a lack of state-provided school transportation led her to dropping out of her poorly funded school prematurely, like many Blacks at the time. When the first Junior college, that included a few rooms attached to the high school opened to preserve whiteness and segregation, Essie tried to enroll Jewel. However, a lack of both social and financial resources prevented this accomplishment. Essie did not have the knowledge of how to access loans and grants to fulfill the college entrance procedures. Given her own limited education, she discovered her meagre house cleaning money inadequate.

When I graduated from high school, the family's income had not changed. Thankfully, public anti-poverty programs such as Upward Bound had been established. These experiences reveal that students from economically disadvantaged families find access to college blocked unless the government restructures systems that have marginalized them because of class, race, gender and other oppressed identities. The information I acquired from my friend and my experience as an Upward Bound program counselor became a vehicle that helped me and my younger sisters acquire higher education degrees, despite their status in the precariat. Education denied to the parents surely undermined their abilities to send their children to college on their own. Without the establishment of the Anti-Poverty programs, Bernadette, Ayana and I would not have been able to acquire a college education. Harris-Perry (2011) suggests our births are linked to economic conditions and public policies.

For African Americans, no matter the era, the status of African Americans is subordinate in the United States (Caruthers 2006). proposes that desegregation is a three-generation process that includes the removal of physical segregation, equal access to classroom and barriers to equal outcomes. However, equity and full citizenship for African Americans denied since 1619 leave them behind. Long blocked opportunities still prevent families from closing the wealth and education debt. In this family, their status rests on the lack of commitment the state of Florida and the United States to Blacks.

During 1929–1930, the per capita expenditure for White and Black students varied greatly with White students receiving \$32.98 for every \$6.98 for African American students. Likewise, teachers collected unequal salaries; White teachers got \$130.12 while Black teachers received only \$66.08 (Bullock 1967). As Scheper-Hughes (2004) notes, such funding disparity places African women on the periphery of social and economic. Structural violence includes curriculum violence as desegregation limited the number of Black teachers in White schools and reinforced a White public sphere. The women who attended the historically Black school, encountered Black teachers who treated them as part of an extended family. Those who attended predominately White schools experienced a few White teachers as being very supportive. However, clearly, I found some of my post-segregation

White teachers unsupportive by the demeaning roles my friend and I were assigned in the senior class play, and by having our voices ignored. Thirty years later, Tina, who also attended a predominately White school, experienced similar events as I did. They resisted at times and asserted their rights, a push that has utterly exhausted many African Americans even today. These hostilities mirrored what Marietta Poff found when she documented the perspectives of the first nine Black students who integrated the schools in Roanoke, Virginia (Poff 2016).

School curricula created a template for Black students to fit in the White world as subordinates, even in Black school settings. Consider first during Essie's generation most of the schools in Florida and many other southern states only provided an eighth-grade education. Even in the late 1940s, an eighth-grade education could only take one so far. Prior to World War II both school facilities and the training of Black teachers represented the lower position of Blacks (Fultz 1995). Later in desegregated spaces, counselors directed Black students to trade school curriculums rather than college. Such tracking based on racism led Jewel to move Tina to another school. This kind of tracking has long blocked Black students from advanced placement and college preparatory classes (Morris 2004). Additionally, desegregated schools became places largely absent of Black teachers. Prior to 1960s, Black teachers comprised one-half of professionals in the African American community. Whites dominate school boards often either fired or demoted them (Walker and Byas 2009).

Such curricula position White culture as aspirational and help supplant African American culture. Some teachers failed to provide critical explanations of history that directly relates to the Black ancestors that would have empowered African American students to see their ancestors as contributors to their world. Perhaps during Jim Crow, loss of jobs concerned teachers. Whatever the rationale, schoolteachers and policy makers decide which information is valuable for students to learn (Ighodaro and Wiggan 2011). For example, when St. Mary's school celebrated May Twentieth as Emancipation Day, the educators failed to inform the students the meaning behind it. Students sang *I wish I was in the Land of Dixie*, an anthem historically associated with White Confederates that Daniel Decatur Emmett created for a minstrel show, without a critical analysis of such material. This exclusion of critical analysis of these historical events ignores the "intellectual and psychological well-being of learners" (Ighodaro and Wiggan 2011, p. 2).

Tracking based on racism sought to position Black students in vocational tracks. Both Bernadette and Tina remember how the high school counselors attempted to track them to lower-level classes. Unfortunately, the counselor directed their Black classmates from taking college prep courses and therefore made them ineligible for both college and scholarships. Gloria Ladson Billings identifies such action as education debt (Ladson-Billings and Tate 2006). This action led Jewel to move Tina to another school. This kind of tracking has long blocked Black students from advanced placement and college preparatory classes (Morris 2004). All these examples of structural violence continue to be a tangible proof of persistent inequalities in spite of the monumental efforts Blacks use to achieve quality schooling (Ferguson 2003; Harris et al. 2004). We will never know what more these women could have achieved had policy makers and practitioners seen them as women full of potential and possibilities.

4. Agency and Dogged Determination: Navigating White Worlds

"It dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others; or like, mayhap, in heart and life and longing, but shut out from their world by a vast veil."
W. E. B Du Bois, *The Atlantic* August 1897

W. E. B. Du Bois describes the strivings of African Americans in the United States as two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. As the quote above suggests, Blacks are the "others." All of the women except Tina tell stories of being ensconced in a nurturing Black world while in segregated schools even when White policy makers significantly influenced the curricula and the quality of

the material conditions within the school. However, each woman knew that she had to prepare to live beyond these protected spaces, therefore each persisted and invested in their survival and success despite the challenges they faced. Their dogged determination led them through the mind fields of whiteness to create a better world they aspired for themselves. Of course, these battles were not all achieved as individuals' quests alone. The African American community played a major role in creating learning spaces and helping these women rise beyond their birth status in an under-resourced rural community.

Essie, the matriarch's life exemplifies the investment that the community made to educate its children. She tells how Ms. Christine and her sister moved the school to their home when the White community used their school as a church. Yet, they demonstrated to the students that it was the responsibility of the county administrators to pay for the supplies that the school needed. Essie recalls how Ms. Christine ran a tab at a local store for school supplies that the Board of Education had to pay. Her actions showed unusual agency and creativity because the majority Black teachers and communities supplied their own needs (Foster 1990). Interestingly, most of the schools that Essie attended were church buildings supplied by the community. When she attended Roulhac in the ninth grade, it was located in a church and not the building that Jewel and Evelyn attended. That building was not built until 1950 and completed in 1968. Mr. T.J. Roulhac, a self-taught community leader, founded the high school for African Americans in Washington County in 1938 after his daughters were denied entrance. The school that became Roulhac also exemplifies Anderson's argument regarding White philanthropists (Anderson and Moss 1999). The Jeanes Foundation funded two-thirds of the amount needed to support the high school. The Washington County School Board provide one-third of the funding. We must remember that prior to Mr. Roulhac's intervention, the county and the state only provided an eighth-grade education to the African American community. Until the late 1960s, there was only one public college available to Blacks. Johnson et al. (2007) remind us that after *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, White policy makers threatened to close Florida A&M to resist Black pressure for integration.

Persistence is key to the women's aspirations. Each life reveals challenges confronted and how they persevered. Essie could have easily continued to work as a maid with her limited education. However, with the assistance of Mr. Wilson, who offered GED courses in the defunct St. Mary's school, Essie returned to school and achieved her GED. Later she acquired insurance and real estate licenses. These efforts modeled to her daughters to endure, no matter the obstacles.

Although, the purchase of a typewriter for Jewel did not help her to get into college, her enduring fight against the principal on Tina's behalf ensured that her daughter would go to college. While she cooked at the nursing home that served the principal's mother, she did not allow his status or whiteness prevent her from advocating for Tina, her daughter. She wielded the power of a Black mother to guarantee that Tina returned to the school bus and received her scholarship. Tina expressed without her mother's assistance; she would have been lost. Parental involvement is crucial to ensuring the achievement of Black students (Johnson 2010).

The dogged determination of these women did not always involve their parents to help them navigate through the system. They drew on their sense of self-confidence and agency. The parents limited schooling and social capital demonstrated that their daughters had to seek help from others. Ayana consistently engaged in a variety of activities -cheer leading, secretary, and debate club—to show that she belonged. Her final skirmish against White standards included the Watermelon Queen. Only after she won, did she let her parents know the clothing requirement. More than concerned about her parents, she desired to show to the school that she mattered as a Black student. Ayana demonstrated what she believed, "I always saw myself from a Black perspective." Chavous and Cogburn (2007) suggest that Black girls enter school with a strong sense of self in the context of racism but experience a lowered status within the school setting. This is the condition Ayana fought.

Self-confidence is necessary to confront the White power structure especially for African Americans. The story of Martha Newman who contested the behavior of the game warden by writing the governor of the state of Florida demonstrates a significant amount of self-worth and courage. The early twentieth century was a risky time for Blacks taking such bold action. Racial terror such as lynching persisted in Florida during the 1930s when she wrote the letter. However, that story embedded in the women, especially Essie, show the necessity of literacy and self-assuredness for courageous actions. Almost all of these women stepped up to confront those in power about injustices. Despite their alleged subordinate roles as Black women, they advocated for Black history, lowering of the flag to honor the death of Martin Luther King or getting a scholarship (Candelario 2000). They denied a fear of racial terror a space in their lives in order to establish their voices against injustices.

Finally, we argue that these women's confidence derives from their attitude of smartness. Each woman from Essie to Tina, expressed in some form an above level of achievement. They consistently discussed their competence whether in spelling, mathematics or generally in advancement placement classes. Self-perception of smartness among Black women is an under-researched topic (Gholson and Martin 2014). Black women's perception of their intellectual acuity gave them confidence to tackle various issues that affected their spaces in the schools. The women in my family exemplify that awareness.

5. Implications and Significance of the Newman Women's Stories

These women's stories reveal the underlining effect of structural violence as practiced through public policies that shape both their schooling and their lives, such as the enduring effect on their mother's ability to provide a middle-class life style. Why is it important to share the intergenerational stories of rural Black women's experiences of schooling? As noted at the onset, the majority of the research concerning Black women in the United States, focus largely on urban women. Additionally, a significant amount of the research trends regarding Black girls frames them through the lens of individual efforts rather than structures of violence put in place by states. Thanks to the decolonizing efforts of some researchers, we begin to see more explorations of the resilience, resistance and empowerment of Black women in relations to social structures (Goodkind et al. 2020). This paper follows this line of research.

The lives of these women remind school administrators, policy makers and teachers of a need to create affirming environments for learning that recognize the presence of Black girls. Such environments require curricula that are inclusive and teachers who are trained to see all students as humans and not block opportunities for their future development. Researchers have consistently argued since the 1980's for multicultural education. However, schools have yet to make the curricula inclusive. As more charter schools arise to address Black and Latinx students in particular, there is not a guarantee that their courses will be inclusive as evidenced by the segregated all-Black schools. Blacks still learned the ways of White people more than any other cultural group. These segregated spaces embedded to some extent in students a Eurocentric model of academia.

While these segregated schools largely instilled a Eurocentric view of the world through the curriculums, the human touch and cultural understanding embodied in these schools gave the students who attended them a strong sense of being part of a community that truly cared about them. As school boards around the countries close schools in predominately Black under-resourced communities, it is important for these policy makers to understand how school closures disrupt and displace both students and communities. As newspapers highlight the number of schools that administrators close, they use such titles as "failed schools, underprivileged schools and in Florida, they identify them as "F" schools." These narratives divorced from structural violence imply as in the days of the desegregation in the South, that Black spaces are inadequate. Such language psychological displaces students and their communities. We see how the abandonment of these schools

challenge students' sense of being as they either voluntarily attend or are forced to attend predominately White school settings.

6. Conclusions

Life for me ain't been no crystal stair, It's had tacks in it, And splinters, And boards torn up, And Places with no carpet on the floor—Bare. But all the time I've been a-climbin' on, And reachin' landin's, And turnin' corners. Langston Hughes

Langston Hughes' poem, "Mother to Son," characterized the Newman family's struggle to acquire a meaningful schooling. We experienced difficulties and triumphs among the challenges and found a relative sense of achievement despite our impoverished beginning in a Jim Crow environment. We sustained our determination despite the lack of will by the United States government and local school boards to provide a quality education to their Black taxpayers. The discrimination that our maternal grandfather and his descendants experienced, educated our grandmother and mother to persist, despite the circumstances of often-limited opportunities. Teachers in both the all-Black and White "desegregated" spaces served to either reinforce achievement in both negative and affirming ways.

Black teachers, without an explicit African-focused curriculum, helped the women counter White hegemonic belief in the inferiority of African Americans by preparing us intellectually and instilling in us a sense of academic confidence—We knew we were smart. Elocution, community plays and modeling of blackness and occasionally activism reinforced a positive sense of our capacities. Despite reading the White Alice and Jerry books, memorizing classical literature, such as Shakespeare and singing Dixie, Black teachers kept White stereotype threats at bay while they affirmed their blackness and treated us as valuable. Additionally, segregation protected us from any intimate contact with Whites.

Nevertheless, without the Civil Rights Movement, the state's noncommitment to equitable schooling, cultural capital and funds, restricted my mother's and older sister's professional opportunities. Along with other African American members of their generations, they paid a heavy burden, because a lack of resources forced them to prematurely leave school regardless of their intellectual capacities. They found themselves confined to low-paying jobs.

Though African Americans envisioned that the *Brown v. Board of Education* case would lead to an improvement of resources in Black schools, we did not anticipate that our Black teachers would be rendered incompetent and unemployed and Black schools useless. The White school board in Washington County saw the historically segregated schools like the Biblical prophet Nathanael wondered about quality of the Messiah when he questioned Philip, "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" (John 1:46, King James Version). The White school board's actions suggests, 'Can anything good come from their Blackness?' The White school board members concluded that White teachers and their schools were better. These White school officials refused to hire Black teachers and tore an essential aspect of African American heritage from its foundation and made desegregated places spheres of alienation for my younger siblings and niece. To this date, each of the White schools hired only one to two African American teachers. The schools remain a White sphere.

The desegregated school has largely remained White spaces, absent of psychological and affirming support for African American youth. In the wake of the "earth-shattering change" of *Brown*, grudgingly implemented in Florida in the late sixties, the Newman women found that they had to plot a course that had been uncharted by our parents. In these hostile environments, we had to assert our individual rights and seek out teachers who were responsible and human adults. Bernadette, Ayana and Tina found teachers who recognized their humanity. Yet humiliation was a constant companion as in my case, when I was made to perform a minstrel act or in the case of Tina, who endured a little boy calling her "nigger" daily until she snapped and physically assaulted him.

These hardships seem minor when compared to a high school education denied to our mother. Whiteness as an ever-present factor in educational policies for African Americans informed a dominant cultural attitude that an eighth-grade education and underfunded schools were sufficient for masses of Black children. That attitude absolved the White school board from extending a full education to my mother's generation.

This research reveals the continuous challenges the Newman family and other African Americans faced when trying to achieve a high quality and culturally appropriate schooling in both segregated and desegregated schools. To the credit of our parents and community, a belief in schooling drove the Newman family women to negotiate the terrain of unequal policies and opportunities.

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Institutional Review Board Statement: After a review of your submission, the HSC/IRB has determined that your proposed project, "*An Autoethnography of the Structural Violence of Education and Its Impact on Three Generations of Women in a family in a Rural Community in Florida*," is excluded from IRB review under the new federal regulations pertaining to oral history projects. Under these new regulations, scholarly activities such as oral history projects no longer require review by an institutional review board. Please accept this email as evidence of the determination that your project is not subject to the regulations pertaining to research with human subjects under 45 CFR 46 per the following: (1) *Research* means a systematic investigation, including research development, testing, and evaluation, designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge. Activities that meet this definition constitute research for purposes of this policy, whether or not they are conducted or supported under a program that is considered research for other purposes. For example, some demonstration and service programs may include research activities. For purposes of this part, the following activities are deemed not to be research: (1) Scholarly and journalistic activities (e.g., oral history, journalism, biography, literary criticism, legal research, and historical scholarship), including the collection and use of information, that focus directly on the specific individuals about whom the information is collected. And, as there is no further action required by the HSC/IRB, you will not be required to submit CITI certificates for this project, and you may begin your work at any time. However, please note for any future projects that are subject to HSC/IRB review that the CITI certificates will be required. The study was conducted according to the guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki, and approved by the Institutional Review Board of Central Connecticut State University (Approved 10 July 2019). This study is excluded from IRB review under the new federal regulations pertaining to oral history projects.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The interviews and transcripts are confidential and in the author's (ENP) collection.

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