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"Bricks Without Straw": An Oral History of Culturally Relevant Caring in Historic a H Parker High School in Birmingham Alabama

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"BRICKS WITHOUT STRAW": AN ORAL HISTORY OF CULTURALLY
RELEVANT CARING IN HISTORIC A.H. PARKER HIGH SCHOOL IN
BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA
`

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the graduate faculty of The University of Alabama at Birmingham,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA

2022

"BRICKS WITHOUT STRAW": AN ORAL HISTORY OF CULTURALLY RELEVANT CARING IN HISTORIC A.H. PARKER HIGH SCHOOL IN BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA

PENNY S. SEALS

EDUCATIONAL STUDIES IN DIVERSE POPULATIONS, METROPOLITAN EDUCATION STUDIES CONCENTRATION

ABSTRACT

Industrial High School, later renamed A.H. Parker High School after the inaugural principal, Arthur Harold Parker, is a predominantly African American high school located in Birmingham, Alabama. In 1900, A.H. Parker High School was established as the first four-year public high school for African American students in Birmingham. Historically, Parker has been recognized as being the heart of Black secondary education in Birmingham. Unfortunately, limited scholarly research exists detailing this historic schooling environment that motivated Black students to excel, despite vast inequities and inequalities. This dissertation tells the story of A.H. Parker High School with a focus on the culturally relevant caring that existed within this educational institution between 1950 and 1989. Utilizing oral history and archival data analysis, this study answers the following questions: What were the lived educational experiences of students who attended A.H. Parker High School between 1950 and 1989? Did Birmingham's historical and sociopolitical contexts shape narrators' lived experiences as it related to the culturally relevant caring that existed within this schooling environment? The primary findings revealed that students valued A.H. Parker's learning environment and deemed it a relevant component of their motivation for success. The four identified themes included: (1) the legacy of school spirit, (2) exemplary administrators and educators, (3) institutional continuity, and (4) alumni institutional mourning. The implications of these

findings suggest that, collectively, former PHS alumni acknowledge that A.H. Parker High School was a good school for Black students. Furthermore, they attest that their experiences in this historic schooling environment prepared them to live and thrive within a society that often deemed them intellectually and socially inferior. Consequently, many former alumni maintain a sense of loyalty and pride in this historically Black high school and the educators that nurtured their academic and interior lives. In sum, the unearthing of the local history of A.H. Parker High School adds to the academic scholarship and the historiography of the importance of Parker High School and the larger Birmingham community as a site of historical significance for studying Black secondary education in the United States.

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Through grief, anxiety, fear, and exhaustion, I held fast to what I knew to be true –
You've come too far to give up. Many days I quoted my favorite scripture for strength,
encouragement, and direction: "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on
your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge HIM, and HE shall direct your
paths."

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I am indebted to the 17 narrators who gave their time to communicate their lived
experiences as former students at A.H. Parker High School. Thank you for entrusting me
with your memories. Your narratives will now be added to the historical record of the
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Finally, this dissertation is dedicated to the memories of my mother, Tondelayo Seals, brother, Derrick Seals, and Aunt, Williestine Brady. None of this would have been possible without them. Although completing this process without their physical presence has been difficult, the memories of their unconditional love, prayers, and encouragement have been felt every step of the way.

Sincerely,

Dr. Penny Sherece Seals

We build on foundations we did not lay.
We warm ourselves by fires we did not light.
We sit in the shade of trees we did not plant.
We drink from wells we did not dig.
We profit from persons we did not know.
We are ever bound in community.
May it always be so.

This is as it should be.
Together we are more than any one person could be.
Together we can build across the generations.
Together we can renew our hope and faith in the life that is yet to unfold.
Together we can heed the call to a ministry of care and justice.

We are ever bound in community.
May it always be so.

- *By Rev. Peter Spilman Raible*

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

A.H. Parker   Dr. Arthur Harold Parker

ASTA   Alabama State Teachers Association

BCS   Birmingham City Schools

BPL   Birmingham Public Library

BPS   Birmingham Public Schools

Birmingham BOE   Birmingham Board of Education

CRC   Culturally Relevant Caring

J.H. Phillips   John Herbert Phillips

PHS   A.H. Parker High School

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

American society has a history of devaluing Black students and the educational

institutions where they are educated, driving the false belief that they are socially and

intellectually inferior to their White counterparts (Horsford & Grosland, 2013; O'Connor,

2006; Perry et al., 2003)[1]. Consequently, historical portrayals of Black segregated public

schools have focused primarily on the structural inequities present within the schooling

environment and the social and academic deficiencies of the students who attended.

Overwhelmingly, this prevailing discourse on Black schools includes narratives of

inadequate learning facilities and educational equipment, outdated curricula, and a lack of

necessary funding to sustain quality learning experiences for Black students (Clotfelter,

1999; Kantor & Brenzel, 1993; Orfield & Eaton, 1996; Orfield & Jarvie, 2020).

However, increasing scholarship on the resiliency of historically Black public schools has

emerged in recent years. Collectively, this growing body of literature offers

counternarratives that highlight exemplary Black educational administrators, teachers,

and community members who were able to establish creative learning environments

despite the vast inequities within historically segregated Black public schools (Anderson,

1988; Coats, 2010; Foster, 1997; Givens, 2021; James-Gallaway & Harris, 2021; Jones-

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[1] The terms "Black" and "African American" are used interchangeably.

Wilson, 1981; Kelly, 2010; Loder-Jackson, 2015a; McKinney de Royston et al., 2021; Morris & Morris, 2000; Siddle Walker, 1993, 1996, 2000). Notably identified in the literature on historically Black segregated schools is the importance of the caring school culture that existed and how this ethos of care motivated Black students to excel (Acosta et al., 2018; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Morris & Morris, 2000; Patterson et al., 2011; Siddle Walker, 1996, 2000; Siddle Walker & Snarey, 2004). Furthermore, this culture of care prepared Black youth to resist notions of intellectual and social inferiority perpetuated within a racist society (Givens, 2021; Horsford & Grosland, 2013; Siddle Walker, 1996, 2000). For instance, Sowell's (1976, 2002) examination of Black segregated high schools, before the 1954 *Brown* decision, revealed high-performing academic environments that offered a counternarrative to the deficient histories of historically segregated schools.

Similar to these narratives but largely missing from the scholarly literature are the histories and lived experiences of the schooling community of Arthur Harold Parker High School in Birmingham, Alabama. The following section details a brief history of A.H. Parker High School, addressing the significance of this educational institution and noting why it is worthy of this dissertation study.

Significance of Arthur Harold Parker High School

A.H. Parker High School has a rich history of cultivating a caring educational environment where Black students were encouraged and expected to be successful. Established in 1900, Negro High School was the first four-year public high school for Black students in the city of Birmingham, Alabama. With the addition of industrial-

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focused coursework, in 1910, the school became known as Industrial High School. Later, in 1939, Industrial High School was renamed A.H. Parker High School, after the inaugural principal, Arthur Harold Parker.

Figure 1. Arthur Harold Parker, inaugural principal of A.H. Parker High School. Note: From Birmingham, Ala. Public Library Archives. Reprinted with permission.

Parker's educational vision was to establish a high school building for the Black youth of Birmingham to gain the necessary academic and professional skills to thrive within society (Parker, 1932). Parker held teachers to a high standard, recognizing the vast responsibility that teachers had to students. In an effort to convey this mammoth responsibility, in a speech to the Alabama State Teacher's Association (ASTA), Parker stated:

> He who would be a real teacher must first get a fulness of that spirit that loves service and loves to live for service. This spirit makes bricks without straw and converts mountains into molehills. It is this spirit that makes and creates, that lives and conquers, and triumphs!! (Parker, 1932, p.18)

During this address, Parker encouraged educators to continue pursuing this mission work despite the structural and racial inequities that existed within society.

Similar to Booker T. Washington, Parker strongly believed that an industrial education empowered Black students to excel despite the structural inequalities that plagued their everyday lives. Specifically, Parker noted "…boys and girls should be taught in the schools how to do thoroughly and well the everyday duties that they find right around them" (Parker, p. 35). Parker's perceptions of the benefits of a practical education were not uncommon during the 19th and 20th centuries. In fact, many White southerners opposed the idea of a classical education for African Americans as they considered it unnecessary and a potential threat to their social and economic positions within the larger society but deemed a vocational or moral education acceptable (Anderson, 1988; Kliebard, 1994). While A.H. Parker and his aims for providing the Black youth in Birmingham with a secondary education were notable, many within the African American community criticized Parker's ambitions, accusing him of aligning with White southerners' racist perspectives of Black inferiority. For example, in 1924, in an editorial within the *Fisk Herald*, Du Bois condemned A.H. Parker:

> In Birmingham, Alabama, the condition of the colored schools has long been a shame. At last, in order to get a large bond issue of three million dollars, the best White citizens solemnly promised to spend five hundred thousand dollars upon the Negro schools. They proposed to put up a Negro high school to cost three or four hundred thousand dollars and one large secondary school. They had, however, as principal of the colored high school a Negro tool and lickspittle. He assured them that the colored people didn't need any school as costly as they

proposed. He asked for a straggling one story building with a little brick and a

great deal of stucco and at a cost of about half what they had proposed to spend.

He achieved a partly finished high school. (Du Bois, 1924).

Juliet Bradford, an alumna of Fisk University and head of the English department at the

then Industrial High School, sent a letter to Du Bois (See Appendix B) in defense of A.H.

Parker, noting:

> … regarding the *Fisk Herald,* I wish to state that I received the one sent out in the
>
> fall and wish to receive copy no. 2. However, I regret very much the unwarranted
>
> attack that was made upon my Principal here. I am a teacher in the Industrial High
>
> School and know that the charges made against Prof. A.H. Parker on page 6 were
>
> untrue. He has labored faithfully here since the very beginning of the school and
>
> has stood for every progressive movement. He has not hindered but has been a
>
> wonderful help in the progress of our community educationally. I am sending you
>
> a copy of our Dedicatory program, containing a brief history of our school…
>
> (Bradford, 1925)

Throughout this correspondence, Bradford's support of A.H. Parker and his vision for

secondary education for Black students in Birmingham, Alabama, was highlighted.

Moreover, as Bradford alluded to within her letter, while A.H. Parker did embrace an

industrial education, his personal beliefs about the best way to educate Black students did

not take precedence over the schooling environment. In fact, with the addition of new

faculty, in particular, Mr. J.R. Coffey, there was more interest in teaching classical

coursework, such as "science, philosophy, and the languages" (Parker, 1932, p. 36).

At the height of its enrollment, A.H. Parker high school touted an attendance rate of almost 4,000 students earning the title of the largest and one of the best Black high schools in the world (Parker, 1932; World's Biggest Negro High, 1950). Many factors made Parker an excellent high school for Black students. For instance, in 1937, in the first volume and the first issue of Carter G. Woodson's *Negro History Bulletin*, Industrial High School was recognized as the school with the largest number of students studying Black History, noting that "three hundred or more of the students actually choose as an elective course the study of Negro History which has been authorized by the Board of Education" (School News, 1937, p. 3).

Recollections from historic A.H. Parker High School alumni, faculty, and staff perceived the educational institution as a vehicle for success that motivated Black students to excel. However, in recent years, the contemporary schooling environment of A.H. Parker High School has experienced challenges that are common to many schools located within urban centers. For instance, 2019 marked the first year since 2016 that Parker High School was not listed on the Alabama State Department of Education's failing-schools list (Wright, 2019). Parker's current principal, Darrell Hudson, attributed the improvements to the collective efforts of the students, faculty, and staff. Hudson stated, "… I knew that we could do better…I've told them several times I was tired of being on the failing list …They took what I said, implemented it in the classroom, and really made it happen" (Wright, 2019). To that end, collectively, the Parker community worked to adjust the school culture and the curriculum to ensure the success of the school. This same spirit and culturally relevant caring for the students at this historic

educational institution did not start with the current administration but originated from

Dr. A.H. Parker's visionary leadership and has continued over 122 years later.

Memories from former students, faculty, and staff tell of a historic institution that

was valued by the African American community and served as a path to liberation

through education. Voluntary oral histories unearth an institution that cultivated student

success in academics, athletics, extra-, and co-curricular activities. Notable alumni of the

historic A.H. Parker community include, Alabama Supreme Court Justice, Oscar W.

Adams Jr, civil rights attorney, Orzell Billingsley, actress and singer, Nell Carter,

political activist and educator, Angela Y. Davis, philanthropist and wife of the late Gen.

Colin L. Powell, Alma Vivian Johnson Powell, jazz musician, Sun Ra, attorney and

community leader, Arthur Shores, and civic activist and educator, Odessa Woolfolk.

Equally important are the 17 narrators who contributed to this oral history study, as their

memories, histories, and contributions are essential to the continuing legacy of A.H.

Parker High School[2].

This oral history aims to illuminate a historical period within the history of A.H.

Parker High School by capturing the lived experiences of former students to ascertain the

climate, practices, and behaviors that existed within PHS that contributed to successful

outcomes for many African American students in Birmingham, Alabama.

---

[2] The terms that researchers use to label research participants are reflective of specific epistemological assumptions. In alignment with most oral history projects, this oral history study used the term "narrators" (Leavy, 2011).

Rationale

The knowledge of the historical and educational pursuits of A.H. Parker High School served as protective factors for Black students against inequities and aided in their positive psychological development. Woodson (1924) cautioned that "If a race has no history, if it has no worth-while tradition, it becomes a negligible factor in the thought of the world, and it stands in danger of being exterminated" (p. 239). Thus, the rationale for conducting this study was to continue the work to acknowledge and document the history of A.H. Parker High School and to unearth specific experiences of culturally relevant caring that served as protective factors for students within this educational community. The implication of this historical scholarship provides a counternarrative to the deficient narratives often attributed to historically and predominantly African American students and educational institutions. Additionally, it extended the work of previous historians who have sought to document the history of A.H. Parker High School and provided a complete and holistic understanding of the culture of care within this schooling environment that continues to motivate students to excel. Furthermore, this oral history study has significant implications for educators, administrators, and policymakers who continue to make decisions for improving the academic and social success of African American students who attend predominantly African American schools (McAdoo, 1980). Thus, this oral history study adds to the literature of historical accounts of historically African American schools that students, families, and communities valued (Anderson, 1988; Fairclough, 2001, 2007; Givens, 2021; Jones-Wilson, 1981; Kelly, 2010; Morris & Morris, 2000; Morris, 2004; Siddle Walker, 1993, 1996, 2000, 2013, 2019; Sowell, 1976).

Statement of the Problem

A significant portion of the research on African American education examines institutional climate, structure, and post-desegregation policies and initiatives while emphasizing the vast deficiencies which exist in these schooling environments. However, similar to emerging scholarship that highlight historic African American educational institutions, and the protective factors that served to prepare African American students to live in a society that deemed them inferior, this study focused on culturally relevant caring in a historically African American secondary school in Birmingham, Alabama.

Although caring is an integral component associated with positive outcomes for students, there is no consensus on the definition as the term is defined and conceptualized in a myriad of ways. Rogers and Webb (1991) posited, "the lack of a coherent definition of caring does not indicate a lack of understanding or knowledge about what caring is or ought to be, rather it reflects our inability to describe that understanding" (p. 177). Therefore, the difficulty is not in our inability to understand what caring is and should look like, but it is in the varied ways by which we attempt to describe a particular type of care in context.

Moreover, this growing body of scholarship underscores the necessity for additional research that describes specific factors that created a culture of care leading to Black students' positive educational outcomes. Despite significant contributions to Birmingham's academic community, the history of A.H. Parker High School between the years 1950 and 1989 has yet to be unearthed within historical scholarship. This oral history study concentrated on the lived experiences of former students of A.H. Parker High School to gain a deeper understanding of the contributions of this historic institution

and its relevance to the greater narrative of the history of Black secondary education in the U.S. South; specifically, regarding its impact and influence on the educational landscape of Birmingham, Alabama.

Purpose and Significance of Study

The goal of this oral history study was to document the lived educational experiences of students who attended A.H. Parker High School and to determine the culturally relevant caring exhibited within the schooling environment. This study utilized an oral history methodology and archival research to examine the study's questions. The central questions of the oral history study are: What were the lived educational experiences of students who attended A.H. Parker High School between 1950 and 1989? Did Birmingham's historical and sociopolitical contexts shape narrators' lived experiences as it related to the culturally relevant caring that existed within this schooling environment?

The 39-year period between 1950 and 1989 was selected because it encompasses and extends beyond the "classical" phase of the Civil Rights Movement (Rustin, 1965). Evidence suggests that educational policies were implemented before, during, and after this "classical" phase to prevent desegregation efforts (Rustin, 1965). Moreover, in 1963 after the desegregation of the Birmingham City School System, A.H. Parker High School remained a predominantly African American school. Still, it continued to be significantly impacted by local legislative and educational policies that altered students' lived experiences within the schooling environment.

This oral history study adds to the scholarship that highlights the historical contributions of predominantly African American institutions and educators. It illustrates the culturally relevant caring that existed within a historic learning community that served as an incubator for the academic and social success of African American students in Birmingham, Alabama. Moreover, uncovering and discussing the emergent themes from this study provide insight into the behaviors and practices that have historically contributed to successful outcomes for African American students and communities.

Overview of Study Design

The primary aim of this study was to gain greater insight into the culturally relevant caring that existed within A.H. Parker High School during a moment in U.S. educational history. This study adds to existing literature that presents a counternarrative to the deficient perspectives of African American education. Therefore, oral history was chosen as the most appropriate methodology. An oral history methodology allowed narrators to tell their unique stories about the culturally relevant caring that was exhibited within A.H. Parker High School during their attendance. According to Leavy (2011), an oral history methodology is most effective for obtaining in-depth knowledge from each participant that speaks to their lived experiences and perspectives. Central to oral history is the process of storytelling, where each participant narrates their own lived experiences (Leavy, 2011). Furthermore, oral histories detail significant portions of the participant's life to discover how individual experiences are connected to larger social, political, and historical context. In addition, archival research was employed to explore and capture the rich histories of the educational experiences of students within historic A.H. Parker High

School between 1950 and 1989. These data were examined to unearth information about Parker and the larger historical, social, and political context of the period being studied. To that end, narrators' oral histories were juxtaposed with archival data to document a more robust and comprehensive examination of this oral history project.

The central questions that guided this study are as follows:

1. What were the lived educational experiences of students who attended A.H. Parker High School between 1950 and 1989?

   a. How did Parker's school community members (former alumni) perceive the culture of care within the schooling environment during the time of their attendance?

2. Did Birmingham's historical and sociopolitical contexts shape narrators' lived experiences as it related to the culturally relevant caring that existed within the schooling environment at A.H. Parker High School?

The following section defines key terms that were used throughout this oral history study.

Definitions of Key Terms

- *African American/Black.* The terms African American/Black are used interchangeably. Grieco et al., (2001) argued that these terms refer to any individual with origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa (p. 2).

- *All-Black/Predominantly African American High School.* These terms were used interchangeably.

- *Culturally Relevant Caring*. Parsons (2005) posited that culturally relevant caring requires that educators understand sociopolitical, historical, and economic structures that negatively impact Black students, and that educators commit to challenging and disrupting those structures. Furthermore, Watson et al. (2016) and define culturally relevant care "as a process in which one's humanity is affirmed by building community, trust, warm demanding, and integrating the cultures and experiences of community members" (p. 986).

- *Historically Black segregated public schools*. Historically Black segregated public schools are *de jure* or legalized segregated public schools that were established with the original intent of educating Black students. As an additional note to readers, I maintain this term for those educational institutions that remained all- or predominantly Black post the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling that deemed separate educational institutions "inherently unequal."

- *Institutional care*. According to Siddle Walker (1993), institutional care "seeks to meet psychological, sociological, and academic needs but provides for those needs to be met directly or indirectly through explicit school policies" (p. 65). Institutional caring reinforces interpersonal interactions and relationships by the establishment of supportive school policies and structures that seek to meet the needs of the whole child.

Theoretical Framework

The guiding theoretical framework that this dissertation is built upon is culturally relevant caring. The concept of culturally relevant caring is informed by culturally relevant pedagogies (Jackson, 2022; Jackson & Ransom, 2021; Watson et al., 2016). In

the following section, traditional theories of care are broadly discussed following a detailed review of culturally relevant caring and its applicability to this oral history study.

Traditional Theories of Care

Across various disciplines, the ethic of care has been defined and conceptualized in a variety of ways (Bubeck, 1995; Eaker-Rich et al., 1996). However, Gilligan's (1993) *In a Different Voice* is foundational to an understanding of the ethic of care. Grounded in feminist theory, Gilligan's research departed from traditional male-dominated moral development theories, that centered an *ethic of justice* primarily concerned with equality and fairness and highlighted the notion that an ethic of care is relational and inextricably linked to gender. According to Gilligan, "In developing an ethic of care, I sought to ground morality in a psychology of relationship and to address the dilemmas that arose in seeking to act responsively and responsibly in connection with others and with oneself" (p. x). For Gilligan, relationships are at the core of an ethic of caring, and it is through relatedness, rather than separateness that morality can be actualized. Additionally, Gilligan's ethic of caring indirectly suggests that caring is primarily a female characteristic and rooted in the way that women are socialized within the larger society (Gilligan, 1993).

Nel Noddings' (1984, 1992, 2001, 2002, 2012) research builds on the work of Carol Gilligan and extends its application to the schooling environment. Like Gilligan, Noddings posited that relationships are central to an ethic of care. While Noddings (1992) does not directly define care within her research, she does provide characteristics of caring relations. Caring is characterized as an encounter between two individuals: "a carer and a recipient of care, or cared-for" (Noddings, 1992, p. 15). Moreover, Noddings

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(1984) distinguishes between "caring-about" and "caring-for." Caring-about is abstract in that it requires no action or effort, while caring-for has an orientation towards action. Essentially, caring-for is a responsibility to act. This aligns with Noddings' (1984) notion of natural caring.

Natural caring is characterized by the "natural" relationships that are established with primary caregivers and family (p. 94). Specifically, Noddings elevated the relationship between a mother and child as the ultimate model for natural caring. Noddings suggested that it is instinctive to care for those with whom we share a natural bond. According to Noddings (1984), natural caring is the "cherished condition," or the primary target that individuals aim within the caring relation (p. xvi). If there are issues within the relational encounters that we have with others, we draw from ethical caring to restore our desire for natural caring. Noddings characterized ethical caring as an "ideal developed in congruence with one's best remembrance of caring and being cared-for" (p. 94). Thus, in order for ethical caring to occur, there has to be a foundation or memories of caring encounters and interactions. Without a memory of being caring or cared-for, one is unable to draw from the ideal ethical self, and thus cannot sustain natural caring relationships and thereby cannot survive.

Nel Noddings' (1984, 1992, 2001, 2002, 2012) relational approach to caring has important implications for caring interactions enacted within the school setting, particularly related to the student-teacher relationship and how care is exhibited within educational environments. Noddings (1992) advocated for the role of schools to be expanded to serve as "multipurpose institutions," similar to the family unit (p. 63). As a result, schools should not only focus on academics, but instead, attempt to address the

needs of the whole child, particularly as it related to their ability to be caring and to be cared-for.

While Noddings' seminal research is essential to an understanding of caring within educational settings, a critique of Noddings' work reveals limitations to traditional theories of care that privilege the experiences and values of majority groups. Moreover, Thompson (1998) claimed that Noddings' ethic of care does not acknowledge systemic inequities or oppressive social structures as it silences the experiences, voices, and values of African Americans. Patterson and Gordon et al. (2008) argued that Noddings' theory of care adopts the belief that "society is just and equitable… and that schools are neutral sites that are not about politics but are about nurturing children" (p. 100). These "colorblind" and neutral assumptions fail to foreground the social and political histories and current realities of Black students and institutions.

Theories of Care with Diverse Populations

Distinctive from traditional theories of care, such as Noddings' theory of care, theories of care with diverse populations draw upon the unique and varied experiences of students within the schooling environment. Rolón-Dow (2005) investigated the intersection of race/ethnicity and caring in the educational experiences of Puerto Rican girls. Rolón-Dow proposed that educators adopt a "critical care praxis" as an alternative to traditional care theories to care for students who belong to marginalized groups. Rolón-Dow asserted that for educators to care for students of color appropriately, they must understand the sociocultural and political conditions of students and the communities in which they live. Educators cannot disregard the experiences and histories

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of students, as these factors continue to shape and impact the daily lives of students and communities (Rolón-Dow, 2005). A vital element of a critical care praxis is that it aims to address care, not only on an individual level, but instead, acknowledge the importance of care at the institutional level. Rolón-Dow noted that interpersonal caring within the student-teacher relationship, while essential for the success of the student, was limited in scope for transformative educational change to occur.

Caring for African American Students.

Care and justice are important themes in the scholarship concerning African American education. Siddle Walker and Snarey (2004) asserted that "African Americans see both justice and care as necessary for their children's development…African American communities generally want the justice of equality of opportunity and, simultaneously, the care that is associated with school success" (pp. 6-7). From an African American perspective, an ethic of care and an ethic of justice cannot be prioritized over the other. Instead, they are complementary and work in conjunction to ensure African American students and communities' academic and social success. Siddle Walker's (1993) research on the value of historically segregated schools identified the critical differences between interpersonal and institutional caring, acknowledging that institutional care "seeks to meet psychological, sociological, and academic needs but provides for those needs to be met directly or indirectly through explicit school policies" (p. 65).

Similarly, Nieto (1998) concluded that "caring implies that schools' policies and practices also need to change because simply changing the nature of their relationships

with teachers and schools will not by itself change the opportunities the children are given" (p. 159). Rolón-Dow (2005), Nieto (1998), and Siddle Walker (1993) attempted to convey the limitations of interpersonal caring when institutional caring is not recognized as a means of contributing to the success of students, particularly those who are members of marginalized groups. Institutional caring reinforces interpersonal caring by establishing supportive school policies and structures that seek to meet the needs of the whole child. Educators must be willing to exhibit not only interpersonal caring but also challenge structural inequities, policies, and practices that disproportionately negatively impact students of color for transformative change to occur.

A qualitative phenomenological study by Roberts (2010) examined teacher care for African American high school students through the use of counternarratives from eight African American teachers whose respective principals and parents identified them as "successful" educators because they motivated Black students to excel (p.456). Eleven themes were identified as emergent from the study; however, Roberts only addressed the two themes that emerged most frequently political clarity/colour talk and concern for students' futures. According to researchers, "colour talk, closely related to political clarity, takes place when marginalized teachers of colour inform marginalized students of their same culture about the challenges and issues germane to being a member of that culture in the USA" (p. 458). Furthermore, Roberts (2010) described a theme of concern for students' futures which is indicative of African American teachers' commitment to not only ensuring that students master subject content matter but that they "master life" (p. 460). Roberts posited that the care exhibited by African American teachers towards African American students was unique in that it incorporated not only traditional theories

of care but also integrated elements of Critical Race Theory. Roberts argued that this integration is a theoretical hypothesis toward a theory of culturally relevant critical teacher care.

Drawing upon a framework of politicized caring, McKinney de Royston et al. (2021) highlighted the perspectives of African American educators and how they expressed care in the form of protection for African American students. Politicized caring enacts four components that include political clarity, communal bonds, affirming potential, and developmental appropriateness (McKinney de Royston et al., 2017). Care in this sense was articulated as encompassing the psychological, physical, emotional, intellectual, and relational components of protection for African American students. At the core of this "relational work" is the notion that some African American educators are able to care for African American students in specific and meaningful ways that acknowledge the historical, social, and political milieu in which students live and thrive (James-Gallaway & Harris, 2021; McKinney de Royston et al., 2017; Ransom, 2020; Watson, 2018).

Culturally Relevant Caring

Culturally Relevant Caring is a theory that developed out of Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings' theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (Jackson & Ransom, 2021; Jackson et al, 2018; Watson et al., 2016). Ladson-Billings (2021) argued that the three tenants of culturally relevant pedagogy suggest that students must have 1) academic success, 2) cultural competence, and 3) critical consciousness. To that end, Jackson & Ransom (2021) and Watson et al. (2016) built on Ladson-Billings' theory focusing primarily on

caring. Watson et al. (2016) defined culturally relevant caring as "…a process in which one's humanity is affirmed by building community, trust, warm demanding, and integrating the cultures and experiences of community members" (Watson et al., 2016, p. 985). Moreover, according to Parsons (2005), caring that is culturally relevant demands that educators understand sociopolitical, historical, and economic structures that negatively impact students, and that educators commit to challenging and disrupting those structures. Whereas Gilligan (1993) and Noddings (1984, 1992) prioritized an ethic of care over an ethic of justice, Parsons (2005) contended that "justice and caring must come together in the act of teaching; if not, systemic inequities and inequalities are preserved and perpetuated by the teacher's actions" (p. 26). It is this acknowledgment of justice that characterizes culturally relevant caring.

In summary, the studies in this section suggest that culturally relevant theories of care are inclusive of an ethic of care and an ethic of justice. Furthermore, culturally relevant theories of care highlight the importance of interpersonal care that exists between the student and teacher relationship but also acknowledge the necessity for institutional caring that seeks to establish policies and structures within the schooling environment that support the needs of the whole student.

Organization of Study

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 included an introduction to the study's topic, the overall significance of the study, and the significance of selecting A.H. Parker High School as a focus for this dissertation. Additionally, Chapter I examined the theoretical framework used to support the study and

outlined the study's research questions and provided definitions of key terms. Next, Chapter II provided a review of the literature that grounded and guided this oral history study. Chapter III described the specific methodological approach used to guide the procedures for selecting narrators, data collection and analysis. Chapter IV presented and discussed the emergent themes and significant findings from the study. Finally, Chapter V concluded with a discussion of findings and implications, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature research in this section does not focus on the narratives that many historically Black schools were unequal in quality and resources. Although this prevailing narrative is not entirely inaccurate, it provides an incomplete depiction of the historical schooling environment of historically Black segregated schools (Siddle Walker, 1996). Instead, this section offers counternarratives that aim to highlight the value that Black schools held among Black students, educators, families, and community members.
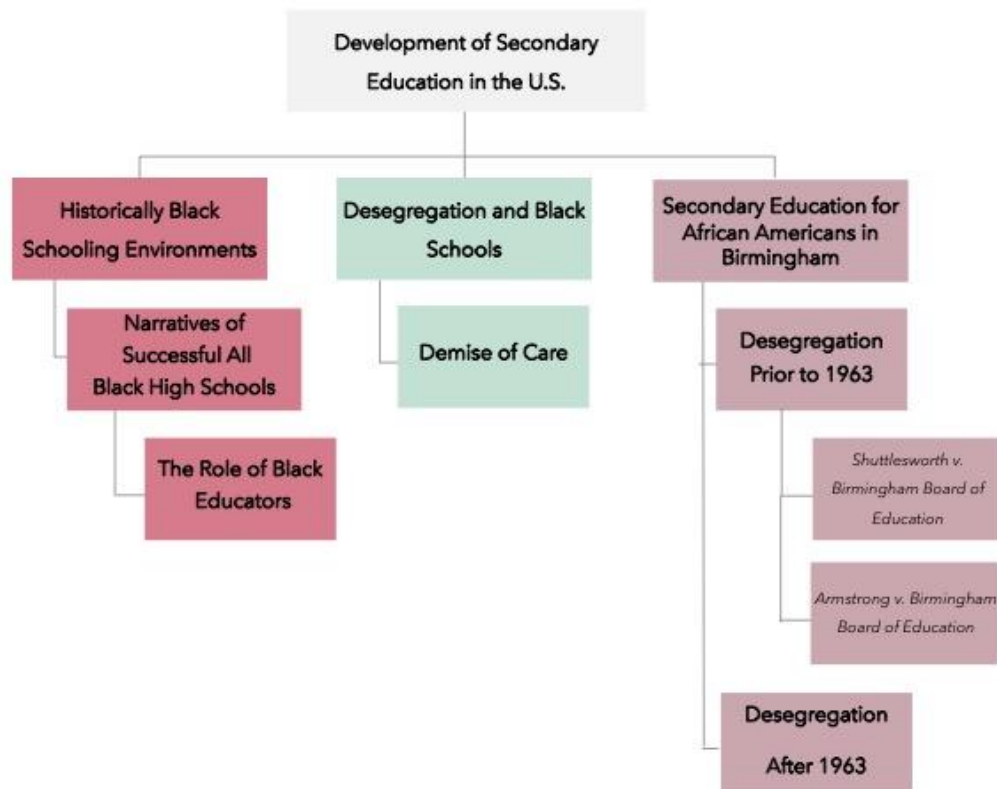
Figure 2. Concept Map of Literature Review

Development of Secondary Education in the U.S.

This section provides a brief overview of the development of secondary education in the U.S. It then describes the role of historically Black schooling environments in the effective education of African American youth.

Initially, secondary education began as an educational pursuit for the elite who did not have plans to attend college (Pulliam & Van Patten, 1995). The first American high school was established in 1821 in Boston. At its inception, the English Classical School was limited to only educating boys. In 1824 the school was renamed the English High School. According to Pulliam and Van Patten (1995), in 1827, the State of Massachusetts enacted a law requiring any "town of four thousand or more to create a high school, but not all towns complied" (p. 66). As a result, the growth of the American high school was slow (Pulliam & Van Patten, 1995). The slow growth was due primarily to competition from private academies and disagreement concerning taxation for secondary schools. However, the notion of a free high school or a "college for all the people" attracted individuals from poor and working-class groups, eventually causing the popularity of the idea. (Pulliam & Van Patten, 1995, p. 66).

In contrast to the slow growth of the American high school for boys, in 1826 the first female high school opened in Boston. However, because of the influx of girls applying for admission, the school closed due to lack of funding (Pulliam & Van Patten, 1995). In the U.S. South, the development of secondary education was primarily inhibited due to the aftermath of the Civil War (Pulliam & Van Patten, 1995). In particular, African Americans were not included or considered in the planning for secondary education (Anderson, 1988). Anderson (1988) noted that prior to 1920, secondary education for

African Americans was mainly available through private institutions. Moreover, Anderson (1988) argued that there were exceptions, noting that a few Black Public High Schools were established through the coalition of a group of White philanthropists who supported the idea. Namely, identifying the efforts of white educational leaders, John Herbert Phillips, Birmingham's first superintendent, and Samuel Ullman, president of the Birmingham Board of Education, and their roles in helping to establish Negro High School, later to be renamed, A.H. Parker High School (Anderson, 1988; Seals, in press).

The following section broadly addresses historically Black schooling environments and how these educational institutions along with the administrators and educators who taught within them were the guiding forces for the academic and social success of African American students.

Historically Black Schooling Environments

The establishment of educational institutions for African American students was met with massive resistance, as many northern and southern whites deemed education for Blacks unnecessary and irrelevant (Anderson, 1988). Often, it was through the collective efforts of Black community members and some White philanthropists that schools were established and sustained (Fairclough, 2001). Students, educators, families, and the broader community viewed Black segregated schools as valuable institutions that not only prepared students to thrive academically but also provided education and support to the larger community. Fairclough (2001) noted that Black schools operated in several ways that served the academic needs of Black students, and also served the needs of families and community members. For instance, schools held education classes for adults

in health and homemaking, functioned as community centers, and were neutral meeting places for Black organizations and religious groups. The following section reviews relevant narratives of successful all-Black High Schools.

Narratives of Successful All-Black High Schools

Thomas Sowell (1976) examined six Black high schools and two elementary schools chosen due to the high number of doctoral degrees earned by alumni from 1957 through 1962. Researching this specific era allowed Sowell to document the outcomes pre- and post- *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. Sowell documented how educational institutions were affected post-*Brown*. This included patterns of White flight and economic and social changes that occurred due to the changing status of metropolitan cities. Sowell discovered a similar ethos of care within all six institutions. These schools contained teachers and administrators who were committed to the academic preparation of students and to equip students to reject notions of Black inferiority that existed within a hegemonic society. To define successful student outcomes, Sowell's research primarily focused on academic variables, such as students' grade point averages, standardized test scores, and degree attainment. Several themes emerged from Sowell's analysis; however, the following two themes are discussed: 1) Schools were orderly, and students were respectful; and 2) exemplar administrative leadership. Sowell maintained that a common thread among all six institutions were high standards and orderly institutions. According to Sowell, schools were "repeatedly described by alumni, teachers, and others as places where 'discipline problems' were virtually unheard-of" (p. 54). Moreover, Sowell's description of an exemplar administrator at Brooklyn P.S. 91 noted, "his talk is free of the

educational cliches, and public relations smoothness normally associated with school administrators" (p. 49). Sowell's study illuminated the high expectations and academic excellence among students and administrators within historically Black segregated schools. His research provided a counternarrative to the deficient histories of historically segregated schools and offered a more complete analysis of Black segregated educational institutions.

Similarly, Jones-Wilson's (1981) comprehensive case study focused on school characteristics that aimed to promote successful learning among the Black student body of Dunbar High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. This researcher discovered that alumni remembered the institution as being "one's home away from home, where students were taught, nurtured, supported, corrected, encouraged, and punished if/when it was necessary to do so" (p. 2). Additionally, alumni noted that "there was never a choice for the student between 'learning' and 'not learning.' To fail to learn what was being taught in school was unacceptable to teachers, family, peers, and the community" (p. 2). Furthermore, Jones-Wilson concluded that students were expected to learn and that teachers were expected to be active, involved, and create an academic exceptional academic experience for all students.

Expanding the research of both Jones-Wilson (1981) and Sowell (1976), Siddle Walker (1996) examined the historical nature of rural segregated schooling. However, whereas Jones-Wilson and Sowell's research concentrated on segregated schools in urban locations, Siddle Walker's case study on Caswell County Training School (CCTS) focused on a segregated high school in a rural setting. Furthermore, rather than explore academic variables, Siddle Walker focused on segregated schools' inner workings to

determine what students, educators, and the broader community viewed as positive elements of their segregated schooling experiences.

Like Sowell's (1976) findings, Siddle Walker discovered that segregated schools enacted an ethic of care that contributed to Black students' successful outcomes. Four primary themes and characteristics that contributed to the caring environment established within Black segregated schools included: 1) educators who were exemplar and provided transformative educational opportunities for students, 2) extra-curricular initiatives and programs that provided students with leadership skills and helped students to build self-esteem, 3) supportive parents and community leaders, and 4) Principals who served as visionary leaders. (Siddle Walker, 1996). These four themes consistently were emergent throughout the literature on historically segregated schools (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999, 2002, 2005; Fairclough, 2001; Foster, 1993; Kelly, 2010; Morris & Morris, 2000). These themes indicate both the interpersonal caring and the institutional caring that existed within CCTS and how these combined factors motivated students to excel academically and socially. Additionally, Siddle Walker acknowledged that a limitation of her study was that this one school case study was not generalizable to other segregated schools. Siddle Walker also maintained that while the focus of her research was on the value of CCTS as a segregated institution, there were issues that served as obstacles to student progress. These issues included instances of colorism and harsh discipline methods that students experienced.

Vivian Gunn Morris and Curtis Morris (2000), in their account of the caring and nurturing environment of a historically Black segregated high school in Trenholm, Alabama, referenced the institutional structures, practices, and policies that contributed to

the successful student outcomes. Programs and activities included: extra and co-curricular programs that included a variety of clubs and student organizations. These institutional structures provided Black students with enrichment opportunities that they would not otherwise have access to within a legalized segregated environment (Foster, 1993; Siddle Walker & Snarey, 2004). Participation provided Black students with leadership and team-building skills and enabled students to develop self-confidence and build a positive self-image. For Black students in this segregated schooling environment, "school was preparation for life" (Morris & Morris, 2000, p. 64). The research of Morris and Morris revealed the importance of the schooling environment for Black students. These educational institutions served to prepare students academically and socially for life outside of school.

Established in 1865 as a private elementary school, Lincoln High School in Kansas City, Missouri, was another all-Black high school that was viewed as valuable to the African American students who attended (Caruthers & Poos, 2015). Through an oral history methodology, Caruthers and Poos (2015) documented the experiences of 5 alumni of Lincoln High School. Alumni participants respectively represented the graduating classes of 1956, 1969, 1970, 1977, and 1983 (Caruthers & Poos, 2015). Findings from this study aligned with previous findings from educational scholarship on historically all-Black schools (Foster, 1993; Givens, 2021; Morris & Morris, 2000; Siddle Walker, 1993, 1996; Siddle Walker & Snarey, 2004). The identified themes included: exemplary teachers and principals as disciplinarian, interpersonal caring, institutional structures through teacher, parent, and community support, legacy and tradition, unequal resources, and a curriculum of high academic standards (Caruthers & Poos, 2015). Furthermore, the

findings of this oral history revealed that the African American alumnae's perceptions of historic Lincoln High School are that of an educational institution that prepared them for academic and social success. Overall, alumni noted that the environment was an incubator for their success and prepared them to live and thrive within the larger society.

Patterson (2015) provided an account of the historically Black Hillside High School in Durham North Carolina detailing the racial division that existed within the city and how this Black schooling environment remained intact despite efforts to desegregate the school. Patterson attributed the school's resilience to the collective efforts of the African American community that existed within Durham. Specifically, the community of Hayti was an all-Black area just outside of Durham's city limits. Together, the residents of Hayti established an enclave of successful Black businesses, political organizations, and religious institutions that yielded political, economic, and educational power. According to Patterson (2015), the Hayti community heavily influenced the school desegregation process at Hillside High School. Approximately sixteen years after the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling, plans were established to convert Hillside High School from an all-Black high school to 58 percent Black (Patterson, 2015). However, only 31 percent of White students reported to the school and by 1975 Hillside's Black student enrollment had increased to 80 percent. Interestingly, Patterson (2015) noted that the culture of Hillside High School was uninterrupted by efforts to desegregate the school. For example, Patterson (2015) stated that the rich school traditions that Hillside students and alumni valued persisted despite expressed frustration from White students and their parents. Similar to previous scholarship (Caruthers & Poos, 2015; Foster, 1993; Givens, 2021; Morris & Morris, 2000; Siddle Walker, 1993, 1996),

narratives of Hillside High School describe a school community that nurtured Black students and prepared them for academic and social success.

These studies of historically Black schools provide a counternarrative to the deficient perspectives associated with segregated schools. Many of the emergent themes within the literature were consistent across educational institutions. In addition, they identified how these educational institutions were valued among students, educators, families, and the larger African American community.

The Role of Black Educators. A vital component of the historically Black schooling environment was the critical role of Black educators. The following section provides a review of the role of Black educators and how they sought to exhibit culturally relevant caring to ensure the success of Black students in historically Black segregated schools.

Much of the literature on the role of Black educators within historically Black schools has viewed Black educators through a deficient lens. Dingus' (2006) research highlighted the ways that dominant narratives have "co-opted and overlooked the roles of African American teachers in schools, and subsequent efforts to obtain educational opportunities for African American students" (p. 228). For instance, Fultz's (1995) account of Black teachers in the South from 1890-1940 described Black teachers as "underprepared," "overburdened with extra curricula expectations," and "powerless" (p. 402). Additionally, according to Fultz, the powerlessness and voicelessness of Black educators prevented them from effectively educating Black children. This portrayal of Black educators is not wholly accurate. While Fultz correctly depicts the deficiencies in the provisions and conditions that Black educators had to work with, he inaccurately

portrays the quality of education that Black educators provided to Black students. Narratives describing Black educators and the quality of the education that these educators have historically provided as substandard perpetuate the false narrative that African American students, educators, and institutions have no history of success (Siddle Walker, 1996, 2000).

However, increasingly empirical scholarship documents the role of Black educators and the overt and subtle practices they utilized to ensure that Black students were prepared for life inside and outside the schooling environment (Dingus, 2006; Foster, 1997; Loder-Jackson, 2015a; Morris & Morris, 2000; Siddle Walker, 1996, 2000). These perspectives reflect the notion that Black educators were leaders within the Black community (King 1993). Historically Black educational institutions provided Black students and the surrounding Black community members with hope for liberation through education (Fairclough, 2001, 2007; King 1993; Siddle Walker, 1996). In a comprehensive review, King (1993) noted that Black teachers have served in multiple capacities and roles inside and outside of the schooling environment. Most importantly, Black teachers served as role models, not only for students but for families and the larger community

Tillman (2004) specifically noted the distinctive role that Black principals historically played in advancing Black education. Tillman argued that within historically Black segregated schools, principals were able to relate to students in unique ways because they understood and were familiar with the students' lived realities. Moreover, Black principals were able to incorporate these cultural norms into their leadership practices (Tillman, 2004).

Siddle Walker and Snarey (2004) characterized Black teachers and principals as caregivers who provided personal care to students and their families. These researchers noted that teachers and principals played a variety of roles to ensure the success of Black students. Siddle Walker and Snarey described these roles as 1) counselor, 2) encourager, 3) benefactor, and 4) racial cheerleader (p.80). In the role of counselor, educators took the time to communicate with students about course subject matter and about life outside of school. According to Siddle Walker, "...teachers believed that they held a knowledge base that students did not have, and they dispensed advice in ways that they believed facilitated the growth of the individual and the race" (p. 81). Black teachers were familiar with the experiences of Black students in segregated schools. These educators attempted to use their wisdom from their life experiences to assist students with meeting both academic and personal goals (Foster, 1997). Black educators also served in the role of an encourager. In this role, educators "...encouraged students to move beyond what was expected of them and urged them to take on new challenges" (p. 82). Within the role of benefactor, Black educators helped students and their families by using their influence or knowledge. Siddle Walker and Snarey also indicated that Black educators served in the role of racial cheerleaders. In this essential role, Black educators "...went beyond the curriculum to instill students with pride in their race and to make certain they understood their history and heritage" (p. 83). Black educators understood the importance of instilling cultural and racial pride into Black students. It was these important messages that fostered and developed resilience within Black students to dispel notions of Black inferiority (Foster, 1997; Morris & Morris, 2000; Siddle Walker & Snarey, 2004; Siddle Walker, 1993, 1996, 2000).

Similarly, Beauboeuf-Lafontant's (2002) work focused on characteristics of womanist caring that Black women teachers have historically demonstrated. This researcher aligned exemplary Black women teachers' pedagogy with tenants of womanism, specifically citing the following three characteristics: embrace of the maternal, political clarity, and an ethic of risk. One of the key findings in this research suggested that Black educators possessed political clarity. According to Beauboeuf-Lafontant, "political clarity is the recognition by teachers that there are relationships between schools and society that differentially structure the successes and failures of groups of children" (p. 77). In addition, Beauboeuf-Lafontant noted that Black teachers believed that they were "ethically and ethnically responsible for preparing these youth for future leadership and for making contributions to this unique mission, namely the liberation and enhancement of the quality of life for Black people" (p. 77). Essentially, Black teachers accepted the responsibility to educate Black students academically and also to prepare them to engage socially and politically within the larger society (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Givens, 2021; Morris & Morris, 2000; Watson, 2018).

Black teachers are remembered for their commitment and dedication to educating Black students. Many viewed their profession as a "calling" or "mission" to make a difference in the life of Black students (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Foster, 1997; Kelly, 2010; Morris & Morris, 2000; Siddle Walker, 2000). Despite inequities and lack of resources, Black teachers were able to create an educational environment for students to excel and exhibit culturally relevant caring for Black students that acknowledged students' social, economic, and political positions within the larger society (Rolón-Dow, 2005). Black teachers recognized the importance of both interpersonal and institutional

caring, as they developed relationships with the students and their families, while also creating structures and policies within the schooling environment that prepared students for life inside and outside of the classroom (Foster, 1997; Morris & Morris, 2000; Roberts, 2010; Rolón-Dow, 2005; Siddle Walker, 1996, 2000; Watson, 2018).

Desegregation and Black Schools

Well before the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, there was conflict within the Black community concerning how to best meet the educational needs of Black children. For example, in 1851, Thomas Paul Smith, a Black shop owner in Boston, was attacked by a group of all Black men (Moss, 2007). Smith's attackers bound, beat, and stuffed his mouth with plaster that was made with tar, feathers, and other substances. Three years earlier, Smith and these same attackers had participated in a community debate over the advantages and disadvantages of implementing desegregation policies. Smith's opposition to school desegregation led to his attack in 1851. Moss (2007) contended that this tarring and feathering attack served to "symbolically and literally silence" Smith (p. 221). This ordeal also exhibited how deeply contentious the issue of school desegregation was within the Black community.

Furthermore, in 1935, in a critical essay, Du Bois grappled with the notion of whether Blacks needed separate schools. He concluded that there is no magic in segregated or integrated schooling environments, but what was needed was a quality and transformative educational experience for Black students. Du Bois (1935) argued, "a mixed school with poor and unsympathetic teachers, with hostile public opinions, and no teaching of truth concerning Black folk, is bad. [And], a segregated school with ignorant

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placeholders, inadequate equipment, poor salaries, and wretched housing, is equally bad" (p. 335). Du Bois arguments suggested that it is not the educational setting that matters; rather, what is most important is the specific educational experiences that determine successful outcomes. Additionally, Du Bois noted that this educational environment should be one that treats Black students humanely and instills in them a sense of pride in their history and culture.

Now, more than 60 years after the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruled that separate educational institutions were "inherently unequal," there remains contention as to whether school desegregation was the best avenue for providing equal educational opportunities for Black students (Bell, 2004; Dumas, 2014). According to Milner and Howard (2004), school desegregation decentered Black institutions, particularly Black schools. This decentering, as described, led to the loss of Black educators and their ability to appropriately provide culturally relevant caring to Black students. The following section provides a brief overview of the demise of care in predominantly African American educational settings.

The Demise of Care

George Dempsey and Noblit (1993) provided insight into the varied ways that the implementation of school desegregation policies had on a Black segregated school and the surrounding community. An important finding from this research revealed that one of the more significant consequences of desegregation was the demise of care. Dempsey and Noblit interviewed 41 participants from the Rougemont School community. Through oral history interviews, the following themes were identified: continuity of place, purpose,

and people. In essence, prior to school desegregation, the school and community worked in conjunction with each other to provide an exceptional educational experience for Black students. However, with the implementation of desegregation policies, Rougemont was closed, and the community and individual families suffered because of this reorganization. In addition, researchers noted that students were assigned to a desegregated school that resegregated them through scapegoating and stigmatization.

Similarly, Irvine and Irvine's (1983) research confirmed Dempsey and Noblit's (1993) findings that the implementation of school desegregation policies had an adverse effect on Black students and their respective communities. Irvine and Irvine described school desegregation as "*iatrogenesis,*" a medical term "...whereby the prescriptions or schedule of treatments produce an unintended and unanticipated ailment far worse than the original disease for which medical treatment was sought in the first instance" (p. 411). These researchers suggested that the school desegregation process resulted in unintended consequences that greatly impacted Black students. These consequences far exceeded academic objectives but included unintended consequences that affected Black educators and the larger African American community.

The research of Milner and Howard (2004) provided insight into the impact that the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision had on Black teachers. Through in-depth interviews with three educational researchers, Milner and Howard found two emergent themes that are beneficial for practice and policy. Researchers posited that Black students attended Black segregated schools with educators who were more educated, better trained, and more familiar with the culture of Black students than their White counterparts. Similar to findings in King (1993) and Siddle Walker (1993, 1996, 2000),

Milner and Howard (2004) found that Black educators served as leaders within the community that they worked and lived in and were able to establish significant caring relationships with students and families. Unfortunately, with the implementation of desegregation policies, many Black educators lost jobs, were demoted, or were displaced. Additionally, when Black educators were reassigned to White schools, they lost their voice and their ability to function within the same roles that they previously had occupied in Black segregated schools.

The implementation of school desegregation policies greatly impacted the way in which Black educators and communities functioned; in particular, the demise of culturally relevant caring that provided for and educated Black students for success. Fairclough (2001) stated, "*Plessy v. Ferguson* had to be destroyed—even if Black teachers, Black schools, and Black communities paid a heavy price. Fairclough's concluding statement is indicative of what Black students and Black communities gave up for the hope of social change that would allow Black students the opportunity to receive an equal education. However, Fairclough's statement reflects the continued dismissal and depreciation of Black education and Black people in general. The section that follows explores the impact of Birmingham, Alabama's sociopolitical history and how it has impacted the culturally relevant caring that is exhibited within predominantly African American educational institutions.

Secondary Education for African Americans in Birmingham

The first public school in Birmingham, Alabama was established in March of 1874. Named after Colonel James R. Powell, the first elected major of Birmingham and

President of Elyton Land Company (LaMonte, 1977). This school was known as a "free school" indicating its lack of association with a religious denomination (LaMonte, 1977). The "free school" was established with the intent of all only educating the White students of Birmingham, Alabama. The educational curriculum focused on developing the intellectual acumen and "the person as a whole" (p.6). According to LaMonte (1977), "no provisions were made for the education of Black children" (p.6).

For African Americans, the pursuit of an education has always meant freedom and liberation from oppression. Pursuing what was once denied and deemed illegal and embedded into the laws of the state was seen as an act of resistance. For instance, in 1833, the *Alabama Slave Code* outlined the following:

> Any person or persons who shall attempt to teach any free person of color, or slave, to spell, read, or write, shall, upon conviction thereof by indictment, be fined in a sum not less than two hundred and fifty dollars, nor more than five hundred dollars. (Akin, 1833)

The Alabama Slave Codes reflected the harsh restrictions placed on African Americans and how laws attempted to reinforce the White supremacist ideals. 35 years later, in 1868, there were no African American teachers in the state of Alabama and no African American students nor educational institutions except those recognized by the Federal Military Commander (Brown, 1959).

Birmingham, Alabama has long been known as Alabama's largest city until recently when Huntsville, Alabama gained the new title. However, Birmingham's metropolitan area remains the largest in Alabama (Chandler, 2021). Furthermore, Birmingham is better known for being the seat of the Civil Rights Movement. Therefore,

a review of Birmingham's sociopolitical history is necessary to recognize the continuing impact that opposition to equal educational opportunities has on Black students and communities. Similar to previous historical narratives on the establishment of public educational institutions, many White citizens of Birmingham resisted educating Black children (Anderson, 1988; Bond, 1994; Harris, 1977; Loder-Jackson, 2015a). However, a few members of Birmingham's White socially elite groups who employed Black individuals deemed it beneficial and in their interest for African Americans to receive an education (Harris, 1977; LaMonte, 1977). For example, in 1899, Samuel Ullman, the President of the Board of Education reported going above and beyond "to improve the possibilities of our colored children, recognizing that...nearly all our domestic help are colored, and as such are in daily contact with our children; hence, the duty of raising their moral standard as indicated, as much as their educational standard" (Harris, 1977, p.173). It was this White self-interest and the possibility of having an educated labor force that contributed to industrial productivity that ultimately resulted in the establishment of Black educational institutions.

In 1876, the Black community petitioned for a "free colored school" to educate the Black students of Birmingham. However, while the Board of Aldermen agreed to hire a teacher, they provided no provisions for a building (LaMonte, 1977, p.6). The burden to secure and purchase a building for the educating of Black students was placed on the Black community (LaMonte, 1977).

The first mention of a secondary school for African American students was a parochial school organized by St. Mark's Episcopal Church. Founded in 1892, St. Mark's Academy and Industrial Institute was the first school to offer high school grades for

African American students in the City of Birmingham. Initially, the school started with grades one through seven and gradually added high school grades as new facilities were built and expanded. According to Brown (1959), the school was supervised by two White teachers, Miss Kornan of Brooklyn, New York, and Miss Patchen of Battle Creek, Michigan. The rector, Rev. Charles W. Brooks, an African American clergy from Baltimore, Maryland, served as principal of the school (Brown, 1959). In June 1940, St. Mark's Academy closed after educating the African American youth of Birmingham for 48 years. Brown (1959) posited that "The action was taken by the Executive Council of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Alabama on account of the advancement of public school education in the higher grades for Negroes in the city schools of Birmingham" (p.15). It is estimated that approximately 500 students graduated from St. Mark's Academy (Brown, 1959).

The first public secondary schools for African Americans were located at Tuscumbia, Huntsville, and Birmingham. In 1912, there were only three recognized four-year public secondary schools for African Americans. These institutions were Trenholm High School in Tuscumbia, Alabama, Council High School in Huntsville, and A.H. Parker High School in Birmingham. Trenholm High School closed in 1969 and students were transferred to Deshler High School (Morris & Morris, 2000). Likewise, Council High School closed in 1970 after desegregation plans were implemented for the city. In 1930, Bond found that over 50 percent of African American students enrolled in the 10th, 11th, and 12th grades of public high schools in Alabama were enrolled in Industrial High School, later renamed A.H. Parker High School (Bond, 1994). A.H. Parker High School continues to serve Birmingham's high school students. Brown noted that these secondary

schools for African American students were named for exemplar African American educators (Brown, 1959).

Desegregation in Birmingham Prior to 1963

Despite the 1954 landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision deeming separate educational institutions for African American and White students "inherently unequal", prior to 1963, Birmingham Public Schools maintained a dual school system. As a result, White students and faculty attended designated White schools, while African American students and faculty attended designated Black schools. A.H. Parker High School remained the sole four-year public high school for African American students until 1937, when the White Ullman Elementary School was converted into a high school for Black students (Brown, 1959). To that end, Ullman High School became the second public high school for African American students in Birmingham. Ullman School, named after Samuel Ullman, who served as president of the Birmingham Board of Education, was established in 1901. This educational institution served as an elementary school for White students within Birmingham's Public School System (Brown, 1959). According to local historian, Charles A. Brown, it was due to the "gradual shift in population" that prompted the school board to convert the White Ullman Elementary School to a high school for the Black youth of Birmingham (Brown, 1959, p. 42). Initially, Ullman High School began with two high school grades and gradually added grades until the high school's curriculum was fully developed (Brown, 1959). In 1952, Ullman High School graduated its first class. Similar to Parker High School, Ullman High School offered African American students academic and vocational curriculum options. However,

Ullman High School closed in 1970 due to local desegregation plans with the aim of racial integration. Moreover, during the Civil Rights Movement, in 1959, Northern High School, later renamed, George Washington Carver High School was established as another public high school for Black students with the dual purpose of evading the *Brown* ruling and maintaining segregated schools in Birmingham.

The goal to preserve racial segregation in Birmingham City Schools continued through overt and subtle means. A few years before the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling*,* in anticipation of the decision to integrate public schools, the Alabama State legislature amended the laws to maintain segregation in the public schools (Ayers, 2013; Loder-Jackson, 2015a). Specifically, Alabama Amendment 111 was recommended by a legislative committee to preserve school segregation by allowing parents the option for their students to "attend schools provided for their own race" (Ayers, 2013). President of Alabama College at Montevallo, F.E. Lund, explained that Amendment 111 "will prevent any child in Alabama being compelled by Alabama law to attend a mixed school" (Ayers, 2013, p. 49). Moreover, W.J. Terry, previous State Superintendent of Education, advocated for the passage of the amendment stating that through implementation, "we can make sure that Alabama's public school system will continue to function in every county of our state on the segregated basis which has always been maintained" (Ayers, 2013, p. 49). Courts and legislative laws became the primary mechanism through which segregation was preserved. Austin Meadows, the former Alabama State Superintendent of Education vowed to "find a legal way to maintain segregation in schools"*,* after the Supreme Court ruled on the *Brown v. Board of Education* case (Bagley, 2018). Sam Engelhardt, Alabama Republican representative, and proponent of segregation introduced

bills that would ultimately eradicate the state's public schools and replace them with private schools financed with designated grants from the state (Bagley, 2018). Alabama's Pupil Placement Law was a bill initially drafted by former Alabama State Senator and Mayor of Birmingham, Albert Boutwell. The primary objective of the Pupil Placement Law was to legally preserve segregation by maintaining a dual school system (Ala. Pupil Placement Law, 1958). This was legally accomplished by placing the power of assigning students to schools in the hands of local school board leaders. Officers of local school boards were allowed to consider practical situations, such as class size and availability of space, transportation, academic preparation, and intelligence. Additionally, the law enabled school boards to consider other factors in determining placements, such as psychological wellness, home life, and the degree of morals and personal standards that students possessed. Notably, school board officials also had the authority to determine if a student's enrollment in a particular school would cause friction or distress to the schooling environment or larger community (Bagley, 2018). The *Birmingham World*, a local African American newspaper in Birmingham argued that the Pupil Placement Plan was "legally worthless and morally defective" (Bagley, 2018).

The Pupil Placement Law effectively created a legal barrier that prevented the placement of African American students into White schools (Ala. Pupil Placement Law, 1958). Anderson (2016) posited that it is these types of subtle pursuits that are often imperceptible but cause the most damage to marginalized groups seeking equality.

Shuttlesworth v. Birmingham Board of Education

Filed on December 18, 1957, *Shuttlesworth v. Birmingham Board of Education* was the earliest school desegregation case for Birmingham, Alabama (Bagley, 2018; Loder-Jackson, 2015a; Manis, 2001; Shuttlesworth, 2000). Fred Shuttlesworth, the pastor of Bethel Baptist Church and a founding member and president of the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights (ACMHR) was the guiding force in this case. The events leading up to the filing of the case in the Alabama District Court reflect the circuitous nature of the proceedings and the inherent inequity that was written into the legislature to ensure that schools would remain segregated. On August 21, 1957, with the support of the ACMHR, Shuttlesworth and a few other families petitioned the Birmingham Board of Education to admit their students into local White schools that were in close proximity to their respective residences. Birmingham's Board of Education forwarded the petitions to the Superintendent of City Schools. Almost three weeks, the Superintendent of City Schools requested that the student petitioners present for testing on September 16, 1957. The parents of the student petitioners requested a meeting with the Superintendent of City Schools, but their request was denied.

While petitioners were engaging with Birmingham's School Board concerning their petitions, the State Superintendent of Education penned a letter to parent petitioners attempting to convince them to dismiss their petition and concede to dual school systems. Furthermore, the letter to parent petitioners included subtle threats in an attempt to encourage parents to dismiss the petition. For example, the State Superintendent of Education remarked:

Under the 1956 Constitutional Amendment [Acts 1956, 1st Sp. Sess., p. 119], any

public school and all public schools can be abolished, and the school buildings

can be rented or given to individuals to operate private schools. If you refuse to

cooperate with the city board of education in the school placement of your

children, you will in effect invite the abolishment of the public schools. Where

would your children be, and where would the children of your friends and your

people be in this State without public schools? ("*Shuttlesworth v. Birmingham*

Board of Education, 162 F. Supp. 372 (N.D. Ala. 1958)", 2022)

Aiming to dissuade petitioners, the State Superintendent of Education emphasized the

individual and collective cost that petitioners could ultimately expose themselves and the

larger African American community to by continuing with petitions. Additionally, the

Superintendent cautioned, "I think you will destroy what you already have if you refuse

to cooperate with the decision of the local board of education to place your child in the

school, they think will be best for your child" ("*Shuttlesworth v. Birmingham Board of*

Education, 162 F. Supp. 372 (N.D. Ala. 1958)", 2022). However, the parent petitioners

persisted, and on October 7, 1957, the students were allowed to present for testing. In

early November, the parent petitioners were finally interviewed by the Superintendent of

City Schools. Over the course of the next 30 days, the Birmingham Board of Education

was silent. No attempts were made to update petitioners or provide guidance on the next

steps. Finally, on December 18, 1957, the petitioners filed a complaint with the District

Court.

On May 9, 1958, Circuit Court Judge Richard Rives, alongside Federal District

Judges Seybourn Lynne and Hobart Grooms, unanimously ruled to dismiss the petition.

Shuttleworth appealed the district court's ruling to the United States Supreme Court. However, in November of 1958, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled to uphold the District Court's decision in the *Shuttlesworth* case ("*Shuttlesworth v. Birmingham Board of Education*, 162 F. Supp. 372 (N.D. Ala. 1958)", 2022).

While this initial case did not fully accomplish what petitioners had hoped for, it did establish a precedent for future petitions that would be filed. Unfortunately, the pursuit of educational equity did not come without cost to the parent and student petitioners. On September 9, 1957, during an attempt to enroll four African American students into the all-white J.H. Phillips High School, Shuttlesworth, his wife, and daughter sustained injuries while being attacked by an angry mob between 15-20 White men ("Mob Beats Minister", 1957). Shuttleworth remarked, "They were actually trying to kill me. I was in a semi-conscious state, dazed from the beating, but I managed to get up and knock one of them down" ("Mob Beats Minister", 1957, p. 7). Furthermore, Shuttlesworth's wife Ruby, received several stitches after being stabbed in the hip by one of the attackers, and his daughter sustained a fractured ankle when one of the attackers slammed a car door on her foot ("Mob Beats Minister", 1957). Three men were arrested at the scene, but later released. After this attack, while recovering at home, Shuttlesworth commented, "If I could I would march right back up there with more colored children" ("Mob Beats Minister", 1957, p.7). While these attacks were vicious and threatened the life of Shuttlesworth and his family, this did not deter him from his ultimate goal of pursuing educational equity for African Americans in Birmingham, Alabama. Shuttlesworth would continue to strategize and fight for legislation to desegregated schools.

Armstrong v. Birmingham Board of Education

Another critical case in the pursuit of educational equity in Birmingham, Alabama that occurred before 1963 was *Armstrong et al., Plaintiffs, v. The Board of Education of the City of Birmingham, Jefferson County, Alabama, et al.*, *Defendants*. In November of 1959, approximately 81 black parents signed a petition requesting that the Birmingham Board of Education (BOE) craft a plan to eradicate the dual school system. Upon the dismissal of the petition by the Board, in 1960, James Armstrong, and his four minor children filed a class action suit accusing the Birmingham BOE of "maintaining a racially 'dual school system,' with a 'dual set up of zone lines…predicated on the theory that Negroes are inherently inferior to white persons and, consequently may not attend [or teach at] the same public schools" (Bagley, 2018, p. 41). After the case was filed in the Northern District of Alabama, it remained untouched in Judge Seybourn Lynne's court for nearly three years. Finally, on May 28, 1963, Judge Lynne denied the petition and an appeal was filed in the Fifth Circuit Court. Circuit Court Judge, John Brown, stated in an opinion submitted to the court:

> It is simply beyond belief that this 'very same case' should have been allowed to pend undecided since 1960…The matter is now simple: Does Birmingham have a segregated system? If—and there is really no if—that is so, then the question is: What is being done to eradicate it? We have now made it plain by cases which are an affectation to cite that a plan of desegregation must be offered, or the district court must fashion its own plan…This is a matter of clear right…the class is a victim of impermissible delay (*Nelson et al., etc. v. The Board of Education of the City of Birmingham, et al.,*)

Judge Brown's remarks indicated an ideological shift in the opinions of the courts concerning school desegregation in Alabama. The *Armstrong* case spanned from 1960 to 1983. While many continued to advocate for racially dual school systems, an increasing awareness of school desegregation was evident. Finally, in July 1963, Armstrong's appeal was granted, and the Birmingham Board of Education was ordered to establish and submit a plan to desegregate Birmingham schools by August 19, 1963 (*Armstrong v. Bd*, 1964). This initial ruling in 1963 was the beginning of a tumultuous plan to desegregate schools in Birmingham, Alabama.

Desegregation in Birmingham After 1963

Nine years after the *Brown v. Board of Education*, schools in Birmingham would finally start the process of desegregation. While Birmingham's nine-year deferral of desegregation is significant, Alabama was among one of the first southern states to implement desegregation policies. Many in the state attributed this progression to the political antics of Alabama's governor, George Wallace. Infamous for keeping his pledge to "stand in the schoolhouse door," blocking federal orders to desegregate the University of Alabama. William Dickinson, a Republican congressman from Alabama, commented:

> George [Wallace] did more to bring about what he professed to oppose than any other three people I can name. Standing in the schoolhouse door—well, that gave him nationwide attention. But it sure did integrate our schools faster than any other state in the South. And this adamant, defiant attitude on the Selma march thing—whatever point they were trying to make, George just made it for 'em. (Yarbrough, 1981, p. 124)

Loder-Jackson (2015a) posited that during this 9-year deferral, Birmingham experienced four phases of school desegregation that served to maintain racial segregation within public schools. According to Loder-Jackson (2015a), these phases included the Freedom of Choice Plan (1967), which provided parents the option to opt-out of desegregated schools; the Unitary System Plan (1970), a modification of the Unitary System Plan (1976), and the Magnet School Plan (1980), which attempted to create racially balanced schools that recruit academically strong students from districts outside of their school zones (p. 72).

In 1969 under the Freedom of Choice desegregation plan, the courts questioned the Birmingham Board of Education's proposal to rebuild A.H. Parker High School at its present site (Bynum, 1974). The courts instructed the Board to conduct a study to determine alternatives for rebuilding Parker High School in an effort to obtain desegregation. The study's conclusion revealed that Parker High School was centrally located in an area that was predominantly Black with only a few White residents. Closing or relocating the school would create other obstacles that ultimately would not align with the aims for more significant desegregation. To that end, the courts approved the Board's proposal to rebuild the school at its current location, noting that "The elimination of Parker at its present site not only would achieve no greater desegregation in the surrounding areas, but it also would cause overcrowding of other high schools (Bynum, 1974, p. 124). Once desegregation efforts were finally underway in Birmingham, a similar narrative unfolded as it related to the demise of care in historically predominantly African American schools.

Currently, the Birmingham City school district is predominantly African American and low-income (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). In recent years, the Birmingham City School district has experienced significant social and political changes that have impacted the city's predominantly African American schools. In particular, the fragmentation of school districts. Frankenberg (2009) noted that shortly after the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling, school districts within the Jefferson County school system began to splinter to form their own districts and preserve segregation. Mirroring national trends, Birmingham City's school district enrollment has continued to decline, in addition to the splintering of independent school districts, resulting in a predominantly African American and low-income student population that has maintained segregation (Diem et al., 2015).

A Pew Research (2019) study revealed that sixty-eight (68%) of Blacks think that students should attend integrated schools, even if those schools are outside of their local community (Horowitz, 2019). On the other hand, sixty-two (62%) of Whites stated that students should attend schools in their local community, even if those schools are less diverse (Horowitz, 2019). These results reveal the difference between Blacks and Whites on the issue of diversity within educational institutions, but also reveal more profound insights into perceptions of Black and White neighborhood schools. For example, Birmingham City School district battles a declining enrollment of both White and middle-class Black families who are opting to reside in suburban areas of the city. This has resulted in a predominantly Black and low-income student population remaining in the Birmingham City School district.

The current challenges that Black students face in this urban center, are reflective of the structural and racial challenges that students encountered in desegregated schools. While A.H. Parker High School remained a predominantly African American school, the institution, students, faculty, and staff were impacted by the shift that can be attributed to school desegregation policy and efforts to subvert the law and preserve segregated educational institutions. For Parker the unintended consequences of desegregation included the reassigning of exemplar educators to White schools. Loder-Jackson (2015a) noted, "...teachers assigned to predominantly Black schools were not deemed as qualified as teachers assigned to predominantly White schools" (p. 74). Moreover, because of White flight and the flight of the Black middle-class from Birmingham City schools, Parker High School's enrollment has significantly declined leaving the contemporary schooling environment with a low enrollment and a concentration of the most vulnerable students. Finally, with the implementation of desegregation policies, many historically Black public schools, similar to Parker High School, have experienced a shift in institutional agency. Black educators demonstrated this agency by their ability to construct schooling environments in specific ways that were impactful and meaningful to African American students. For example, the pedagogical practices that were implemented to motivate African American students to excel in a society that deemed them inferior.

While Parker, like other predominantly African American schools in urban centers, continues to experience significant challenges. However, the school spirit and the love and reverence for the history of the school remain. Milner and Howard (2004) argued that the "...effectiveness of predominantly Black public schools needs to be

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revisited...we must investigate the essence of what made schools work in the past and use those insights as a foundation to structure schools presently" (p. 295). This is particularly important because of the resurgence of legislature to erase African American history and reverse gains made toward educational equity for African American students. Since January 2022, approximately 37 states have introduced legislation banning critical race theory in K-12 schools. While critical race theory (CRT) is not typically taught in K-12 schools, the term has become a catch-all term for any narratives, histories, or concepts that arouse discomfort (Critical Race Theory FAQ, 2022). In particular, Alabama has submitted a resolution to ban critical race theory in K-12 schools. Eric Mackey, the Alabama State Superintendent indicated that his office had received complaints about the celebration of Black History Month (McKnight, 2022). Mackey stated, "I had two calls in the last week that they're having a Black History Month program and they consider having a Black history program CRT… Having a Black history program is not CRT" (McKnight, 2022). This attack on African American history is reflective of the continued divisiveness of our state and country. The current state of our democracy reflects the importance of revisiting history and particularly African American educational institutions, not only to gain insight into the practices that motivated students to excel, but also to participate in the tradition of keeping the legacies of these historical institutions alive. Therefore, my study aims to fill this historical gap by examining the interpersonal and institutional culture of care within A.H. Parker High School in Birmingham, Alabama, during a specific historical moment in time.

Summary of Literature Review

This chapter provided a thorough review and discussion of relevant literature beginning with a broad discussion of the history of African American segregated schooling environments. Additionally, the discussion was extended further to highlight desegregation and African American segregated schools. Specifically, a review of the literature on desegregation and secondary education for African American students in Birmingham followed with a focus on desegregation in Birmingham prior to 1963 and desegregation after 1963.

Overall, the literature in this chapter highlighted the abundance of research on historically Black educational institutions and how these institutions created innovative learning environments that motivated students to excel. In addition, this chapter reviewed the history of desegregation in Birmingham and a discussion on the specific phases of desegregation that have often served to preserve segregation. Finally, this chapter ended with a brief discussion on A.H. Parker High School, and how desegregation plans, and policies have impacted this historic educational institution. The following section, Chapter III, will provide an in-depth discussion of the methods and procedures that were used to conduct this oral history study.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this oral history study was to document the lived educational experiences of former students who attended A.H. Parker High School between 1950 to 1989. And, to determine the culturally relevant caring that was exhibited within the schooling environment. For this inquiry, a qualitative design was utilized, as it provided depth to the study topic. Rossman and Rallis (2012) identified two features that are unique to qualitative research. The first unique feature recognized that the researcher is the research instrument through which the study is conducted. The second feature is that the purpose of qualitative research is to learn about an aspect of the social world. Ultimately, the primary aim of qualitative research is to improve the human condition. Typically, the objective of qualitative research is to identify those factors that have the potential to assist with generating undiscovered data that is appropriate for researching populations that have previously been ignored (Creswell, 2007).

Moreover, this dissertation highlighted a historical moment in the life of the first four-year African American High School in Birmingham, Alabama. According to McDowell (2002), "The study of history has both a practical and educational value" (p. 3). While past events are not a reliable source for predictions of future situations, the past does significantly influence the future (Horsford & D'Amico, 2015; McDowell, 2002). McDowell (2002) asserted that obtaining an understanding of the past is advantageous, as

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it allows for an appreciation of the present and offers space and opportunity to learn from mistakes. As suggested by McDowell, the primary aim of historical research is to gain insight into the "significance of past events and not merely regard these events as an unconnected series of facts" (p. 10). Therefore, the value of historical research is that while it does have the potential to provide an understanding of the specifics of past events, it also offers insight into the present reality. This chapter explains the specific methods and procedures that were utilized in this oral history study. Moreover, this chapter explains the rationale for using an oral history methodology.

Oral History

There are numerous qualitative methods that researchers can utilize to advance educational research. The method chosen for this study was oral history. According to Mertens (2014), oral history is a field of study and a qualitative method that is utilized to "gather, preserve, and interpret the voices, experiences, and memories of people, communities, and participants in past events" (p. 281). Foundational to an oral history approach is that it has the potential to illuminate aspects of narrators' lived experiences (Yow, 2005). Moreover, according to Ritchie (2015), the act of retelling memories allow participants the opportunity to analyze their personal experiences and situate them within a larger historical context. Thus, oral histories are centered as a form of social justice for those theories that center empowerment (Leavy, 2011; Ritchie, 2015). Several distinct factors that are unique to oral history interviewing methods include "(1) tapping into processes; (2) micro-macro linkages; (3) comprehensive understanding; (4) bearing witness and filling in the historical record; (5) collaboration in the meaning-making

process; and (6) a focus on the participants' perspectives" (Leavy, 2011, p. 15). A distinctive component of oral history methods includes identifying how the macro environment shapes participants' micro-level experiences (Leavy, 2011). This oral history study spans a 39-year period between 1950 and 1989. Significant historical, political, and social shifts occurred nationally and locally, particularly in Birmingham, Alabama during this period. Consequently, A.H. Parker High School was significantly impacted by local legislative and educational policies that altered students' lived experiences within the schooling environment. Utilizing an oral history approach, allowed the researcher to gain a comprehensive understanding of narrators' lives as interviews were not isolated to specific topics.

Furthermore, oral histories preserve the voices and the stories of former students. This aspect would be lost with other research designs that do not allow for first-person narratives. Moreover, this oral history asked narrators to discuss experiences and recall memories of events and interactions that occurred throughout a significant number of years. Therefore, an approach employing oral history methods allowed narrators' the flexibility to describe relevant historical, social, and political experiences while also discussing specific educational experiences that occurred within historic A.H. Parker High School. Additionally, oral history methods were chosen for this study as it interweaves historical inquiry with this traditional method.

Oral History and African Americans

Historically, mainstream educational scholarship has often neglected and diminished the voices of African Americans, relegating their unique experiences to the

margins of American history (Broussard, 2011; Shockley, 1978; Taylor, 2008; Trouillot, 1995). This has been particularly true for the preservation of the histories of African American women (Taylor, 2008). According to Taylor (2008), historically, the perspectives of Black women have been devalued, disregarded, and misconstrued. Trouillot (1995) proposed that this disregard for history is demonstrated through two primary means.

> At the level of generalities, some narratives cancel what happened through direct erasure of facts or their relevance. "It" did not *really* happen; it was not that bad, or that important… On a seemingly different plane, other narratives sweeten the horror or banalize the uniqueness of a situation by focusing on details…some U.S. slaves were better fed than British workers… The joint effect of these two types of formulas is a powerful silencing: Whatever has not been cancelled out in the generalities dies in the cumulative irrelevance of a heap of details. (Trouillot, 1995, pp. 96-97)

As explained by Trouillot, these practices have deleterious effects on the historical conceptions of the lived experiences of African Americans and how their histories are valued and remembered. For instance, in 1894, German philosopher, George Hegel posited, "At this point we leave Africa, not to mention it again. For it is no historical part of the World; it has no movement or development to exhibit (Hegel, 1956, p. 99). Hegel's perceptions of the historical contributions of African society have far-reaching implications and are reflective of how the histories and contributions of people of African descent have historically been perceived by mainstream society. However, an oral history

methodology served a critical role as it illuminated the lived experiences of African Americans.

Particularly for African Americans, oral histories address both the larger historical, social, and political realities while also providing granular details of narrators' subjective experiences (Quantz, 1985). Moreover, oral history has been fundamental to the sustaining and preservation of African American histories, traditions, and rituals. In fact, during enslavement, because of the established laws and customs that denied African Americans the right to literacy, oral traditions were the primary mediums through which histories, values, and traditions were passed from one generation to the next (Banks-Wallace, 2002; Cannon, 1995; Ogunleye, 1997; Shockley, 1978). Furthermore, oral traditions served to encourage, guide, and nurture African Americans, as a collective, to resist White supremacist ideologies in American society. To that end, an oral history methodology serves to illuminate the histories of African Americans through the telling of their lived experiences. Mears (2009) stated, "An oral history interview asks individuals to talk about their life experiences, to tell their own story without being subjected to interrogation requiring confirmable details of cognitive recall or demanding absolute content accuracy" (p. 56).

Oral history interviewing is a difficult task for both the interviewer and narrator. Narrators are often prompted to be vulnerable and transparent about their experiences. Therefore, trust must be established early in the interviewing partnership. Trust is critical to establishing and sustaining the partnership among interviewers and narrators during the oral history interviewing process (Huang & Coker, 2010; Turner & James-Gallaway, 2022). Through these methods, African American narrators are empowered to

communicate their truths and experiences in meaningful ways that can be transmitted to future generations.

The following section reflects on the role of trust with African American narrators throughout the oral history interviewing process.

Cultivating Trust with African American Narrators

Historically, the Academy has often used information in ways that proved to be harmful to both individuals and communities. For example, Huang and Coker (2010) documented the cultural distrust that has historically existed among African Americans and other minoritized groups because of the mistreatment of study participants and the misuse of research data. Documented examples of research abuse and misuse of data from studies to perpetuate stereotypes of Black inferiority include the Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment, *The Moynihan Report*, and *The Bell Curve* (Earl & Penney, 2001; Huang & Coker, 2010). Moreover, within an oral history study, distrust often manifests as a lack of interest in participating in studies because of suspicions about the motivation for research or narrator dissemblance. According to Hine (1989), outwardly, dissemblance portrays one as open and candid while inwardly concealing the "truth of their inner lives and selves" (p. 912). Furthermore, the significant experiences that African Americans have endured in the past and continue to contend with in the present have substantial influences on how they perceive and engage with academic research (Turner & James-Gallaway, 2022). To that end, it is crucial that oral historians cultivate an awareness of the social and political histories of narrators and honor their life stories and how they choose to communicate their narratives within oral history interviews.

…. Oral historians of education must understand that there are limits to rapport and relationship building in the pursuit of oral history interviews, and some of these limits cannot be overcome by the skill, training, or positionality of the interviewer. We each exist within interlocking systems of oppression that leave lasting scars; that is, our lived experiences teach us what we can and cannot safely share. Thus, it is imperative to respect the wishes of both potential and actual narrators. (Turner & James-Gallaway, 2022, pp. 7-8)

While educational researchers who conduct oral histories are interested in the making of meaning within the interview process, they must remain cognizant of the limitations that exist in pursuit of this methodology and maintain respect for narrators' decisions concerning the disclosure of information.

Taylor (2008) perfectly described the aims of a good historian noting, "… the ability to construct a recognizable past via not only a careful resuscitation of silenced voices but a dissolving of one's own personal voice and political persuasion" (p. 188). This is the work of a historian, particularly as one attempts to unearth hidden individual and collective histories of African Americans and their respective communities.

The following section addressed the function of generations and memory and their importance within the oral history interviewing process.

Generations and Memory

While the topics of generations and memory were not the primary foci of this dissertation, it is important to mention the significant role that generational location and memory play in shaping both individual and collective identity. The narrators in this oral history study represent different historical and generational distinctions and experiences.

The three distinct generations that spanned this oral history dissertation included the

silent generation, born between 1925 -1945, baby boomers, born between 1946 and 1965,

and generation X, born between 1965 and 1981 (Markert, 2004). Contained within each

of these distinctions are varied experiences, events, and movements that are collectively

shared by members (Cohler & Hostetler, 2003; Loder-Jackson, 2015a). These shared

experiences shape narrators' attitudes, beliefs, and general perspectives. A majority of the

narrators in this dissertation study are baby boomers. The baby boomers were the largest

living generation up until 2019 when they were surpassed by millennials (Fry, 2020).

Baby boomers grew up during a period of social and political unrest, particularly here in

Birmingham, Alabama (Loder-Jackson, 2015a; Turner & James-Gallaway, 2022).

Reflecting on their oral history research with African American baby boomers, Turner

and James-Gallaway (2022) revealed the intergenerational challenges that occurred

during their research process. For instance, researchers noted the difficulty in building

trusting relationships with their narrators. Many African American baby boomers,

particularly those who came of age in Birmingham, Alabama, experienced the horrors of

Jim Crow and White supremacy. Turner and James-Gallaway considered how revisiting

these painful experiences impacted narrators and also shaped the retelling of their

personal narratives (Turner & James-Gallaway, 2022). Similarly, Loder-Jackson's

(2015a) scholarship on the activism of Black educators during the civil rights movement,

highlighted significant local and national historical events that those in the silent and

baby boomer generation recalled. Among these were,

> Assassinations of John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King Jr., and Robert F.
>
> Kennedy and the Vietnam War. But their most vivid memories were of

triumphant and tragic local civil rights watersheds such as the Children's'

Crusade and the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church bombing. (Loder-Jackson,

2015a, p. 83)

In contrast, those participants who were members of later cohorts highlighted

significantly different historical moments, such as, "Presidency of William Jefferson

'Bill' Clinton (1992-2000), the end of the Cold War (1991), and the election and tenure

of Birmingham's first African American mayor, Richard Arrington Jr. (1979-999)"

(Loder-Jackson, 2015a, p. 110).

Memory is central to the oral history process. Significant social, political, and

historical events greatly impact individuals' lived experiences, linking them to particular

contexts (Cohler & Hostetler, 2003; Shockley, 1978). Opponents of oral history methods

identify the unreliability and subjectiveness of memory as a weakness of the approach

(Ritchie, 2012; Shockley, 1978). According to Shockley (1978), memories have the

potential to be inherently fallible due to cognitive decline as a result of age and health.

However, many oral historians argue the opposite, positing that the subjectivity of

memory is a strength as it reveals how narrators make meaning of their lived historical

experiences (Leavy, 2011; Ritchie, 2012; Shockley, 1978; Thompson & Bornat, 2017).

The way that participants tell their stories and what they remember is equally important

to the process. Remembering is a purposeful and social process that often reveals

participants' interests and meanings assigned to historical moments. Individual and

collective memories are inextricably linked to identity.

Archival Research

This oral history dissertation study draws from both primary and secondary
sources. These included oral histories and historical archival resources obtained through
both print and digital sources. Shockley (1978) posited:

> One of the essential needs for collecting black oral history lies in the long neglect
> and racist attitudes of some historical societies, libraries, colleges, and universities
> in believing that the collecting of archival and manuscript materials belonging or
> relating to blacks was unimportant. As result, valuable documents and
> memorabilia have either been lost, destroyed, or deteriorated in attics, basements,
> garages, and yes, libraries and historical societies. Because of this, there is a
> historical urgency to collect and preserve all that is possible through oral history.
> (p.787)

The collection of narrators' lived experiences allows educational researchers to construct
original primary source archival documents that can be made available to future scholars,
researchers, and those interested in the content. This is particularly important for the
preservation of African American history due to historical notions of inherent inferiority
relating to Black people, culture, values, and histories. Yale (2015) emphasized, "there is
a violence at the heart of archiving: when memories and stories are recorded in the
archive, alternate possibilities, other ways of telling the story, are repressed or
suppressed. When we return to the archive seeking 'history,' we open up that instability"
(p. 334). To that end, it is important to not only note what resources are available in the
archives, but equally telling is what is not available, and whose narratives, histories, and
stories are missing.

Selection and Description of Narrators

Narrators were selected purposefully to provide information-rich data. Thus, 17 narrators were identified and selected based on their knowledge and experiences within the A.H. Parker High School community, namely, former students who attended the school between 1950 and 1989. In addition to narrators having the necessary lived experience, they were selected based on their "availability and willingness to participate, and the ability to communicate experiences and opinions in an articulate, expressive, and reflective manner" (Palinkas et al., 2015, p.2). Community nomination was the secondary method chosen to recruit narrators. In this process, members of a specific community of interest nominate or suggest individuals whom they believe will be the best narrators for the researcher to interview. Foster (1997) suggested that this method is preferable due to the direct connection that exists to the targeted community. Each potential narrator was contacted via email or phone, depending on the method of referral, and provided a detailed description of the oral history project. Potential narrators demonstrated their willingness to participate by providing verbal consent. Turner and James-Gallaway (2022) argued, "no narrator owes any oral historian or interviewer their memories" (p.6). The researcher approached each interaction with narrators with similar reverence and understanding for each narrator's story and their willingness to assist with this oral history study. The table below describes the narrators who contributed to this study. Narrators were identified by their preferred first names, whom they were nominated, profile classification as a student or educator, year graduated from PHS, and gender. Narrators were given the option to select pseudonyms, however, all narrators consented to the use of their preferred first name.

Table 1

Description of Oral History Narrators

Narrators	Nominated by	Profile	Graduated	Gender
Gwendolyn	Non-participant	Student	1952	Female
Earnest	Adrienne (sibling)	Student	1957	Male
Carol	Non-participant	Student	1966	Female
Riley	Non-participant	Student	1966	Male
Brenda	Cassandra (sibling)	Student	1968	Female
Clifton	Non-participant	Student	1968	Male
Ellen	Non-participant	Student	1970	Female
Dale	Non-participant	Student	1970	Male
Sandra	Parker Alumni	Student/Educator	1972	Female
Valerie	Sandra	Student	1972	Female
Patricia	Non-participant	Student	1973	Female
Josephine	Non-participant	Student/Educator	1974	Female
Adrienne	Parker Alumni	Student	1975	Female
Chris	John	Student	1977	Male
Cassandra	Non-Participant	Student	1981	Female
John	Non-participant	Student/Educator	1985	Male
Barry	John	Student/Educator	1989	Male

Data Collection and Analysis

An extensive range of documents were examined to reveal consistencies, tensions, and differences in perspectives and discourse concerning the culturally relevant caring that existed within historic A.H. Parker High School. The researcher examined historical documents and records. These included primary and secondary sources, including A.H. Parker's autobiography, archives, newspapers, school records, and school board minutes. Additional archival materials included artifacts both published and non-published, that were beneficial in understanding the past.

As such, oral history interviews and archival materials utilized in this dissertation study served to guide the researcher in answering the following questions:

1. What were the lived educational experiences of students who attended A.H. Parker High School between 1950 and 1989?

   a. How did Parker's school community members (former alumni, and educators) perceive the culture of care within the schooling environment during the time of their attendance?

2. Did Birmingham's historical and sociopolitical contexts shape narrators' lived experiences as it related to the culturally relevant caring that existed within the schooling environment at A.H. Parker High School?

Oral History Interviews

Oral history interviews were the primary method for data collection. This interview format was selected because it permitted researchers the ability to tap into various processes, such as, exploring historical processes and narrators' experiences within shifting contexts and how narrators came to understand and make meaning of their life experiences (Leavy, 2011). The researcher and narrators are co-creators in the research process as the participant gives voice to their unique experiences and life stories (Leavy, 2011; Yow, 2005). Interviewing methods for oral histories are open-ended. As recommended by Yow (2005), the researcher created an interview guide that included open-ended questions to facilitate oral history interviews (see Appendix D).

While it was preferable to interview narrators in person, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, oral history interviews were performed via telephone and Zoom as a safety precaution for the researcher and each of the narrators. Additionally, as recommended by the *Oral History Association* (2009), interviews were digitally recorded using Otter.ai

software. Otter.ai is a web-based application technology software. Otter.ai was selected as the most appropriate software for this oral history project because of the flexibility of the technology. For instance, Otter.ai can be accessed via any web or phone operating system. Additionally, the Otter.ai software transcribed narrators' interviews in real-time.

Seventeen oral history interviews were performed beginning in Summer 2021 and concluded in Spring 2022. Seven narrators were male, and 10 narrators were female. All narrators identified as either Black or African American. Four of the 17 narrators currently or have previously taught at A.H. Parker High School. One narrator, Valerie, attended Ramsay High School, in Birmingham, Alabama, prior to being rezoned to PHS. In addition, two sets of siblings were narrators in this oral history study. Prior to oral history interviews, the researcher scheduled preliminary telephone interviews with narrators. Preliminary interviews allowed the researcher to introduce narrators to the dissertation topic, receive verbal consent, and build rapport. The researcher was able to schedule most of the oral history interviews within a week of the narrators' preliminary interviews. Preliminary interviews averaged approximately 15 to 25 minutes. Additionally, preliminary interviews were recorded but were not transcribed.

While oral history interviews covered a broad range of historical, social, and political topics, narrators' lived experiences at A.H. Parker High School were centered. Oral history interviews averaged approximately 60 minutes in length. Interviews were recorded and transcribed utilizing Otter.ai digital technology. Otter.ai software technology provided a real-time transcription of the recorded oral history interview. Following the completion of the oral history interviews, each transcript was read alongside the audio recording to identify and correct any transcription errors.

Furthermore, after the interviews were fully transcribed, the researcher read the transcripts and noted initial themes and pertinent passages within each narrator's transcript.

Archival Materials

In addition to oral history interviews, archival materials were critically analyzed. To establish validity, both electronic and print archival materials were examined (McCulloch, 2004). This process allowed for triangulation of the data collection. Collected archival data included: Birmingham City School Board minutes (1950-1989); archival documents obtained from the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute; A.H. Parker's school newspaper articles and yearbooks located in Parker's High School library; print and digital materials from Birmingham Public Library; articles obtained from historical newspapers, with a specific focus on African American presses; and digital archives from local, regional, and national archives.

While there was no central archive that housed a collection of information on A.H. Parker High School, multiple archives did have within collections and papers information that was relevant to Parker. Additionally, once relevant documents had been located within a particular archive, an added challenge was obtaining the documents. This was challenging as many archives were closed to the public due to the Covid-19 pandemic. However, under these circumstances, many archivists were willing to provide digital scans of archival documents. Throughout the research process, this researcher was able to visit both the Birmingham Public Library Archives and the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute Archives in person. However, other archives that provided digital

information relating to A.H. Parker High School included: A.H. Parker High School library, Brooklyn Historical Society, Alabama A&M University, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Alabama State University, Emory University, Howard University Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, University of Alabama, University of California, Davis, and University Massachusetts Amherst.

Moreover, in addition to the 17 oral history interviews completed for this oral history dissertation, 14 extant oral history interviews by A.H. Parker's high school graduates were analyzed. Extant oral history interviews were retrieved from the following databases: Birmingham Civil Rights Institute Oral History Collection; Duke University Behind the Veil Oral History Project; History Makers African American Video Oral History Collection; and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Southern Oral History Program.

Data Analysis Procedures

An oral history methodology is a holistic approach that is based on specific narratives that are inextricably linked to larger contexts (Mears, 2009). Consequently, the process of analyzing and coding oral histories entails highly interactive methods and connections with the collected data (Mears, 2009). While a thorough analysis of the collected data is demanding and laborious, it is not a process that can be entirely completed by technology in the form of computer software programs. However, the preliminary iteration of initial codes was created using NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software. This data analysis software allowed the researcher to identify frequently used terms and phrases across collected oral history interview data.

Reflexive thematic analysis (TA) was selected as the method for analyzing oral history and archival data. Approaching TA from a reflective perspective required the researcher to assume an active role in producing knowledge obtained from the oral history interviews and archival data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2012, 2020). Ultimately, chosen codes are reflective of the unique ways that the researcher has engaged with and interpreted the collected data materials (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2012, 2020; Byrne, 2021). Conducting reflexive TA included a six-phase process that is described below. Phase one included becoming familiar with the data. Byrne (2021) suggested that this step includes a continuous reading of the data materials. The researcher initiated this initial phase by reading narrators' oral history interview transcripts and editing them for accuracy. Phase two of the six-phase process included the creation of initial codes. These initial codes are the elementary units for emerging themes. According to Byrne (2021), reflexive TA requires continual engagement with data through repeated coding and familiarization with the data. The researcher tracked the progression of the coding process in an Excel spreadsheet. Phase three of the analysis included generating relevant themes that emerged from the data collection. Next, phase four involved a review of the generated themes. The fifth phase included selecting themes and defining and constructing appropriate titles for themes. Finally, the last phase of the process was the production of this oral history dissertation study providing captivating oral histories that highlighted the culturally relevant caring that existed within historic A.H. Parker High School.

Role of the Researcher

Growing up in Mobile, Alabama, as a young Black girl from a working-class background, early on, I experienced the impact of Black teachers, primarily Black women teachers who were strategic in how they cared for students both in and outside of the classroom. Throughout my P-12 education, I attended predominantly African American schools within Mobile's urban centers. While I started school in the late 1980s, many of my primary teachers were older and were either a part of the Civil Rights generation or had been taught by other Black educators from that generation. My introduction to the kind of academic scholarship that teased out the counternarratives of predominantly African American schools deeply resonated with my own educational experiences of predominantly Black schools and teachers who motivated students to excel despite educational inequities. In many ways, this dissertation: "*Bricks Without Straw": An Oral History of Culturally Relevant Caring in Historic A.H. Parker High School in Birmingham, Alabama*, was my attempt to offer a counternarrative and a more complete account of the history of African American secondary education, here in Birmingham.

Qualitative research requires the researcher to delve into the life and experiences of the narrators to gain an accurate understanding of their lived experiences and to determine how narrators make sense of these experiences (Serrant, 2002). Therefore, a temporary relationship is established between the researcher and the narrator so that the exchange of information can occur (Serrant, 2002). Within an oral history study, the role of the researcher and the forming of temporary relationships with narrators was critical to the success of the study. Particularly, an oral history study that is intergenerational in that

it is outside of the generational location of the researcher. To effectively accomplish this feat, it was important that the researcher have an awareness of her own identity and how that identity influenced the way that narrators' information and experiences were analyzed and interpreted.

Serrant (2002) argued that the insider-outsider debate is particularly problematic for Black and minority researchers as the boundaries of each definition are ambiguous and provide an incomplete and inaccurate view of identity. According to Serrant (2002), "At any one time, the researcher who appears to be part of the group (insider) can be simultaneously 'placed' by the study group as not part of their group (outsider)" (p. 43). Moreover, Serrant suggests that a more appropriate consideration for Black researchers should be "Who am I and why don't I belong?" (p. 43). Similar to Serrant's perspectives on insider-outsider, in many respects, as an African American woman researching a predominantly African American institution, I was considered an insider. However, while an insider, I was also considered an outsider to narrators as I was not an alumna of the A.H. Parker High School educational community. Often, the first questions that narrators asked were, "Did you attend Parker?" or "Why did you choose to study Parker?". Often, I discussed with narrators how my own educational experiences were similar despite a significant generational gap between my own historical and social location in comparison to narrators.

<center>**Limitations**</center>

Every study has inherent limitations (Volpe & Bloomberg, 2015). For example, oral history has the potential to result in a narrow understanding of the studied phenomenon. According to Yow (2005) and Hoopes (2014), limitations to utilizing oral history is that within this approach, there is a tendency to focus on narrators' personal experiences and less on institutional, national, or international trends that occurred during a person's lifetime. To that end, this oral history study is limited to narrators' personal experiences, memories, and archival documents related to A.H. Parker High School in Birmingham, Alabama. Therefore, while it is important to use oral history to acquire new knowledge and give voice to individuals and groups, it is equally important to be aware of sociopolitical problems and larger issues that individuals may have experienced (Mertens, 2014).

The most significant limitation to this oral history was time—specifically as it is related to building rapport (Turner & James-Gallaway, 2022). This oral history dissertation was bound by the limits of time and prevented the researcher from establishing the necessary rapport required for robust oral history interviews with narrators. Another limitation to oral history is the "fallibility of human memory" (p. 292). According to Yow (2005), individuals tend to remember events and recall memories that were of great importance to them personally but forget those events and memories that were not as important. Memory is selective and largely dependent on individual interests and needs (Yow, 2005). Generally, while memory is fallible, older narrators are better able to situate events within the larger historical context and assign meaning to their experiences and memories. Additionally, while memory is considered a limitation, the

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researcher privileged the memories of each narrator as their personal and authentic lived experiences.

Ethical Considerations

This oral history dissertation study was submitted to the University of Alabama at Birmingham's Institutional Review Board for Human Use (IRB). Upon review, the IRB office determined that this oral history dissertation study was not subject to FDA regulations and was not considered Human Subjects Research (Appendix C). According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Common Rule, oral history studies are excluded from IRB review. This exclusion falls under section "§46.102:

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. (Oral History Association, 2009)

While federal policy excluded this oral history study from IRB oversight, the researcher continued to follow the guidelines of the professional and ethical standards as outlined by the Oral History Association's Principles and Best Practices (OHA, 2009). Jackson et al. (2022) argued, "The exemption and strict definition of research both speak to the lack of value placed on stories in research" (p. 3). While this dissertation study is was not considered research according to the guidelines of the IRB, it was no less rigorous and essential to educational scholarship.

Finally, no study is without risks; however, the researcher assumed the responsibility to ensure the physical and emotional safety of narrators to the greatest extent by establishing protocols that involved minimal risk to narrators (Cozby & Bates, 2015).

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Chapter 4 presents the findings of this oral history study that examined the culturally relevant caring that historically existed within Arthur Harold Parker High School in Birmingham, Alabama. Findings included an analysis of oral history interviews and archival materials that were inclusive of historic mainstream and African American newspapers, extant oral histories, and select archival documents related to A.H. Parker High School.

Historical Context

As previously stated in Chapter 1, this oral history study covered a 39-year period that spanned four major decades – the 50s, 60s, 70s, and 80s. Each of these decades contains historical, social, and political movements that have shaped the experiences, attitudes, and perspectives of narrators. For example, during the 1950s, segregation laws, the Cold War, McCarthyism, the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision, the murder of Emmitt Till, and the Montgomery Bus Boycotts were some of the significant events of the 50s that are remembered by narrators who graduated from Parker during this decade.

The 1960s was an era of social and political unrest, particularly in Birmingham, Alabama. Etched into the memory of many narrators are events and movements, such as, Freedom Rides, Martin Luther King Jr.'s *Letter from the Birmingham Jail* (1963), the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom (1963), the Birmingham Children's March (1963), the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing (1963), the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the Vietnam War, the Selma to Montgomery Marches, the assassinations of Malcolm X (1965) and Martin Luther King Jr. (1968), and the rise of the Black Power Movement.

In many ways, the 1970s were a continuation of the social and political movements that began in the 60s. Protest concerning the ongoing war in Vietnam and continued anti-war protests, the Women's Rights Movement, Shirley Chisholm became the first African American woman to campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination, and the election of Richard Arrington Jr., as the first Black mayor of Birmingham, Alabama are significant events in the 1970s that narrators recollected.

Finally, the 1980s continued to usher in major changes within the city of Birmingham. For instance, John Cantelow II served as the first African American interim superintendent for the Birmingham City School Board, and in 1984, Walter G. Harris was the first African American elected superintendent for the Birmingham City School Board (Loder-Jackson, 2015b).

Findings by Research Questions

This section describes the findings of this oral history study that answered the following questions: What were the lived educational experiences of students who

attended A.H. Parker High School between 1950 and 1989? Did Birmingham's historical

and sociopolitical contexts shaped narrators' lived experiences as it related to the

culturally relevant caring that existed within the schooling environment at A.H. Parker

High School? Sub-questions focus on the culture of care that existed within this historic

institution and the educational experiences that alumni deemed necessary for their

success.

Q1: What were the lived educational experiences of students who attended A.H. Parker High School between 1950 and 1989?

Graduates of A.H. Parker High School remembered Parker has a good school for

Black students. Sandra, a retired Birmingham City School educator and 1972 graduate of

Parker, lauded the school for its caring environment and exemplary teachers.

> Parker was an excellent school for Black students because we were nurtured and
>
> taught our history by many teachers who knew the importance of Black students
>
> being proud of their heritage. They made sure we knew that many great alumni
>
> walked the hallowed hallways of Parker High and had risen to greatness, and so
>
> could we.

Earnest, a retired educator and 1957 graduate of Parker, highlighted his

membership in Parker's choir. According to Earnest, he was a member of the school's

choir during his entire four years at Parker under the direction of Mr. William S. Henry.

> From the 9th grade to the 12th grade, I had some of the best teachers in the world.
>
> We were well schooled in science, and history, and music. Oh, my goodness. We
>
> had a top notch, concert, marching band, and choir with Mr. Henry, it was
>
> exceptional…Every Monday and Tuesday following Easter, Parker would have
>
> what was known as a variety show for the community. Jam packed both nights of

excellent talent. We did blues themes. We did classical themes. We did dance. We

had people on instruments.

In particular, Earnest expressed his respect for Mr. Henry, Parker's choir director, and his

excellence and dedication to his craft.

William S. Henry was only one period. He was a graduate of Fisk University…He

could play, but he couldn't sing that well. But he played very well. The average

size of the choir was 100. We had so many students to choose from and you had a

bunch of talent. We did some complicated numbers. I didn't know how

complicated they were until I got out of high school and started doing them in

college. Birmingham used to have a program called "Music Under the Stars". It

was always in Spring, usually in April at Legion Field. It was segregated, Blacks

on one side and Whites on the other. The groups that always performed was the

Alabama Symphony Orchestra and Parker High School…Now we didn't sing

with them, but we sang on the same program with them.

Additionally, Earnest emphasized the wide range of musical selections that the choir

performed. Furthermore, Earnest noted that many of the selections were Negro spirituals

from Black composers from Tuskegee, Fisk, Howard, and Hampton Universities.

We did Peter Wilhousky's "Battle Hymn Republic". We also did another

arrangement of "Battle Hymn Republic" by Fred Waring. We did the theme for

the Broadway play, "You'll Never Walk Alone". A lot of spirituals, "Done Made

My Vow to the Lord", "There's a Star in the East", and "Ezekiel Saw the Wheel"

by William Dawson at Tuskegee.

Finally, Earnest explained that while the choir was a significant component of his high school experience, he valued the ethos of caring that existed within the schooling environment, primarily when he considered the role of Black educators.

> I am glad it [Parker] was all-Black. Oh goodness, because they pushed us…I don't care what your interest was. Everybody took a general science. In your 10th grade year everybody took a biology, in your 11th grade year everybody took chemistry and in your 12th grade year everybody had physics. Those were required…If you went to Parker High School, you had all Black instructors and all of them knew what they were doing and how to go about doing it…They were very interested in what you were doing, even with those big old classes. That's what I can't understand. My days at Parker High School were fantastic!! I'll tell anybody about it.

Similar to Earnest, Brenda, a 1968 graduate of Parker, was a member of Parker's choir. During her freshman year, Brenda served as the pianist for Parker's choir under the direction of Mr. Henry. Brenda described her experience as good, noting "Parker was THE school. They had the most people going there, a good football team, a good basketball team, a good choir, and some really good teachers". In contrast, to her overall positive experiences at Parker, Brenda recalled violent situations among students. In particular, she mentioned a physical confrontation between Parker students.

> We had an incident while I was there where two people had knives, and they got to fighting over a nickel, if you can believe it. They were arguing, "you owe me a nickel," and "I don't owe you a nickel." And, then they got to fighting with each other and tried to slice each other up.

Another narrator, Clifton, graduated from Parker in 1968. Additionally, most of Clifton's

siblings attended Parker and his father was a 1927 graduate of Industrial High School.

Similar to Brenda, Clifton recalled minimal violence occurring at the school, stating,

"There was a little violence on campus at the time, people at the time were using knives.

At that time, they were fighting each other with knives".

In stark contrast to many of the oral history narratives who described positive experiences

at PHS, Angela Davis, in her autobiography, recalled her apathy for the transition to high

school:

> My friends and I were not overly eager to enter high school. When we graduated
>
> from Carrie A. Tuggle Elementary School, we had to enter Parker Annex, several
>
> blocks away from the main building. This was a cluster of beaten-up wooden huts
>
> not much different from what we had just left. When we arrived on the first day
>
> we discovered that the inside of these structures was even more dilapidated than
>
> the outside. Unpainted wooden floors, ancient walls covered with graffiti no one
>
> ever bothered to remove. We realized that when the season began to turn, we
>
> would have to depend on the archaic potbellied stove in the corner of each house
>
> – we called them Shack I, and Shack II, etc.. Very few of my classes were
>
> stimulating – biology, chemistry, mathematics were the subjects that interested
>
> me most. My history classes were a farce. Farcical not so much because of the
>
> teachers' deficiency as the deficiency of the textbooks assigned by the Board of
>
> Education. In our American History book I discovered that the Civil War was the
>
> "War for Southern Independence" and that Black people much preferred to be
>
> slaves than to be free. After all, the books pointed out, the evidence of our

ancestors' cheerful acceptance of their plight was the weekly Saturday night

singing and dancing sessions. In elementary school, we had already been taught

that many of the songs by slaves had a meaning understood only by them. "Swing

Low, Sweet Chariot" for instance also referred to the journey toward freedom in

this life. But there was nothing about this in our high school textbooks. The

teachers either had too much on their hands keeping the classes orderly or else

they were not as concerning as our elementary school teachers were about

presenting us with an accurate picture of Black history. (Davis, 1974, p. 100)

Davis did not remain a student at Parker High School but left during her junior year to attend an integrated high school in the North (Davis, 1974).

While the majority of oral history narrators attended Parker all four years of their high school careers, one narrator, Valerie, was rezoned to Parker for her junior year of high school and later would graduate with the class of 1972.

I attended St. Paul Lutheran Church and my pastor was White and he was very

instrumental in civil rights and encouraged us to integrate. I could have attended

either Ullman High School or Parker High School, but because of the time that we

were in and laws were passed so that we could attend a White school, we were

encouraged to do that, my sisters and I…I attended Ramsay my freshman and

sophomore year, and then that summer of, I guess 1970, I was in Chicago

babysitting my nieces, and my mom sent me a letter that I had been zoned to

Parker High School. I was really disturbed and cried and did not want to make the

change. Change is hard. But little did I know that it would be the best thing that

could have happened to me in high school.

Valerie further explained some of the critical differences between her experiences at Ramsay and at Parker.

> I did feel inferior at Ramsay because I saw the favor that was given to the White students over the Blacks, but that's all I knew because that's where I was. I had really wanted to go out for a majorette at Ramsay, but I just never had the courage. After I saw what happened to my [Black] classmate, going out for cheerleader, qualified, but didn't make it, I was like, "There's no way I'm going to do that." Once I was zoned to Parker, I went out for majorette, and made it. I always wanted to be a majorette as a little girl. That did something for my self-esteem, and academically I did so much better…that just boosted my drive, my desire to want to achieve. Everybody looked like me, I didn't think that this person's outfit was better than mine because we all were struggling Blacks. I did have mostly Black teachers and few, just very few White teachers; we did have White teachers at Parker. It just felt like home.

Q2: What impact, if any, did Birmingham's historical and sociopolitical contexts shape narrators' lived experiences as it related to the ethos of care that existed within their schooling environment at A.H. Parker High School?

Oral history narrator Gwendolyn, a 1952 graduate of Parker High School, recalled that Parker was the only high school for Black students during the time that she attended.

> We were closer to Ensley High [School] but we could not go to Ensley High, because it was for Whites only…All kids in every neighborhood attended Parker unless you were in a private school. They had a Catholic private school. Because my younger sister attended the private school in high school…. We had to go to Parker… All the neighborhoods Ensley, North Birmingham, Titusville,

Woodlawn…where there were children, they bussed them into Parker High

School. The city bus they called them Specials. They were loaded up in different

areas-neighborhoods. That's who bought the Black kids in. And during the time

that they were coming in, busses [would] be lined up in front of Parker maybe two

blocks down.

Moreover, Gwendolyn further described how race relations in Birmingham impacted her

educational experiences.

We went to school later than White students. The Whites started at eight o'clock.

But we were not allowed to go at eight. Because they were afraid that Black and

Whites would meet up…Parker was widely known. They were able to win and

capable of doing a lot of good things and they had teachers that were dedicated so

you really got a good education…When the White schools got new books, they

would send the old books to the Black schools, but they [Black students] still

excelled.

Furthermore, Dale, a 1970 graduate of Parker High School, remembered how he was

affected by the racism that existed within the larger society but eventually found its way

inside this all-Black high school.

Now, it's interesting to note that Parker High School kids didn't have the best

material books, chemistry lab equipment, as did the White schools around the

city. In many cases we got hand-me-down stuff. I never did use a brand-new

beaker, test tube, microscope, none of that at Parker High School. Now, it wasn't

the teachers' fault, it was the political climate… At many times even the furniture,

the desks that we received at Parker High School… had been used prior by White

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kids. And when White kids found out where their furniture was being used next, they wrote notes on the furniture. So, you can imagine what those notes said. But we did the very best with what we had, because the thing that they didn't know is all those little notes and the little messages that they wrote to us in the books and on the furniture, we had very caring, intelligent teachers that demanded that we be successful. And they did everything they could think of to make sure that we were competitive. And they were in fact preparing us to be able to go to the next step in our educational pursuits, and that would be to college.

Oral history narrator Riley, a 1966 graduate of Parker High School, recalled a band trip to Tuskegee with one of Parker's teachers.

And I remember one time, we were going to Tuskegee, and we stopped to get something to eat. And the sign said, "Get Blacks in the back." And we kind of laughed at them and left. We told them a few choice words. We really weren't scared of people back then, you know. As long as we stayed together as a group, we didn't have any problems.

Oral history narrators, particularly through the 60s, recounted their experiences and involvement with the local social and political movements of the era, namely the Civil Rights Movement. Clifton, class of 1968, recalled the numerous riots that occurred within his neighborhood and his teachers' response to students' participation.

Martin Luther King got killed in April and we graduated in May. There was a big riot right before we graduated. The first riot I remember was when Bull Connor drove his tank up our street in the early 60s…they were ordering everybody off the street. And they beat this woman up that lived next door to us. The police did

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it. That was the first time I've seen the police beat somebody. The lady next door was drunk and she staggered out on the street when they was telling everybody to go inside, and they beat that woman and…she was the mother of one of my friends and they beat her. I remember seeing that… I participated in the Children's March in 1963. We marched from Parker High School…to downtown to the church and then they shot water at us.

Sandra, class of 1972, described the social and political climate in Birmingham during the time that she attended Parker.

I attended A.H. Parker High from September 1968 through May of 1972. The social and political atmosphere during those years was tense, to say the least. Although the Civil Rights Act had been passed in 1964, there was still much social and political unrest due to overt racism. The Vietnam War was still going on, and many Black men felt that they should not have to fight in a war against the people who had done nothing to Blacks. Many felt that they had more issues with the White power structure right here at home. Eugene Bull Connor was Commissioner of Public Safety, and he was a Klansman who strongly opposed the Civil Rights Movement. He, like most White people, openly referred to Blacks as, "Niggers." Civil Rights activists were targeted with violence, and there was much civil unrest due to so much discrimination. At the county courthouse, Downtown, just blocks from Parker, the Colored and White signs over the water fountain had been removed. But the imprints were still present as a mental reminder that we were once not allowed to drink from the White fountain. I took my hand and rubbed the word Colored from the wall, and it came right up. So, if I

could erase it by rubbing it with my finger, the word should have been removed

when the metal plates were removed. So, this was definitely intentional, just as a

mental reminder that it's over, but it's not over.

Themes and Subthemes

The questions that guided this study are summarized, and the themes that emerged

from oral history interviews and archival materials are outlined. Collected data from oral

history interviews and archival materials were collectively analyzed and organized. As a

result, the researcher identified the following themes: (1) the legacy of school spirit, (2)

exemplary administrators and educators, (3) institutional continuity, and (4) alumni

institutional mourning.

Table 2

Themes and Subthemes

Theme	Subtheme
The Legacy of School Spirit	Purple Parker Pride Protectors of the Legacy
Exemplary Administrators and Educators	A.H. Parker's Principals Notable Educators
Institutional Continuity	Familial Continuity Educational Continuity
Alumni Institutional Mourning	Decline in School Spirit Changing School Culture

Theme 1: The Legacy of School Spirit

The spirit of A.H. Parker High School reflected the pride and allegiance to the school, and it also encompassed a specific responsibility that students had to excel academically and to uphold the reputation of the school. A common phrase and mantra used by students and faculty at Parker was "Purple Parker Pride." This phrase reflected the spirit of the PHS community and was inclusive of the responsibility that students, faculty, and staff had to this historic African American institution.

Purple Parker Pride

Charged with the spirit of the inaugural principal, Dr. Arthur Harold Parker, A.H. Parker High School has been a beacon for African American students, families, and the larger Birmingham community. Purple Parker Pride was a phrase that embodied the allegiance and pride to Parker High School. According to narrators, it was a phrase that was printed on school paraphernalia as a visual reminder to students, faculty, and staff to uphold the legacy of excellence. It was also a phrase that was often chanted at sporting events and instilled into students within the classroom settings as a verbal reminder of their responsibility to perform and act in a manner that aligned with the values and morals initially set forth by Dr. Arthur Harold Parker. Oral history narrator Barry, a 1989 graduate of A.H. Parker High School, further explained the meaning of "Purple Parker Pride," stating:

> When we think about Parker, of course, our school colors are purple and white….
> when we think of purple, we know that purple is the color of Christianity. The
> school itself was born at 16th Street Baptist Church. And so that idea in that

tradition is long standing. And you just didn't want to do anything to let down or

besmirch the purple.

Barry's definition of Purple Parker Pride highlighted the guiding principles of PHS and

the responsibility that students had in sustaining the traditions and historic legacies of this

educational institution. Likewise, Sandra, a 1972 graduate of Parker, remarked:

School pride and spirit were second to none. We boasted about our rich history,

heritage, and noble tradition of excellence, about being the first in the city for

Blacks, in 1900's, and once the largest in the world in 1950, when the enrollment

was 3,761. The entire Smithfield community was proud to be a part of Parker

because of its reputation, but not just Smithfield, but the entire city of

Birmingham, for if you were Black, someone in your family attended Parker

because it was the only high school for Blacks for nearly four decades.

Sandra's experience, similar to other PHS graduates, reflected a schooling environment

that was inextricably connected to the larger African American community in

Birmingham. Pride and allegiance to this historic institution was not claimed solely by

those who attended, but the larger African American community valued the school,

faculty, and staff as it was a concrete path for liberation and freedom for African

Americans. This was evidenced in John's description of Parker Pride. Narrator John, a

1985 graduate of Parker, commented:

Well, Parker always had a cliché that says Parker Pride. That would be adorned

on all the paraphernalia that the football team would wear. When we would work

out, we would have different cliches and different chants that included Parker

Pride in it, and the community rallied behind you. Example being, we played

many of our football games at Legion Field. Legion Field was right down the street from Parker. Oftentimes, instead of the bus coming to pick us up for the games we would walk from Parker to Legion Field for the games and as we would walk, community members would be sitting on their porch, cheering for us as we walked down the street to our football game. So, that was a community that would rally around the school and validate that pride because, you know, no other school is located in an area where the team would walk from the school to the stadium. So, I remember that being a very exhilarating experience.

Likewise, Patricia, a cheerleader and 1973 graduate of PHS, stated, "just having that "ole Parker spirit" was awesome. In fact, Patricia recalled, "being at the games and all we would have to do is say, "What's the word?" And it was like boom – "Thundering Herd" …the school spirit was hype."

Narrator Cassandra, a 1981 graduate of Parker, had a similar experience as Patricia, noting that Parker's rituals and school traditions increased the school spirit and pride. For instance, Cassandra stated that the schooling environment at Parker was "very supportive" and that this was inclusive of the community that surrounded the school. According to Cassandra, "the neighborhood supported everything that Parker did." Furthermore, pride in the school was instilled in students by faculty and staff during their early years at the school. Cassandra remembers that as a ninth grader at Parker, students were required to learn the school song and know the history of the school. Cassandra also addressed how Parker's school pride was transmitted across generations and geographical locations, recalling:

…If you see somebody out on the street.…and you just know they went to Parker—you walk up to them and just say, "what's the word?" They go pop back and say, "thundering herd". We all do that. To this day, doesn't matter how old you are.

Adrienne, a 1975 graduate of Parker High School, reflected on the correlation between the spirit of the institution and the pride that existed within the schooling environment. Adrienne commented:

…if you went to Parker High School, you were somebody and you were going to be somebody. You were going to do the best you could. I don't care if it was just sweeping the street or being a garbage collector, you were going to be the best.

A 1998 article in *The Birmingham World,* a local African American newspaper, documented Milton Hurst's experiences at A.H. Parker High School. Hurst, a 1950 graduate of Parker, remembered Parker "as a place where school pride flourished in the minds of the students and faculty despite the racial segregation of the day" ("Local educator credits," 1998, p. 17).

The theme Purple Parker Pride served to encourage the A.H. Parker High School community to excel in academics, sports, and extracurricular activities. Additionally, this pride and allegiance to this historic institution inspired students, faculty, and staff to be mindful of how their actions inside and outside of the schooling environment could potentially impact the overall reputation of the school.

Protectors of the Legacy

A.H. Parker High School narrators were protective of their school's history and legacy. Many narrators evaded narratives that elicited negative memories while a few narrators explicitly stated that they did not want to discuss specific negative memories. Narrators, particularly women narrators, illustrated what Darlene Clark Hine described as a culture of dissemblance. Hine (1989, 2004) defined dissemblance as "the behavior and attitudes of Black women that created the appearance of openness and disclosure but actually shielded the truth of their inner lives and selves from their oppression" (Hine, 1989, p. 912). When asked about factors that hindered students' success within the schooling environment, many narrators chose not to disclose any information, were declined to cite specific factors that prevented students from excelling or asked if statements could be "off the record". However, extant oral history interviews revealed instances of colorism that significantly affected the psychological and emotional state of some students in Parker's schooling environment.

Colorism. In 1982, Pulitzer Prize novelist, poet, and social activist, Alice Walker, initially explained colorism as a display of preferential treatment based on lighter complexion skin tones (Walker, 1983). While colorism is typically a concept that affects all races and cultures, historically, African Americans tend to experience colorism to higher degrees due to the nature of White supremacist ideologies and their legacies of Black inferiority (Wiggins, 2021). Furthermore, colorism is a gendered term as more African American women recount experiences of colorism in comparison to their male counterparts. Loder-Jackson (2015a), documented incidents of skin color discrimination

that former students of PHS experienced, specifically noting the prejudice that students with darker skin complexions experienced with faculty and staff.

During a 2006 HistoryMakers oral history interview, Alyce Jenkins, a 1953 graduate of Parker, recounted her experiences at Parker as a majorette in the band. Jenkins recalled trying out to be a majorette on three different occasions and being told by the Director, Mr. Caswell, that she was too dark (Jenkins, 2006). Eventually, Jenkins made the majorette line when Caswell determined that there were enough students with darker completion to create a second majorette line. According to Jenkins, majorettes with lighter skin tones were on the front line and those with darker skin tones were on the second line, in the back. Additionally, Jenkins remembered another majorette who experienced prejudice because of her darker complexion, "she was really dark, and she had this pretty wavy hair, and she was good, I mean she was really good…He [Caswell] put her behind the drum major cause she had to be on a line by herself (Jenkins, 2006).

> …but there were so many dark skinned girls—so many of us it was enough to make a second line so he put us on the second line and we were about the same height and he said that the reason that he was like that was because from the stands when we march—when we hold our leg out he wants it to look like one leg not different colors just one leg, one shade…. (Jenkins, 2006)

In an account of her experiences at A.H. Parker High School, Catherine Burks Brooks recalled the colorism that she experienced within the schooling environment. Brooks, a majorette in Parker's band, recalled the band director calling the darker complexioned majorettes his "three Blackies" (Brooks, 1996). The below exchange is an excerpt of Brooks' oral history interview with the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute.

Brooks: Yes. And, even at our Black high school, at that time you know we were just letting Black girls become majorettes and I was one of the first Black majorettes at Parker.

Huntley: You were one of the first phenotypically Black majorettes at a Black school?

Brooks: Yes. Color Black is what I mean. Dark.

Huntley: That's interesting. What was that like? Did you have any difficulty as a result of having dark skin?

Brooks: Yes.

Huntley: tell me how did that operate in that Black setting?

Brooks: Well, you know it's been years since I've thought about that. It was always a challenge. It was always a fight. I was always willing to fight the fight and kept my head high even though we were dark. It was a little saying what was that?

Huntley: "If you're Brown, stick around…"

Brooks: Yes. "If you're Brown, stick around, if you're Black, get back." It was something like that. And, so I was determined not to get back.
…

Huntley: So, you put up a defense against that whole idea?

Brooks: That's right. I did. And, I built a wall, which is a mess too, because you eventually have to tear it down.

Huntley: What do you mean? "You built a wall and, then, you eventually have to tear it down."

Brooks: Because you become hard, you become tough. You're always waiting for something. You're always waiting for a fight. (Brooks, 1996)

Furthermore, Brooks remembered that this and similar events were prevalent in the

schooling environment at Parker, as "it seemed as if the lighter skinned students received

the better breaks or privileges" but were topics that were not openly discussed in her

home or in the larger African American community (Brooks, 1996). In general, Brooks

narrative of her experiences with colorism at Parker revealed the deeply destructive impact that colorism had on the psychological and emotional reality of Black students, particularly among Black girls within the historic schooling environment.

Across decades, narrators recalled that A.H. Parker High School was a good school for African American students. Graduates of A.H. Parker High School valued their schooling experiences. Particularly in the earlier years of the institution, many students felt privileged to attend Parker High School, as it was the only four-year public high school in Birmingham until the 1950s.

Equally important to the spirit of this school community was the culturally relevant caring exhibited within the schooling environment by African American educators. These exemplary educators sought to create an educational experience that developed and fostered academic success but also instilled a sense of cultural pride within students that negated the negative messages of Black inferiority.

Theme 2: Exemplary Administrators and Educators

Oral history narrators remembered many caring educators who motivated students to excel. Both principals and educators worked together to establish an environment where students were motivated to excel academically and were provided an educational experience that taught students to resist notions of Black inferiority.

A.H. Parker's Principals 1950-1989

Over the course of the 39-year span that this study is situated, two individuals, Robert Charles Johnson and Edward Bennett Thompson, served as principals of A.H.

Parker High School. Johnson was the third principal of Parker and served from 1947

through 1969, and Edward Bennett Thompson was the fourth principal of PHS and

served from 1969 through 1989. In addition, according to archival data obtained from the

Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, a brief note mentioned that Lovie Jean Ashford

Hayden served as an interim principal from January 1989 to December 1989. While none

of the oral history narrators recalled Hayden's leadership or interacting with Mrs.

Hayden, it is worth noting that Lovie Jean Ashford Hayden was the first female principal

in Parker's 122 years of existence. This section highlights these three administrators and

how each contributed to the culturally relevant caring within historic A.H. Parker High

School.

Principal Robert Charles Johnson 1947-1969. Johnson's twenty-two-year

tenure as principal was the second longest in the school's history, with Dr. Arthur Harold

Parker occupying the principalship the longest for 39 years.

Figure 3. Robert Charles Johnson, third principal of A.H. Parker High School.

Robert Charles Johnson was born on August 11, 1903, in Oberlin, Ohio. In 1925, Johnson earned his Bachelor of Arts degree in Chemistry from Talladega College and later earned a Master of Arts degree from Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee (Record, 2000; Seals, in press). Before being appointed to the principalship of Parker High School, Johnson served as a science instructor at Parker and principal of several elementary schools in Birmingham, notably Lincoln Elementary School. In 1947, Johnson became principal of A.H. Parker High School.

Narrator Gwendolyn, a 1952 graduate of Parker, recalled, "R.C. Johnson was the principal during that time. He had very, very high control. He didn't have to do anything but stand in the hall and you could hear a pin drop". Likewise, during a 2006 HistoryMakers Oral History interview, Alma Powell, a 1954 graduate of Parker High School, wife of the late Colin Powell, and eldest daughter of principal Johnson, remembered, "with your father as the principal, nobody ever gave me a valentine. Nobody was ever going to talk to me because my father, was a much respected, feared man, which I guess you had to be to maintain order" (Powell, 2006). Furthermore, Powell remembered:

He [R.C. Johnson] was a very strong, courageous man, hardworking…. His whole life was that student population [Parker High School]. And as I said, my mother's [Mildred Bell Johnson] brother [George Crenshaw Bell] was principal of the other school [Samuel Ullman High School, Birmingham, Alabama], so they could talk and coordinate…. I can remember being sent home 'cause I was out of uniform. I had on a navy blue skirt, and I had on a light blue blouse, and I had a yellow wool jersey over it. And the girls' advisor came along with somebody and told who had

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been turned in for being out of uniform and said, "May I see what you have on under that jersey?" And I lifted it up, and she said, "That's not the uniform. You'll have to come to my office." (Laughter) And my father said she came in scared to death. "What must I do? Alma's out of uniform." He said, "Send her home. That's what you do with everybody else." (Powell, 2006)

Powell also recalled Principal Johnson pouring his life into ensuring that Parker High School students received the best. In fact, Powell noted that her father, Principal Johnson,

scheduled every—there were four thousand students, and he did every one of their schedules… He did every one of them. It occupied all of his spare time and all summer long—which he did in addition to teaching summer school so that he would have extra money. He and my [maternal] uncle [George Crenshaw Bell] both taught at Alabama State summer school. (Powell, 2006)

Narrator Earnest, a 1957 graduate of Parker High School, described Principal Johnson in the following manner,

He was very strict. If you got sent home for something, he would point toward the door and say, "we don't talk to you unless your parents are with you." He said when you come, have your parents with you, when you come, please. And we used to have an assembly in the old auditorium. He used to walk down the center aisle and the auditorium would get quiet. He just walked down the aisle and it got quiet. Now, he wasn't mean. Every year when it was time to practice for graduation. The senior class was always the marshal for graduation... Mr. Johnson would come in before the seniors marched in and come down the aisle go center stage and stand there and watch everybody come in. When the assembly was

over, he would say "you people over here on this side, need to learn how to march. You are out of time—out of step with everybody. He sat and watched all of that. We thought he was just standing there, but he was watching us. He wanted everything to be good and perfect… But personality… he wasn't a mean person. You could talk to him. Barbara, his youngest daughter, didn't think he was mean. She would say "that is just my dad". I thought he was a pretty good disciplinarian.

During a 1995 Birmingham Civil Rights Institute Oral History interview, Emily Thomas Ellis, a 1965 graduate of Parker High School, recalled that "Everybody knew him, R.C. Johnson, as "Big Red," he was a very strict principal" (Ellis, 1995). Ellis noted that the nickname "Big Red" was a name given to Principal Johnson by students due to his large statue and red skin tone, but it was not a name that you could call him. Ellis also recalled that Principal Johnson seemingly knew every student at Parker High School and could call them by name. A 1966 graduate of Parker High School, Carol, recalled:

R.C. Johnson was a stern, strict, principal. He was a… husky man. They called him Bid Red. [chuckle]… he was a no-nonsense principal. When he walked the halls, the children, they got to going where they had to go. He was very, very no-nonsense. And he was hands-on. He would be around, you would see him. He didn't just sit in his office, and you would see him, but he didn't even have to say anything to you. If you saw him, you knew to get where you were supposed to be.

Oral history narrator, Clifton grew up in a neighborhood called 'Little Korea' in Birmingham. Clifton, a 1968 graduate of Parker High School recalled a group of students acting silly in the school halls and Principal Johnson's response:

… somebody was acting crazy in the hallway, and I just happened to be walking

by there at the time, and ...I think we usually call him 'Big Red,' [chuckle] that

was his nickname, it was Big Red. And Big Red knew my mom and daddy

because my dad had gone to school there and all my brothers and sisters had gone

there before me. So, when he saw me, he didn't know who was doing what, but he

just told me, "get out." So, I went out the front door. That was R.C. Johnson, he

didn't play. [chuckle] Anyway, my momma called him, and I ended up going

back to school. I had fun.

Narrator Dale, a 1970 graduate of Parker High School, reflected on his memories of

Principal Johnson stating:

Well, I was scared of him. I ain't playing. I was afraid of him. Now, I don't know

whether this is good or bad, but he looked like he was White. And, if you listened

to him, he sounded White. But he was a no-nonsense type of principal, who did a

great job under the circumstances…. Parker had its share of kids who didn't want

to behave, but he was a strict disciplinarian. And he protected those of us who

were there to get an education. There were some crazies there, but he handled

them, and I think they feared him.

While many students remembered Principal Johnson as a firm leader, several accounts

recall that he was not mean. Jenkins recounted:

When we were taking ballet lessons they would give us lessons, and Alma and I

would try to practice our lessons and we could do them and Professor Johnson

would come in and he would show us how to do them…. We were looking and

saying, "Dang, he can do them and we can't do them and he's big and fat," you

know… He could do the ballet moves cause he was watching us and he was light on his feet and he could do them (laughter). It was funny. It was funny, and—but he was really nice, but he was a firm person.

Jenkins recalled another occasion when she was in elementary school when Johnson was the principal of Lincoln Elementary School. Jenkins remembered an instance when Principal Johnson called Jenkins' mother to the school.

When I was in elementary school my mother came down for some reason because someone had told her that I had—was making fun of the teacher or something and this particular teacher, Ms. Trust liked pigeon, squab you know, and she was always talking about it, and we used to say she looked like a pigeon. She ate so many pigeons, she looked like one. So, I think one day I was mocking her or something like that and somehow and another mama found out about it and she had to come to school and Professor Johnson was trying to tell mama what I had done (laughter) and so he was imitating me imitating Ms. Trust and mama said he was so funny she couldn't help but laugh. But he was a very nice person. (Jenkins, 2006)

After 22 years of service, Principal Johnson retired from A.H. Parker High School in 1969 (The Record, 2000). According to oral history narrators' accounts, Principal Johnson was a disciplinarian who valued the institution and aimed to create an environment where Parker's students were protected and provided the best educational experience. During his tenure as principal, Johnson also was active in the African American community and notably served as the President of the Alabama State Teachers Association (ASTA) from 1948-1950 (Gray et al., 1987). Under the leadership of

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Principal Johnson, in 1953, Parker High School became accredited by the Southern

Association of Colleges and Schools, a guidance counselor program was implemented,

and appropriate faculty were added to the program (Record, 2000; Young, 1970).

Additionally, several student organizations expanded their activities to include

membership in state, and national associations (Young, 1970).

Principal Edward Bennett Thompson 1969-1989. The fourth principal of A.H.

Parker High School was Mr. Edward Bennett Thompson. Principal Thompson was a

1943 graduate of Parker High School. Moreover, his mother, Mrs. Myrtle Johnson

Thompson, was a mathematics instructor at Industrial High School, later to be renamed

A.H. Parker High School. Additionally, Principal Thompson was the nephew of the

second principal of Parker High School, William Bennett Johnson. Similar to R.C.

Johnson, Principal Thompson had previously served as an educator in the science

department at Parker. In addition, he served as principal of Bryant Elementary for two

years, and principal of Hudson Elementary for one year, in the Birmingham Public

School System (The Record, 2000). Thompson earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from

Howard University and a Master of Arts degree from Alabama State University (Young,

1970). Among students, Principal Thompson was affectionately known as "Bubba"

Thompson.

Figure 4. Edward Bennett Thompson, fourth principal of A.H. Parker High School.

A former educator and 1972 alumnae of Parker High School, Sandra, recalled that

Principal Thompson had a visible presence on Parker's campus. Moreover, Sandra noted:

> Being a Parker graduate, he encouraged excellence in all phases of school life. I
> think it's safe to say that most teachers liked him. He brought the SECME, that's
> an acronym for Southeastern Consortium for Minorities in Engineering. He
> brought that program to Parker, and the program was second to none. Students
> competed in engineering projects and Parker always performed well, bringing
> home first place trophies more often than not.

As a student at Parker in the late 60s and early 70s, Dale remembered having both

Johnson and Thompson as principals. Dale noted the two different leadership styles that

Johnson and Thompson exhibited, referencing Principal Thompson's engagement with

the student body. In fact, Dale recalled a situation where students were not getting along

with a band faculty member. Dale reflected on how Principal Thompson convened a

conference of student leaders from the band to discuss the issues.

We were juniors and seniors in high school, and he wanted to know from us what's the problem with the band. And I think that kind of leaned towards the skills he had in understanding young folks at the time. And he convinced us that as leaders we needed to be the best and that the least, we could do was give the man a chance and work with him.

Many narrators reflected on the supportive nature of Principal Thompson with student activities and other educational pursuits. Patricia recalled,

He was a very nice person… He was the type of principal that was acceptable, that you could go up to him or talk to him. I can remember even some of the guys that had a good relationship with him, they used to call him "Bubba Thompson". We always called him Mr. Thompson, because he was the principal, but he had that type of relationship where he wasn't stand-offish or anything like that. And I can remember that our cheering coach would go to him for new uniforms for the cheerleaders and he would pay for the material and get them made. We could negotiate with him in order to get what we needed. He was a good principal.

Remembering the significant challenges that were faced by Principal Thompson due to the changes in the social and political culture of the late 1970s. Oral history narrator, Chris, recalled:

A lot of his faculty were going to White schools and some of the White teachers were coming to Parker High School. So, he had a chore to try to blend some of these young White teachers along with some of the old faculty members. Plus, they had just closed Ullman High School. Parker and Ullman were big rivalries. They used to always be confrontational. So, when they closed Ullman, that meant

many of those students had to come to Parker. So, he had a chore to get those

communities and all those students that was used to fighting against each other, he

had to try to get them to come together into one Parker High School and one

community. So, he had a task on his hands.

Oral history narrator Josephine, a 1974 graduate of Parker, remembered that Principal

Thompson reminded her of the fictional no-nonsense principal, Joe Clark, from the film,

Lean on Me.

> He [Principal Thompson] was two steps from being Mr. Clark. But he never said
>
> anything. I mean he never had to do anything because he had the assistant
>
> principal which was Mr. Fred Horn. And Mr. Horn didn't play the radio with
>
> you…Mr. Thompson never—I don't think he ever talked above a whisper. But he
>
> had a look that meant—don't test me. Don't test my gangsta. Period. Those
>
> teachers had a look, just a look that would get you back to your class.

While several narrators adored Principal Thompson and appreciated his specific

leadership style, there were a few narrators who described a different perspective. For

example, one narrator noted that Principal Thompson was not among his favorite

administrators.

> The principal [Principal Thompson] was not my favorite… he was a scholar in the
>
> educational community. But I just did not like his attitude towards students, and
>
> he wasn't empowering. He wasn't motivational. And I feel like a principal should
>
> have an academic side and should have a motivational side. And his motivational
>
> side was not there… All he did was delegate responsibility to other people in the

school, and they did the job for him… So, I just remember him being a supreme delegator.

Another oral history narrator agreed that Principal Thompson was not her favorite. This narrator perceived that Principal Thompson was not fond of the class of 1981 due to their seemingly lack of academic enthusiasm in comparison to previous classes. This oral history narrator recalled that Principal Thompson would brag about the academic achievements and educational pursuits of the class of 80. In particular, this narrator stated, "he didn't care for us too much." In part, the oral history narrator attributes this disinterest in the class of 81 to the primary reason that the class was not allowed to have a yearbook.

However, on the other hand, Adrienne's perspective was that Principal Thompson's leadership style was a strength to students and the entire Parker community. Adrienne attributed Thompson's good leadership to the staff that surrounded and supported his vision for Parker.

> He was a very good administrator and a very good leader because he had under him, a good assistant principal, good secretarial persons in the office, and great guidance counselors, who held him accountable for his role and they did their jobs, which made his job a little easier.

Oral history narrator Barry recalled the pride and loyalty that Principal Thompson held for Parker High School.

> He was really a part of the royal family… he was, to put it bluntly, "[I'll] be damned if the school took a dive on my watch". Because he stressed instruction and discipline… If you were out of line, and this was for teachers as well, you

would be addressed. He created that kind of atmosphere… He came to Parker High School with a history of being involved in the Civil Rights Movement in Birmingham. And so that same history, inspired him as well. And that connection to families in our high school, helped him to lead. He was so familiar with it, that he could keep it alive… He was a very positive influence. And I would be remiss, if I didn't mention that he would bring his car to the automotive shop in the school, and I was trusted to be his personal mechanic… That made me a better mechanic and it also made me have confidence in myself that he trusted me with this task.

Edward Bennett Thompson served as principal of A.H. Parker High School for 19 and a half years, retiring on December 31, 1989. As many narrators recalled, during his tenure, Principal Thompson faced significant social and political challenges within the greater Birmingham community that affected the schooling environment at Parker.

Principal Lovie Jean Ashford Hayden 1989-1989. Lovie Jean Hayden was a 1948 graduate of Parker High School and began teaching at Western-Olin High School at 20 years of age. For many years, Mrs. Hayden served as a Mathematics instructor and eventually was promoted to the head of the Math department (Birmingham Public School Directory, 1984).

Figure 5. Lovie Jean Ashford Hayden, Interim principal of A.H. Parker High School.

Reflecting on her years of teaching, Hayden stated, "…I taught 42 years in winters, summers, days, nights, and weekends. When referring to my students, I take a phrase from the familiar soap opera and call them "All My Children" (Selma, 2012, p. 75). Once Mrs. Hayden transitioned to Parker High School, she served as the girl's advisor, interim principal, and later assistant principal.

Notable Educators

Historically, African American educators assumed multiple roles within the Black segregated school. Among these are teacher, advocate, racial cheerleader, counselor, encourager, surrogate parental figure, disciplinarian, and role model (Adair, 1984; Fairclough, 2007; Foster, 1993, 1997; Givens, 2021; Loder-Jackson, 2015a; Morris & Morris, 2000; Siddle Walker, 1993, 1996, 2013). Overall, the narrators expressed that the teachers at A.H. Parker High School cultivated and exhibited a culture of care within the schooling environment. In an extant oral history interview, Helen Heath, a graduate of

Industrial High School, reflected on her experience as a mathematics teacher at Parker High School in the 40s and 50s.

> I loved all of my children, and I just had the most wonderful time. As a matter of fact, if ever I was a little puny and ordinarily, I would not have to work, I had to go. Well or feeble, I went to school every day because I enjoyed the children just that much, the young people. They were just respectful, and you never had to say, a single day did you ever have to really fuss at anybody and scold them… You just sort of looked their direction and they just were obedient and cooperative. (Heath, 2004).

The late Reverend John Porter, the previous pastor of the Sixth Avenue Baptist Church and a 1948 Parker graduate, in a 1998 interview published in the *Birmingham World,* remembered the influence and the inspiration that Parker's educators had on the student body. Porter commented:

> The kind of teachers we had at Parker made all the difference in the world. Not the building or the grounds but the teachers. It was an experience to sit under Henry Williams in a history class. He would preach history. To some people, history is boring…but not at Parker…not under Henry Williams. You had your literature class. The teachers in the English classes, literature…the poetry that I quote now in my sermons, many of them I learned at Parker. I think that the teachers, and I can just name them one after another, that made all the difference, and how blessed we were to have that opportunity to be exposed, to be inspired. Many of us came from families whose parents had not gone to college, we could not get inspiration for post high school education from our parents because they

really had no experience themselves, we had to get it from our high school

teachers. (Dickson, 1998b, p. 22)

Similar to Porter's experience of teachers who demonstrated expertise with the course

curriculum and were able to convey subjects in ways that were interesting and useful.

Barry, recalled notable instructors during his tenure at Parker that had a significant

impact on his academic experiences at Parker.

Mr. Henry Boykin was one of those people that would really drum the idea of

economics. He would teach the history of the Birmingham Black business district

on what happened, and he would go into the roles that Harold Parker and

Reverend Pettiford played. I can remember that as a part of our class he had us to

go to Citizen's Federal, which at the time was owned by A.G. Gaston. Everybody

in his economics class had to have a passbook savings account, from Citizen's

Federal…. Mrs. Weeks would teach English but would also teach etiquette and

how to carry yourself and how to speak… There was a level of professionality

that the faculty had, and there was also the idea that teachers didn't seek to be

familiar with students. There was a separation, and it was a clear separation. You

knew that they were the adult. And sometimes I think that… we miss that in

modern education, but Mrs. Weeks was your mother. I mean every day, she came

to work – Sunday best… head to toe, hat and heels…

In a 1998 interview published in the *Birmingham World,* with a 1952 graduate of Parker,

Atty. J. Mason Davis, cited the chair of the history department, Mrs. Dessie Ray, as an

exemplar instructor at Parker High School during his attendance. Davis recalled,

"…Dessie Ray taught us not only American History, we also learned Black History. We

used DuBois' *Black Reconstruction*….and John Hope Franklin's, *From Slavery to Freedom*, in the 12th grade" (Dickson, 1998a, p. 21). Likewise, Milton Hurst, a 1950 graduate of A.H. Parker High School noted,

> There were "tough no-nonsense instructors like English teacher Leona Reed…and history teacher Dessie Ray, who taught them to be proud in spite of the limited opportunities offered to blacks, Hurst said. "They were taskmasters, Hurst said as he fondly reflected on his teachers' insistence on excellence and discipline. School counselor Griffin Day and Principal R.C. Johnson also were instrumental in teaching him about honor and responsibility. "Griffin Day made me appreciate learning. He was respected in the church, and he was a role model for me. Mr. Johnson let me take a leadership role at school. He let me hang around the office; he gave me assignments and let me take on some responsibilities." "the school was a nurturing environment. Our teacher made us feel as though we could accomplish anything. They taught us black history and invited inspirational speakers to the school, and we felt we were the best in the country." ("Local educator credits," 1998, p. 17)

During Dale's senior year at Parker, in 1970, a fire took place in the school. Dale's recollection of the event was that the fire began in the school's auditorium. According to Dale, he was in his first period class preparing to take a math quiz.

> It started in the auditorium, and it was rumored that the science fair that was going on at the time, people plugging in lights and all of the gadgets having to do with the science fair, overloaded the circuits and that what caused the fire. At least that

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was the rumor. I'm not going to say that was it or not, because I don't think they really knew what started the fire.

Furthermore, Dale recalled that the students and teachers did not know that the school was on fire.

The fire was smoldering in the building, and it disabled the alarm systems, and the bells. So, the first-period bell didn't ring. The subject teachers came out…in the halls and told students to go to class. And they said, "We don't know what's going on with the bell system." Well, it was burning then, we just didn't know it…. pretty soon it became apparent that the school was on fire.

Ultimately, the single most critical factor that stands out to students about the fire in 1970 was the response of the teachers and the faculty. Dale recalled his experience stating:

Those teachers made sure that not a single person got hurt. Not a single one. Every kid was accounted for… The teachers and administrators and "Bubba" Thompson, they made the adjustments to make sure that the education continued. And when we came back to school…we went to class, and we did what we needed to do. And we might have been at a little disadvantage because some of the labs were destroyed and stuff, but we made it work. With good, strong, hard-working, dedicated teachers that cared about us. Those were the keys, the quality of professionalism that came from those teachers.

Oral history narrator, Adrienne, recalled that during her time at Parker, students would often skip class to go to the local corner store, Oddo's.

Children loved to sneak out of class, go get something from Oddo's and shoot back to the school. Well, on this particular day, Mrs. Loretta Allen [a mathematics

instructor] and Mr. Fred Horn [Assistant Principal], about 9:30 in the morning, they walk across to the store, and they talk to the store owner, and he let them set up a table in there that was right to the … Kinda not at the door but right to the back. Not to the back, but where you… You had to come in the store to see them. And as soon as the children started coming in, getting their stuff, they just came right up to them and they started, "Come on, baby, we go write you up." And you were already in there, so there wasn't nothing you could do…. And so, they sent them all home. And after a while, word got out, "Don't go to the store." I just laughed so hard. I thought that was the funniest thing, that they just sat over there. They did it for about two days and caught students, and they broke that up for a while, going to the store during school because they sat there, and they just wrote them up.

In addition to a command of course content and cultivating a culture of care, educators within A.H. Parker's schooling environment were disciplinarians. Similar to the verbal and physical discipline that students received in their home environments, students in A.H. Parker High School experienced. An extant oral history interview from the Duke University archives documented the story of Gertrude Sanders, an early graduate of then Industrial High School and retired educator for Birmingham City Schools. Sanders (1994) recalled that teachers were very strict and would discipline students by sending them home.

I know one day it was raining and we were late because we walked from Titusville to Industrial High School, and it was raining, and we wrapped our shoes up in paper and went over there barefoot. And was late walking in Mrs. [Odessa]

Kennedy's office... I'm wiping off my feet, and putting on my shoes, another girl

with me and she [Mrs. Kennedy] said, "you may as well put them on and you can

go back like you came, because you're late. Go back home and get an early start

tomorrow morning." I cried, but I ran all the way back home in the rain. A long

way from Titusville to Industrial High School. And, I remember her saying,

"there's no excuse for an excuse". (Sanders, 1994)

Heath (2004) also reflected on her overall experience and perspective of working with
other faculty and the role that parents played in supporting the education of students at
Parker.

We were all closely aligned. We were one body and in my day in teaching every

teacher wanted to have the reputation of having had cooperative students who

were anxious about learning. That was one of the major jobs that we all felt at

Parker that we had the type of discipline that they were seemingly motivated to

learn... they were anxious to please the teacher. And the parents were cooperative

because if you had any small problems, you could just anytime refer to the parents

and you just had all of the support that you needed. In that day you didn't have

parents fussing at teachers for being a little hard on their children. They were just

happy to know that you were interested in getting some concept over to them.

(Heath, 2004).

After graduating and pursuing a career in education, oral history narrator Sandra
reiterated her desire to return to Parker to teach.

It was always my ultimate goal to teach at my alma mater to help instill that good

old Parker pride in the students of today. And after returning home from teaching

in Kano State, Nigeria, I made my wishes known to my former choirmaster, Mr. Perry L. Anderson, who had been my favorite teacher, and he pointed me in the direction of Mrs. Loretta Allen, who was head of personnel at the Board of Education. Mrs. Allen was an alumnus of Parker and a former math teacher and girls' adviser at Parker. Mrs. Allen said she believed in helping Parker graduates return to Parker in order to uphold the school's rich tradition of excellence. … I was not the only Parker alumnus who considered returning home to teach at Parker, one's dream job. During my 20-year tenure at Parker, there were never less than 15 alumni on staff.

Overall, Black educators with A.H. Parker High School motivated and inspired students to learn. Former alumni described educators as central actors in their educational experiences at Parker and revealed the significance of the student-teacher relationship to their educational experiences within the schooling environment.

Theme 3: Institutional Continuity

The theme of institutional continuity within A.H. Parker High School highlights both the familial and educational continuity that existed within the schooling environment. The following sections provide further details about oral history narrators' accounts of familial and educational continuity and how these factors contributed to their success within this historic schooling environment.

Familial Continuity

For most oral history narrators, attending Parker was a family tradition that sometimes spanned several generations. Narrators recalled how historical memories and

school rituals from previous familial generations served to motivate and instill a deep pride in those who attended Parker.

Oral history narrator John vividly expressed the familial legacy of attending Parker within his family. According to John, four generations of his family attended A.H. Parker High School.

> my grandfather finished Parker High School when it was Industrial High….in 1920. My father attended Parker High School in the 1950s, and my brothers…we all attended Parker High school. I had a brother that finished in the class of 81, class of 85, and I had a younger brother in the class of 87. And, I had a nephew that finished in the class of 2002.

Broadly, John noted that familial legacies were one of the primary factors that contributed to Parker being considered a good school for Black students.

> … Many of the students at Parker, also had three and four generations of their family members that attended Parker High School. So, there was a legacy of excellence. So, because of that, it gave students a purpose, and it gave them a goal. I knew all along I wanted to go to Parker High School since I was in elementary school… seeing in that day and time, high schools were like colleges…. As a young kid growing up in the Smithfield community…students looked forward to attending Parker. They look[ed] forward to having the same teachers that some of their older brothers and sisters had. [They] looked forward to being a part of extracurricular activities, because, like I mentioned earlier, Parker had a history for academics, fine arts, and athletics.

Moreover, Barry recalled how attending Parker, and other Birmingham City Schools was a tradition for many generations within his own family.

> Parker was a family thing for me….my roots were firmly entrenched in Parker… my grandmother, my aunt, my uncles, and various cousins had gone to Parker High School…my mother actually attended Ullman High School, which was an all-Black high school as well. So, that tradition of going to Birmingham City Schools, and also going to those schools that [served] the Black community was something that I grew into [as] part of my family's history.

Earnest, a 1957 graduate of Parker and the eldest of 10, mentioned that his mother was a graduate of Industrial High School and that all of his siblings attended Parker. Earnest's younger sister, Adrienne, also served as a narrator in this oral history study and commented that:

> All of my brothers and sisters had already gone to Parker, and I am the ninth out of 10 children, and we all went to Parker. I was pushed by my parents and my older brothers and sisters to always do well academically.

Similar to previous experiences among oral history narrators, Dale was excited about the possibility of attending Parker High School.

> Some of my friends, instead of going to a predominantly Black school, the White schools had become integrated and some of my friends instead of going to Parker, they went to Phillips, Ramsay, Ensley, Shades Valley, some of the traditionally White schools. However, my parents and I made the decision for my brother and I both to go to Parker High School. It was the family tradition. My Aunt Ruth worked at Parker High School. It was right there in the neighborhood, and there

were so many things that I heard about the Parker High School experience. I couldn't wait to get there and be a part of it myself.

Educational Continuity

Educational continuity addresses a phenomenon expressed within narrators' accounts of Black educators at Parker who taught multiple generations of families. Moreover, it acknowledges how Black educators at Parker were linked inextricably to the interior lives of their students and the broader African American community.

John attributed the "instructional excellence" that existed within Parker High School to the "individual and collective longevity" of African American families and educators.

> Well, the greatest thing that I can remember about teachers at Parker was the fact that there was a sense of individual and collective longevity. What I mean by that, is that I had an older brother that went to Parker for four years before I got there. Then I was at Parker for two years before my younger brother got there. And all of us were taught by the same cadre of teachers. So, that meant that Parker was able to create a pipeline of instructional excellence, because those teachers were a staple at the school for an extended period of time. And then many of those teachers were still there when I came back to teach….that means if you have an established group of teachers, they are able to truly create a longstanding reputation and legacy to affect a multitude of students….It elevated Parker as an institution that was able to make a difference in the lives of different generations of students because those teachers all stayed around and taught there for an extended period of time.

Likewise, Sandra's siblings and later her two children attended Parker High School. Sandra recalled a conversation with Mr. Perry Anderson, renowned choir director at Parker, and one of Sandra's favorite teachers.

> … My son was in the choir and my daughter was as well. But my son actually had Perry Anderson…I remember telling Perry Anderson cause [my] children are seven and a half years apart, and I said, "Mr. Anderson, I don't want you to retire now before my daughter comes." He said, "Sandra, what grade is she?" I said, "She's in kindergarten." He said, "Oh, I'll be long gone." He said, "I'm sorry, I can't wait on the baby." We all wanted our good teachers who had taught us to teach our children, and it's an honor when I teach my children and they say, "oh, my dad, you taught him, and my mom, said you taught her in middle school." And that makes you feel good.

Furthermore, narrators' accounts described experiences with Parker's Black educators outside of the schooling environment that reiterated their care and concern for students. For example, both, Alma Powell, daughter of Principal R.C. Johnson, and Alyce Jenkins recalled, Johnson being their principal at Lincoln Elementary School and then being their principal when they entered A.H. Parker High School (Jenkins, 2006; Powell, 2006). Moreover, Jenkins (2006) recalled growing up in the same neighborhood as Principal Johnson and his firm but loving nature.

> … I remember one time I had some skates and I had learned how to skate on the streets where we lived on 5th Street, but I decided I'm good at this now, so I'll go over to the next street, and I went over the next street and I was going down this hill and I lost control. I couldn't do it and the next thing I knew I was at Professor

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Johnson's house because I had fallen and knocked myself out and he took me

home—to his home and called my mother and told her where I was and

everything. But see he just lived down the street from us. He lived at—we lived at

the top of the hill, and he was at the bottom of the hill. If you were driving and

you didn't turn your car to the right or to the left, you'd run right into his house.

While a student at Parker, Chris recalled the immense pressure of living across the street

from one of his science teachers, "you could imagine taking a class with her. She'd come

right over there and talk with my mama, right across the street. Or she would see me at

church. These types of interactions encouraged Chris to do his best in school.

Likewise, Earnest explained that Black teachers cared for students both inside and

outside of the classroom.

They definitely cared. [Teachers] kept up with you when you were out of school

and when you were in school. They really had no choice because there were a lot

of teachers who were living in the neighborhood where the school was…They

lived in your neighborhood, so they knew you. A lot of them went to your same

church. If you went to church that is. I know especially for me when I was in

elementary school in Tuggle. All my teachers, Mrs. Scott, Mrs. Tuggle, and Mr.

Winston, the principal went to our church…. So, if you messed up…Let me tell

you what happened once, not to me, but one of my siblings. My brother got in

trouble one time. There were some guys who were gambling in the classroom

down at Parker and got sent home because he was there. So, when Momma and

Daddy, carried him back down to the school. Mr. Winston came in.. He said, "Mr.

Reynolds, what are you doing here"? He said, "I'm here to bring my son back. He

got sent home [because] he was down there gambling. He said, "If I had've

known that was your son, he wouldn't have been sent home. I would have taken

care of him right here". They [teachers] were just that interested. They cared.

Recollections from A.H. Parker High School alumni reveal the varied ways that

their lives were linked with African American educators both inside and outside of the

schooling environment.

Theme 4: Alumni Institutional Mourning

Institutional mourning, a term coined by Eve Ewing (2018), is representative of

the social and emotional mourning that individuals and communities experience after the

closing of a shared institution. At the writing of this dissertation, Parker remains a viable

institution and is not at this time in danger of being closed. However, participant

narratives are closely aligned with the definition. This term is discussed in more detail in

the final chapter within the interpretation of findings section in Chapter 5.

The theme of alumni institutional mourning is representative of oral history

narrators' remarks concerning their perceptions of differences and changes within the

contemporary schooling environment at Parker. In essence, many alumni mourn the

decline of school spirit and the deep tradition of Black excellence that existed during their

high school years.

Decline in School Spirit

Patricia's reflections on her time at Parker included an atmosphere that consisted

of school pride and deep traditions. However, the contemporary schooling environment is

different from when she attended because of the declining school spirit and pride that she observed.

> We had that Parker spirit. Our brothers, cousins, and neighborhoods, all had that Parker spirit…. most of the teachers had gone to Parker and they had that Parker spirit too whereas, I think now, they really don't understand. I remember going back to the school one year when they had invited us to come to the school for the Purple and White day. And we talked about the Parker spirit and being on the pep squad and cheer. They didn't even know what a pep squad was…things have been taken out of the school and they don't know about it. If no one tells you and teach you about it, you don't have it. So, unless it's being embedded in them or they've had people to reiterate and tell them, they won't know it… a lot of people don't even know the school song and that's sad.

> Likewise, Chris recalled attending an event at Parker and getting the opportunity to speak with students about their experiences.

> … I tried to talk to these kids about Parker High School, but they had no interest. I didn't understand that… I know that a lot of them come from different backgrounds and different communities…They really don't have an allegiance. Their families don't talk about their high school experience like my parents or people did.

Changing School Culture

According to Carol, education in general and schools in particular are very different from when she attended. One of the primary differences that she noted was the level of care that is displayed within the schooling environment.

> I think that some teachers now are disinterested. They are younger, and their mind is on enjoying their life, not putting as much into the students as the teachers back then in my day did. The teachers would visit your home. And if you weren't performing or doing something, they would tell your parents.

Furthermore, Carol recounted an instance with her daughter, who attended Parker in the 80s, that demonstrated the care that still existed during that time.

> … my daughter went there [Parker] in the 80s… when she got to school, she took what she had left home in and put this little halter top on, and had her hair twisted to the side… the Math teacher called me and she said, "Miss Owens, I don't think you know what she has on." … And I said, "No, ma'am, I sure don't." I didn't know anything about it. So, when she got home, she had put her clothes back on, and I let her know that I had heard she had a halter top on. That was in the 80s. They still cared. I don't think they care as much now as they even did in the 80s, let alone the 60s. And so, she knew then she couldn't do just anything at school because the teachers cared enough about her that they would tell.

Ellen, a retired educator from Fairfield City School System and a 1970 graduate of Parker High School, explained that technology and social media have significantly impacted the culture and student behaviors, often resulting in school violence.

We didn't have social media to form opinions about different things, and to cause

a whole lot of controversy, where students do now, where they can get on

Facebook, and carry-on verbal altercations on Facebook and then bring it on to

school and then the situation escalates while they're at school.

Sandra offered another perspective, stating that her "experiences were much richer than

that of these students today." She further explained:

Unfortunately, today, teachers are admonished to teaching only the course of

study, which doesn't include Black history, self-discipline, morals, values, and

self-worth. In the teacher's defense, however, they're generally evaluated on how

well their students fare on aptitude tests that don't measure the aforementioned

characteristics.

Chapter Summary

This chapter detailed the findings of this oral history study through the

explanation of four identified themes. The findings identified within this revealed that

students valued A.H. Parker's learning environment and deemed it a relevant component

of their motivation for success. The four identified themes included: (1) the legacy of

school spirit, (2) exemplary administrators and educators, (3) institutional continuity, and

(4) alumni institutional mourning. Each theme demonstrated the collective experiences of

students who attended Parker High School during the 39-year period between 1950 and

1989. In sum, former PHS alumni who participated in this oral history study, collectively

acknowledged that A.H. Parker High School was a good school for Black students.

Furthermore, they attested that their experiences prepared them to live and thrive within a

society that often deemed them intellectually and socially inferior. Many former alumni

maintain a sense of loyalty and pride in this historically Black high school and the

educators that nurtured their academic and personal lives. The identified themes and the

central questions that guided this oral history study will be discussed in further detail in

the following chapter.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The insistence on viewing African American educational histories through a lens of pathology persists. As a result, both African American educational institutions and African American students are portrayed as inherently inferior to their White counterparts (Perry et al., 2003). However, historically, predominantly African American educational institutions and educators have resisted and persevered despite vast inequities. Similar, to extant narratives of successful all-Black high schools, Arthur Harold Parker High School in Birmingham, Alabama has a rich history of nurturing African American students and exhibiting culturally relevant caring in the schooling environment that ultimately motivated students to excel (Acosta et al., 2018; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999, 2002; Morris & Morris, 2000; Patterson et al., 2011; Seals, in press, Siddle Walker, 1996, 2000; Siddle Walker & Snarey, 2004).

The primary aim of this oral history study was to document the lived educational experiences of educators and students who attended A.H. Parker High School between 1950 to 1989. The primary questions that guided this study include:

1. What were the lived educational experiences of students who attended A.H. Parker High School between 1950 and 1989?

a. How did Parker's school community members (former alumni, and educators) perceive the culture of care within the schooling environment during the time of their attendance?

2. Did Birmingham's historical and sociopolitical contexts shape narrators' lived experiences as it related to the culturally relevant caring that existed within the schooling environment at A.H. Parker High School?

Seventeen alumni from A.H. Parker High School participated in this study. An oral history methodology along with archival documents were utilized to highlight the experiences of former students. The findings of this oral history can be used to guide future practice, research, and policy as researchers and educational practitioners work to improve the educational experiences of African American students.

This concluding chapter is organized into five sections. The first section answers and discusses the central questions that guided this study. The second section examines the implications for theory and research. The third section provides a brief overview of the limitations of this oral history study. The fourth section discusses recommendations for future research. And finally, this chapter will conclude with final reflections on this oral history dissertation study.

Interpretations of Findings

Findings from this oral history study are consistent with previous scholarship on the value of historically all-Black schools and the exemplar educators that nurtured and cared for students in meaningful ways (Acosta et al., 2018; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999, 2002; Foster, 1993, 1997; Givens, 2021; Kelly, 2010; McKinney de Royston et al., 2021;

Lewis & James-Gallaway, 2022; Morris & Morris, 2000; Patterson et al., 2011;

Randolph, 2004; Siddle Walker, 1996, 2000, 2013, 2019; Siddle Walker & Snarey,

2004).

Theme 1: The Legacy of School Spirit

Since its' inception, A.H. Parker High School has always been an educational

institution that produced students with unwavering school spirit and a sense of pride and

loyalty to their school. Woven into the fabric of A.H. Parker High School is a school

spirit that is second to none. This intangible element of Parker is foundational to the

continuing legacy of the institution. The spirit of Parker's school community is

transcendent. Stern (2009) posited, "Spirit goes beyond individual people or individual

institutions, and is an active or 'lively' characteristic incorporating events and emotions"

(p. xv). Furthermore, Parker's school spirit is a unifying thread that has served to promote

loyalty and pride within the study body. Dr. Arthur Harold Parker attributed the initial

success of the school to the spirit of the student body (Parker, 1932). For example, in

1914, when the school building was condemned and moved to another location that

contained fourteen small cottages on the property, Dr. Parker and the student body

utilized their industrial skills learned in the classroom setting to remodel the site.

According to Parker (1932), while the Birmingham Board of Education provided

the paint for the cottages, it was through the collective efforts of the students, faculty, and

staff that the cottages were converted into classrooms. The boys rebuilt and painted the

cottages from the inside-out and the girls cleaned and decorated. Parker recalled that

"while we were thus building and making our own schoolhouse—there was being built

into the fib[er] of the spirit of the school a strength and purpose that made it irresistible.

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The school's popularity grew apace" (p. 65). Students took ownership and pride in their school and in the work that was accomplished through their intensive labor and commitment to establishing a learning environment that served as an incubator for the uplifting of the African American race. This pride and allegiance to Parker High School continued with each successive generation.

The theme, the spirit of a school community, reflects the importance and impact of the intangible element of school spirit. Across generational cohorts, oral history narrators acknowledged the enduring school spirit that was present within A.H. Parker High School. Furthermore, several narrators discussed Purple Parker Pride, which is identified as a subtheme of the school's spirit. According to narrators, Purple Parker Pride was a mantra that was ingrained into the student body and served to promote loyalty and a sense of tradition within students. Students who voiced this phrase acknowledged that it represented a sense of respect, responsibility, and allegiance to Parker. Overall, oral history narrators indicated that Parker's school spirit was instrumental in their perception of the school environment as good.

Theme 2: Exemplary Administrators and Educators

Historically, exemplar African American teachers and administrators within Black segregated schools assumed the responsibility to care for students. Educators deemed it their "mission" to meet the individual and collective needs of African American students (Acosta et al., 2018; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999, 2002; Fairclough, 2001, 2007; Foster, 1993; Givens, 2021; James-Gallaway & Harris, 2021; Kelly, 2010; Loder-Jackson, 2015a; Siddle Walker, 1996; Watson, 2018). Within the

African American community, similar to Black preachers, Black educators were highly esteemed and were considered leaders of the community. Fairclough (2001) posited that Black educators "personified the belief that education meant liberation" (p. 9).

Black educators contested ideologies of Black inferiority and through education, strategically sought to uplift African American students and the larger African American community. This culturally relevant caring for Black students began with the Dr. Arthur Harold Parker and his quest to establish a secondary educational institution for African American students in Birmingham, Alabama. Dr. Parker admonished teachers and those contemplating entering the profession to consider the responsibility of being an educator:

> By taking the position of the teacher, all responsibility is assumed, a responsibility not only for what is done but for what is not done, and there is no escaping the responsibility. One may have entered the work without serious thought of its tremendous obligation, yet the responsibility is upon him. Study long and hard what it means to be a teacher. (Parker, 1932, p. 17)

Just as Dr. Parker envisioned, the administrators and teachers at Parker High School took their role seriously in educating the Black youth of Birmingham, Alabama.

Together, oral history narrators' narratives and accounts from extant oral histories along with information obtained through archival research, aligned with previous scholarship on the essential role of exemplary Black educators (Acosta et al., 2018; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Fairclough, 2001, 2007; Foster, 1993,1997; Givens, 2021; James-Gallaway, & Harris, 2021; Kelly, 2010; Loder-Jackson, 2015a; Siddle Walker 1996; Watson, 2018). All of the oral history narrators that participated in this oral history study had either R.C. Johnson or Edward "Bubba" Thompson as principal. While both

administrators were different in their leadership styles, many oral history narrators'

perceptions of both administrators were that they cared for students in their own unique

way. As expected, some narrators voiced their preferences for a particular administrator

based on individual experiences and perceptions. Furthermore, oral history narrators

expressed their value for particular educators within the schooling environment.

Educators were valued because of their professionalism, expertise in content, and

dedication to the profession and ensuring the success of students. In contrast, some oral

history narrators expressed that there were instructors that they perceived as uncaring and

lacked motivation and skill. However, these narratives are few. Overwhelmingly, oral

history narrators expressed that exemplar educators were a key component to their

success while students at A.H. Parker High School.

Theme 3: Institutional Continuity

Educational researchers have theorized about the necessity for continuity in the

educational experiences of students (Dewey, 1963; Noddings, 1992). For example,

Dewey (1963) asserted that all educational experiences are connected, and that past

experiences should be carried forward and incorporated into future educational

experiences. Noddings (1992) extended Dewey's recommendations and outlined the

necessity for continuity of purpose, continuity of place, and continuity of people, and

continuity of curriculum. Specifically, continuity of purpose addressed the need for

schools to prepare students not only for academic pursuits but also to provide students

with opportunities to pursue "specific skills, desirable attitudes, and social interactions"

(p. 66). Continuity of place addressed the benefit to students' educational experiences if

they are allowed to remain in the same school building for an extended amount of time as

they progress through their academic careers. Additionally, Noddings suggests that students need continuity of people—primarily, their teachers. As with continuity of place, Noddings recommended that students remain with the same teacher throughout their academic careers. Finally, Noddings suggested a continuity of curriculum. This particular curriculum would offer students essential themes of caring. In sum, Noddings (1992) argued that "care requires continuity" (p.68).

For the purposes of this oral history study, a focus on Noddings' definition of continuity of people is broadened to address familial continuity and educational continuity that was present in A.H. Parker High School. Familial continuity addresses the phenomenon of consecutive generations of families attending the same educational institution, while educational continuity addressed the phenomenon of Black educators teaching successive generations of Black families.

Until the 1950s, A. H. Parker High School was the only four-year public high school in Birmingham, Alabama for African American students. Moreover, since Birmingham operated under a dual school system that was separated by race through the 1960s, African American educators interested in teaching at the high school level had limited options. However, these barriers to the educational experiences of students and educators created an incubator for student success. Narrators' accounts of these experiences at Parker revealed not only the importance of familial continuity but also the essential role of educational continuity in motivating students to excel.

Narrators recalled how historical memories and school rituals from previous familial generations served to motivate and instill a deep sense of pride in those who attended Parker. Oral history narratives about the impact of both familial and educational

continuity on the educational experiences of Black students provided insight into what it meant to attend the same school that your grandparents, parents, or older siblings attended. Moreover, narrators expressed that these particular forms of continuity created caring teacher-student interactions because of the generational connections that existed. Finally, oral history narrators recalled that these experiences compelled them to do well in their coursework because of the gaze of Black educators.

Theme 4: Alumni Institutional Mourning

While Parker remains a high school within the Birmingham Public School System and at the time that this dissertation was written, is not in danger of being closed; however, there were vague echoes of institutional mourning, as defined by Eve Ewing (2018), in narrators' transcripts. Ewing (2018) defined institutional mourning as:

> The social and emotional experience undergone by individuals and communities facing the loss of a shared institution they are affiliated with – such as a school, church, residence, neighborhood, or business district—especially when those individuals or communities occupy a socially marginalized status that amplifies their reliance on the institution or its significance in their lives (Ewing, 2018, p. 127).

Ewing's definition of institutional mourning specifically encompasses experiences dealing with the loss of shared institutions. However, this dissertation expands Ewing's definition to include shared institutions that have experienced cultural shifts within the schooling environments. This study's findings supported Ewing's (2018) assertions concerning institutional mourning.

Furthermore, findings indicated that narrators' perceived their experiences at Parker to be vastly different from those who currently attend. These differences are primarily due to a decline in school spirit and to shifts within the culture of the educational institution. For instance, some oral history narrators perceive that students within the contemporary schooling environment do not support school athletic activities or events to the same degree that previous generations have supported the school. Additionally, some accounts note that students are not as familiar with the school's history and the historical significance that this all-Black educational institution occupies. Furthermore, some narrators identified a cultural shift that was disconcerting to them as alumni. In particular, narrators noted that the professionalism and dedication of educators, and the rigor of the curriculum and what is required of students have declined in comparison to previous generations.

Overall, oral history narrators contend that their allegiance and loyalty to the school remain. However, they acknowledged factors within the contemporary schooling environment that they perceived to impact culturally relevant caring and nurturing that was historically provided to Black students.

Implications

There continues to be an interest in historical scholarship that highlights historic African American schooling environments, particularly the history of secondary education. This scholarship on A.H. Parker High School has been turned into a book chapter to be included in an edited volume entitled: *The First African American High Schools in the U.S.* My chapter on A.H. Parker High School is entitled "A Labor of Love:

The origin, development, and legacy of Parker High School in Birmingham, Alabama. The initial call for this edited volume included A.H. Parker High School as an institution of significance. This demonstrates not only local interest in the history of this historic institution but a broader national interest in the history of A.H. Parker High School. This oral history study contributes to existing scholarship on historical narratives of valued and successful predominantly African American secondary schools. It gives voice to those individuals who were educated within this environment and will serve as a living record for future generations that document the lived experiences of oral history narrators who attended A.H. Parker between the years of 1950 to 1989. The following section addresses the implications for theory and recommendations for future studies.

Implications for Theory

Across generational cohorts, narrators revealed that Arthur Harold Parker was a good school for Black students. Several narrators indicated that the particular type of care that they received during the time of their attendance encouraged them to be successful and prepared them for future endeavors. Narrators from earlier cohorts described the connections between school, home, and community and the consistent messaging that they received about the importance of academics and having pride in their race.

Culturally relevant theories of care were utilized to frame this oral history study. Historically, culturally relevant theories of care, particularly when educating African American children, acknowledge the historical, political, and social milieu in which students live and thrive (James-Gallaway & Harris, 2021; McKinney de Royston et al., 2017; Watson et al., 2016; Watson, 2018). This form of caring encompasses the

emotional, physical, mental, relational, and intellectual components of protection for

African American students. At the core of this "relational work" is the notion that African

American educators are able to care for African American students in specific and

meaningful ways (McKinney de Royston et al., 2021). Drawing on these theories,

educators and schools are able to develop political clarity in an effort to build communal

bonds with students that have the potential to undergird the student-teacher relationship.

      Furthermore, analyzing and interpreting this oral history study's findings through

culturally relevant theories of care provides significant insight into the essential role that

interpersonal and institutional care have historically occupied within the schooling

environment. In most circumstances, these environments cannot and should not be

replicated. However, insight into the particular pedagogical practices that Black educators

harnessed and how these educators cultivated caring and trusting relationships with

families to create effective learning environments can prove helpful to those educators

who serve in predominantly African American school settings. The following section

provides recommendations for future studies.

Recommendations for Future Studies

      This dissertation study specifically recruited narrators who attended A.H. Parker

High School from 1950-1989. Recommendations for future research studies include more

scholarly studies on historically all-Black secondary schools. While there are a few

accounts of specific narratives of historically Black public schools, many are outdated or

non-scholarly accounts of these histories. More recent research is needed to address the

value of historically Black educational institutions and to precisely dissect the

pedagogical practices that were utilized to gain insight into how contemporary educators

can best serve African American students (Garry & Isaac-Savage, in press). Additionally, these narratives are needed, particularly for Black students as increasing academic scholarship suggests that developing an awareness about the historical narratives and histories of African American individuals and communities may strengthen students' positive self-identity and their connection to the larger African American community (Chapman-Hilliard et al., 2022; Chapman-Hilliard & Adams-Bass, 2016).

Furthermore, expanding this study to explore the differences between specific generational cohorts. Naturally, this would include recruiting a robust sampling of narrators from each decade to provide vital information on how culturally relevant caring has changed over time and across generational cohorts.

Additionally, several oral history narrators discussed their membership in A.H. Parker High School's Alumni Association and their respective class alumni associations. Narrators detailed initiatives, scholarships, and volunteer work aimed at encouraging the next generation of scholars at Parker to excel. Additional research is needed on the function of Black Alumni Associations within historically institutions and their role in sustaining the institution and providing for the needs of the current student body.

Finally, other recommendations for future studies include examining the role of high school sororities and fraternities within historically African American educational institutions and exploring how these organizations often served to both uplift Black students and also perpetuated issues around colorism and class.

Limitations

This section provides details about the limitation of this oral history study. As stated in previous chapters, limitations are inherent with any study (Volpe & Bloomberg, 2015). The primary limitations of this oral history include the limited number of narrators, range of narrators' perceptions of schooling experiences, and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Seventeen narrators participated in this oral history study. While 17 is a reasonable number of participants for a typical oral history study, more narrators across generational cohorts would have provided for a more robust study and more detailed findings.

Moreover, the experiences of many of the narrators were similar in that they all had good experiences with in the schooling environment. During recruitment efforts, this researcher attempted to gain a wide range of perspectives but discovered that many potential narrators who did not have good experiences were unwilling to participate in the study. However, in almost all these cases, these narrators did provide the name and contact information of others whom they perceived would be a good fit for the study. This is reflective of the identified subtheme, protectors of the legacy. Even those potential oral history narrators who did not have good experiences at PHS were unwilling to document the negative aspects of the schooling environment.

Finally, this study began at the height of the COVID-19 global pandemic. This reality impacted both this researcher and potential narrators. For example, the researcher deemed it appropriate to interview participants via phone or Zoom as opposed to in-person. This decision, while the safest for both parties, possibly contributed to the difficulty in building trust and rapport with potential narrators.

Final Reflections

The primary aim of this oral history study was to document the lived educational experiences of educators and students who attended A.H. Parker High School between 1950 to 1989. Did Birmingham's historical and sociopolitical contexts shape narrators' lived experiences as it related to culturally relevant caring that existed within their schooling environment at A.H. Parker High School. Through narrators' oral accounts of their experiences and archival documents, findings revealed that across generational, historical, and social locations, narrators perceived their educational experiences at Parker to be valuable to their success.

Moreover, narrators expressed that both administrators and educators were able to establish a creative and caring learning environment that encouraged students to excel intellectually, socially, and emotionally. Educational histories similar to this oral history are needed to create robust scholarship on the essential role that historically Black educational institutions have occupied. In conclusion, it is not enough to focus only on deficient narratives, as this portrays an unbalanced view of the history of African American education and does a disservice to U.S. history in general (Dagbovie, 2006). The history of A.H. Parker High School demonstrates the resilience of African American educators and educational institutions.

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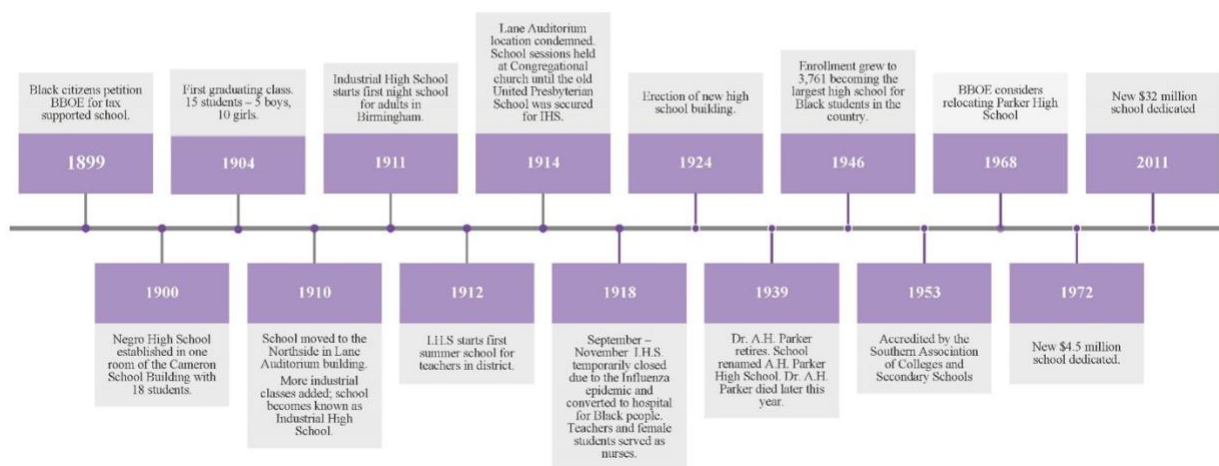
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APPENDIX A

A.H. PARKER HIGH SCHOOL HISTORICAL TIMELINE

A.H. Parker High School

Historical Timeline

1899 — Black citizens petition BBOE for tax supported school.

1900 — Negro High School established in one room of the Cameron School Building with 18 students.

1904 — First graduating class. 15 students – 5 boys, 10 girls.

1910 — School moved to the Northside in Lane Auditorium building. More industrial classes added; school becomes known as Industrial High School.

1911 — Industrial High School starts first night school for adults in Birmingham.

1912 — I.H.S starts first summer school for teachers in district.

1914 — Lane Auditorium location condemned. School sessions held at Congregational church until the old United Presbyterian School was secured for IHS.

1918 — September – November I.H.S. temporarily closed due to the Influenza epidemic and converted to hospital for Black people. Teachers and female students served as nurses.

1924 — Erection of new high school building.

1939 — Dr. A.H. Parker retires. School renamed A.H. Parker High School. Dr. A.H. Parker died later this year.

1946 — Enrollment grew to 3,761 becoming the largest high school for Black students in the country.

1953 — Accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools.

1968 — BBOE considers relocating Parker High School

1972 — New $4.5 million school dedicated.

2011 — New $32 million school dedicated

APPENDIX B

JULIET BRADFORD LETTER TO DU BOIS

Birmingham, Ala.
March 13
1 9 2 5

Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois
69 - 5th Ave.
New York, N.Y.

Dear Sir:

I am in receipt of your letter of March 6, reporting
the conference of Fisk Clubs held January 2, and 3,
1925. I thank you for sending it as I am intensely
interested in anything which effects my alma mater.
I have received several communications from the
University. The situation is to be regretted. I am
praying that our school may be preserved and that
the right may triumph.

Regarding the Fisk Herald, I wish to state that I
received the one sent out in the fall and wish to
receive copy no. 2. However, I regret very much the
unwarranted attack that was made upon my Principal
here. I am a teacher in the Industrial High School
and know that the charges made against Prof. A.H.
Parker on page 3 was untrue. He has labored faith-
fully here since the very beginning of the school
and has stood for every progressive movement. He
has not hindered but has been a wonderful help in
the progress of our community educationally. I am
sending you a copy of our Dedicatory program, con-
taining a brief history of our school.

As an evidence of the esteem in which Prof. Parker
is held, he was presented the Loving Cup by the
Jones Valley Boosters club as the citizen who had
rendered the greatest service to his race in
Birmingham during 1924. This presentation was made
Sunday Feb. 15, before an audience of more than
two thousand. The Boosters Club is composed of our
leading business and professional men.

Getting back to the Fisk question, I hope the trouble
will be satisfactorily adjusted and all shall be well.
I hope to visit there soon.

Sincerely yours,

Juliet R. Bradford
716 N. 10th St.

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APPENDIX C

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD DETERMINATION LETTER

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM

Office of the Institutional Review Board for Human Use

NHSR DETERMINATION

TO: Seals, Penny Sherece

FROM: University of Alabama at Birmingham Institutional Review Board
Federalwide Assurance # FWA00005960
IORG Registration # IRB00000196 (IRB 01)
IORG Registration # IRB00000726 (IRB 02)
IORG Registration # IRB00012550 (IRB 03)

DATE: 08-Apr-2021

RE: IRB-300006528
An Oral History of Culturally Relevant Caring in Historical A.H. Parker High School in Birmingham, Alabama.

The Office of the IRB has reviewed your Application for Not Human Subjects Research Designation for the above referenced project.

The reviewer has determined this project is not subject to FDA regulations and is not Human Subjects Research. Note that any changes to the project should be resubmitted to the Office of the IRB for determination.

if you have questions or concerns, please contact the Office of the IRB at 205-934-3789.

Additional Comments:

Not Research - Oral History project

PLEASE NOTE: You may not refer to the findings from this project as research in any presentations or publications.

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW GUIDES

Student Alumni Demographic Information and Interview Protocol

Name: _____

Gender: _____

Age: _____

Years at A.H. Parker: _____

Did you graduate from Parker? _____ if so, what year did you graduate? _____

Describe the social and political atmosphere in Birmingham Alabama during the years that you attended high school at Parker.
- What major events in Parker's community do you recall during high school?
- What major events do you recall within the larger society during your time at Parker?
- What were some of the significant challenges for Black students who lived in Birmingham Alabama during this time?

A.H. Parker High School

How did you come to attend Parker High School?
- How many generations of your family attended Parker High School?

Tell me about Parker during the time that you attended.
- What knowledge do you have about the early history of Parker High School when it was established as Industrial High School?
- What was the reputation of the school during the time that you attended?
- What type of school pride/spirit was displayed within the school and the surrounding community?
- Describe the physical location and shape of the school.
    - How did Parker compare to other established high schools in the area during this time?
    - Did Parker have appropriate resources and offer opportunities to provide a good education?

Faculty and Staff
- Describe the teaching staff during this time.
    - Were the majority of teachers Black? If so, what were your experiences with them?
    - Were there teachers of other races? If so, what were your experiences with them?
    - Were the teachers mostly female or mostly male? Was there a sufficient number of teachers for the number of students?

- What specific things to do you recall about their teaching styles?
    - What expectations did teachers have students?
    - Did you have any favorite teachers? What made these teachers your favorite? What specific characteristics did they display?
    - Did you have any teachers who were not your favorite? If so, what specific characteristics did they display?

- How did topics of racism and discrimination show up in the school curriculum? And how did educators address these topics.

- During the time that you attended who was the principal?
    - How would you describe him?
    - How would you describe his leadership style?
    - Are there any particular events or interactions that recall with any of the administrators during this time?

- Did educators exhibit care within Parker's schooling environment? If so, how?
    - Are there examples of how care operated in the classroom and the school environment?

General Reflections

- Were there specific problems that Black students faced during the time that you attended Parker? If so, what were those problems and how did the school attempt to address those problems?

- Do you think Parker was a good school for Black children? If so,

    - What were factors that contributed to the ethic of caring exhibited within Parker high school?

    - What, were factors that worked against you as a student that you deemed uncaring or prevented successful outcomes?

- Were there specific organizations, associations and/or clubs were students encouraged to participate?

    - Did these organizations prepare students both academically and socially?

- Were there policies and school structures that exhibited care?

- Did the faculty and staff at Parker encourage or provide opportunities for students to interact with the larger community?

- Thinking about your time at Parker, do you feel that your experience at Parker was different from students who attend school today at Parker High School? Explain.

- Do you have any additional stories or reflections about your time at Parker that you would like to share?

Faculty Alumni Demographic Information and Interview Protocol

Name: _____

Gender: _____

Age: _____

Years at A.H. Parker: _____

What years did you work at Parker High School? _____

Did you attend Parker High School as a Student? _____

If so, what year did you graduate? _____

Describe the social and political atmosphere in Birmingham Alabama during the years that you attended high school at Parker.
- What major events in Parker's community do you recall during high school?
- What major events do you recall within the larger society during your time at Parker?
- What were some of the significant challenges for Black students who lived in Birmingham Alabama during this time?

A.H. Parker High School

How did you come to work at Parker High School?
- What was your primary role? Did this role change during the course of your time at Parker?

Tell me about Parker during your tenure.
- What knowledge did you have about the early history of Parker High School when it was established as Industrial High School?
- During your tenure, what was the reputation of the school?
- What type of school pride/spirit was displayed within the school and the surrounding community?
- Describe the physical location and shape of the school.
  - Discuss the shape of the buildings, classrooms, labs, gyms, etc.
  - Physical space for number of students that attended.
  - How did Parker compare to other established high schools in the area during this time?
  - Did Parker have appropriate resources and offer opportunities to provide students a good education?
    - What resources did the school lack and how did this lack of resources impact your learning or the opportunities that you needed for success?

Faculty and Staff
- Describe the teaching staff during this time.
  - Were the majority teachers Black? If so, what were your experiences with them.
    - Did the implementation of desegregation policies have an impact on the teaching staff at Parker?
  - Were the teachers mostly female or mostly male?
  - Were there sufficient number of teachers for the number of students?
  - Did teachers have adequate supplies and equipment to educate students?
  - What expectations did teachers have students?

- o Did topics of racism and discrimination show up in the school curriculum? If so, how did educators address these topics.
- o Did Parker prepare teachers to educate students.
  - ▪ Are there specific events, professional development, lessons, etc…that you recall?

- Describe any factors that helped or enhanced students' ability to excel academically and socially.
- Describe any factors that hindered or kept students from excelling.
- During the time that you attended who was the principal?
  - o How would you describe him?
  - o How would you describe his leadership style?
  - o Are there any particular events or interactions that recall with any of the administrators during this time?
- Did educators exhibit care within Parker's schooling environment?

General Reflections

- Were there specific problems that Black students faced during the time that you attended Parker? If so, what were those problems and how did the school attempt to address those problems?

- Do you think Parker was a good school for Black children? If so,

  - o What were factors that contributed to the ethic of caring exhibited within Parker high school?

  - o What, were factors that worked against you as a student that you deemed uncaring or prevented successful outcomes?

- Were there specific organizations, associations and/or clubs that students were encouraged to participate?

  - o Did these organizations prepare students both academically and socially?

- Were there policies and school structures that exhibited care?

- Did the faculty and staff at Parker encourage or provide opportunities for students to interact with the larger community?

- Thinking about your time at Parker, do you feel that your experiences at Parker was different from other faculty/staff who attend Parker High School today? Explain.

APPENDIX E

EMAIL RECRUITMENT TEMPLATE

Email/Verbal Recruitment Template

Potential Narrator,

My name is Penny Seals, and I am doctoral candidate at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. I would like to invite you to participate in my dissertation research project. The primary purpose of this this study is to explore the culture of interpersonal and institutional caring interactions and practices that existed within historic A.H. Parker High School during 1950-1989.

Participation will involve two interviews, a 15–30-minute preliminary interview and a 45–60-minute oral history interview. The preliminary interview will introduce you to the current study and provide an opportunity for you to test your phone equipment. The oral history interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes and will be organized around selected major topics from this research study. The oral history interview will be recorded and manually transcribed by the researcher.

Additionally, this study will provide participants with the option to be recognized for their contributions to the larger collection. Participants will be identified in the oral history only by their first name. Should a participant indicate that they would not like to be identified, this researcher will assign participant with a pseudo name and ensure that their personal information remains confidential.

Potential risks to for your participation in this research study are minimal as participants may be asked to discuss experiences that have the potential to elicit mild discomfort. However, participation is voluntary, and participants are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

If you would like to participate in this research study or have further questions, please email me at psseals@uab.edu .

Thank you for your consideration,

Penny S. Seals