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THE AFRICAN CENTERED SCHOOL MOVEMENT AND THE DETROIT PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM

By

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ABSTRACT

THE AFRICAN CENTERED SCHOOL MOVEMENT AND
THE DETROIT PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM

By

Jeffery D. Robinson

This research seeks to properly contextualize the successes and failures of the African Centered Educational (ACE) movement, releasing this movement from liberal and conservative discourse and presenting it as the end result of Black people asserting a counter response to years of educational neglect. Additionally, this research will speak to those counter ideological forces that sought to prevent ACE initiatives from moving forward. The intent and origin of those ideologies that condoned the continued disenfranchisement and subjugation of Black children will be given special focus and identified and implicated as the root causes of problems within the U.S. educational system. These infrequently identified problems have far-reaching ramifications that require immediate remedy. Of the many descriptions of the substandard education provided for Black children in Detroit in just the last two decades, the most accurate are "savage and unequal." Critical examination of those conditions, coupled with the devastating long term negative effects of a failing educational system, can be termed a travesty of justice, at least, and a crime against humanity, at worst. In this study the following questions will be addressed: *What factors made/make Detroit unique? Have there ever been any significant educational trends attributed to Black initiatives? Who were the key figures in the ACE movement in Detroit? What was the motivation of those political and civil organizations for interference in the Detroit initiatives? What was the*

rationale for ACE reform? What educational philosophy did/does ACE subscribe to? What are the correlations between the conditions in Detroit and those experienced by other urban school districts in Michigan servicing Black children? What radical action is necessary to eliminate the educational disenfranchisement experienced by Black children in the United States? Where do we go from here?

In an effort to create a new theoretical framework by which to examine and better explicate the extent to which race affects the education of Black people in the United States, this dissertation research project will examine the African Centered School reform movement within the historical context of the Detroit Public School System. This study will concentrate on the socioeconomic (i.e. employment, poverty, and achievement rates) as well as the political climate of city, state, and federal levels that affected Detroit's public school system. Those conditions will be analyzed using an ethnographic approach employing relevant statistics, structured interviews, and reviews of historical and contemporary documents. The researcher will examine the factors and conditions that influenced school and community officials to seek out alternative educational methods that eventually led to the decision to employ African Centered Education. This research will contribute to the developing field of Critical Race Theory in the field of Education, and further understanding about the two primary forces contributing to Black educational disenfranchisement: 1) structural or institutional racism, policies, and 2) symbolic racism, the invisible White supremacist ideology that justifies the unjust distribution of educational opportunity. Ultimately, this research seeks to construct a new vision for progressive educational institutions, which would lead to the assertion of Black agency and educational independence to empower and develop Black people.

DEDICATION

First and foremost this dissertation is dedicated to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Without question it is dedicated to my four reasons for being the very best I can be my daughters, Kristina, Cydni, Kenedi, and my son Corbin. To my wife Lisa, and step-son Maalik, my mother, my grandmother, and my father. I also dedicated this work to the entire congregation of the Original New Grace Missionary Baptist Church of Detroit Michigan.

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I would also like to acknowledge the guidance of the late Dr. Clifford Dean Watson the founder of the Malcolm X Academy, and central leader of the African Centered Education Movement in Detroit Public Schools. I owe my career in education to his support and encouragement. I would like to also thank Mrs. Freda K. Dawson the current principal of Malcolm X Academy (Boss Lady) without whom I would not have been able to take advantage of all the opportunities I have been provided, she has contributed so much to the professional I am today.

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DEFINITION OF TERMS

African Centered Education (ACE): Educational pedagogy that approaches knowledge from the perspective of Africans as the origin of human civilization and the descendants of Africans as subjects, rather than objects, of history and scientific observation.

Critical Race Theory: Is the branch of critical legal studies concerned with issues of racism and racial subordination and discrimination. It emphasizes the socially constructed nature of race, considers judicial conclusions to be the result of the workings of power, and opposes the continuation of all forms of subordination.

Liberal Black Labor Coalition (LLBC): a combination of Blacks and White union leaders associated with the automobile industry. This group engaged in open and abrasive conflict with local businesses to shape both local and state educational politics in Michigan.

Whiteness Studies: is an interdisciplinary arena of academic inquiry focused on the cultural, historical and sociological aspects of people identified as white, and the social construction of **whiteness** as an ideology tied to social status.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to examine and analyze the history of African Centered Education (ACE) in the Detroit Public School System. This history spans the period of the late 1980's to present-day. The study will deconstruct the material conditions and social and educational factors that influenced school and community officials in Detroit to seek out an alternative educational paradigm for Detroit's children and youth. Their quest eventually led to the decision to employ African Centered Education. Proper attention should be given to this critical educational movement in the Detroit Public Schools because it was a phenomenon that represented African Americans asserting agency in their educational destiny. In addition to establishing a historical record, a complete analysis of that record is required to properly contextualize the meaning of the Movement in relation to not only Black people in Detroit, but Blacks throughout the entire American educational system. The expectation of Blacks for educational advancement has always been inextricably linked both to the broader path of individual achievement and to the group struggle for Black self-determination.

The overwhelming force of race and politics proved to be more than Blacks in Detroit were prepared to handle in the last fifty years of the Twentieth Century. After coming to Detroit from the South in search of better economic opportunities, Blacks found themselves in direct competition with Whites for employment in a booming automobile industry. Participation in that competition yielded them unexpected financial gain as well as elevated class status due to that gain--a result not anticipated by Whites. Unable to deprive Blacks of gains in the auto industry, Whites set out to create other forms of control. Those attempts at control lie at the very heart of this study. The

structure of those institutions created by Whites and the continuing effect of those institutions on the development of the Detroit Public Schools (DPS) are still being felt today.

This research seeks to properly contextualize the successes and failures of the African Centered Educational reform movement in Detroit, disentangling ACE from liberal and conservative discourses and presenting it as the end result of Black people asserting a counter response to years of educational neglect. This study will chronicle the process taken by Black educators in Detroit to eliminate barriers to the educational achievement of Black children in the face of decades of structural racism, economic neglect, and social decay. Additionally, this research will speak to those counter ideological forces that sought to prevent ACE initiatives from moving forward in DPS. The intent and origin of those ideologies that condoned the continued disenfranchisement and subjugation of Black children will be identified and implicated as the root causes of the problems within DPS specifically, and within the U.S. educational system, in general.

Despite all efforts, the educational situation in America has continued to worsen for Black children. As Horace Mann Bond said, "The schools have never built a new social order, they have always been an interpreter of the existing system" (1934, 104). Black children continue to occupy the lower rungs of the educational and economic ladder with dismal statistics and few prospects for improvement. As recently as June, 2006, all of the largest school districts responsible for educating this nation's minority youth occupied the top of the list of districts in which less than one third of the 9th graders who enter high school actually finish four years later. Included in this list are the Detroit

Public Schools, graduating only 21% of its high school students (Detroit Free Press, March 2007).

This study will address the following specific research questions:

1. What are the social, economic and political factors that characterize Detroit in the period from the late 1980's to present-day?
2. What are the material and educational factors that characterize the Detroit Public Schools during the above time frame? How and to what extent is DPS the "poster child" for urban school districts in Michigan and the U.S.?
3. What was the philosophy and rationale of African Centered Education as conceived by the Detroit Public Schools? Who were the key scholars and leaders in the formation of this new approach to the education of DPS children?
4. What obstacles and challenges did the ACE Movement in DPS face, and how did the pioneers of the Movement deal with those obstacles and challenges?
5. Now that it has been nearly a generation since the implementation of ACE in the Detroit Public Schools, how is that educational paradigm to be assessed? What is required to eliminate educational disenfranchisement of Black children and youth in DPS and to advance and empower them for the Twenty-First Century?

In examining these questions and issues, this study will employ historical and archival data from the Detroit Public Schools, Census records and other public statistical information, and ethnographic interviews. This study is structured as follows: Chapter One will provide information on current research and literature pertaining to African Centered Education. African Centered Education is still a relatively new educational

paradigm and research is still very limited. A review of the research relevant to this study is analyzed and discussed. Chapter Two contains a review of the current literature on the origin and development of the concept "African Centered" and its effectiveness and or relevance in education. Chapter Three provides an historical perspective on the City of Detroit. Specifically this chapter focuses on Detroit during the 1980's and highlights the effects of a varied number of socio-economic factors and their impact on the Detroit Public School System. Chapter Four combines the history of Detroit with the that of the school district, and provides a view of the various ways in which educational, political, legal, economic, personal, and racial interest intersect and alter society and those institutions within them. Chapter Five outlines the genesis of the African Centered Educational Movement in Detroit, and the formal procedures taken to establish it as a viable educational alternative. Given the importance of properly categorizing this history in academia, Chapter Six highlights those "community activist" and a scholar involved in the ACE movement and provides their personal accounts of the meaning, purpose, and relevance of the movement from both a historical and current perspective. Chapter Seven discusses the broader implications of the African Centered School movement and juxtaposes it with the paradigm of Critical Race Theory in Education for the purpose of re-conceptualizing the effects of race on the institution of education in the United States.

Two theoretical frameworks inform this history of ACE within the Detroit Public School System. First, this study positions itself within the ideological and philosophical framework of one of the most outstanding proponents of democracy and Black equality, W.E. B. Dubois. Between World War I and the 1960s, DuBois formulated five

theoretical positions in his examination of U.S. social, economic, and political history and policy.

DuBois's first postulate was the primacy of racism, domestic and international. DuBois viewed racism as being "at the core of every issue relating to power, economic production, culture and society." Without the eradication of racism, there could be no serious discussion of democracy in the U.S. In 1921, DuBois wrote, "The first and fundamental and inescapable problem of American democracy is Justice to the American Negro." He argued that the liberation of Black people would open the way for "realization of democracy for all" (DuBois, 1921,p.197).

In 1948 Dubois formulated his second theoretical position that no real democracy has ever existed in the United States. It was his feelings that the problem with democracy in America is that "it had not yet been tried" (DuBois, 1948,p.432-433). Dubois took serious notice of the lack of democracy for the Negro under segregation codes, which prohibited most Blacks from participating in the electoral process. Neither Blacks nor whites had been freed to exercise democratic principles of governance because of the powerful controls of the white capitalist America's upper classes. Thus and condemnation by the U.S. government of socialist and Third World countries behavior at the ballot box was the supreme hypocrisy. On one occasion when the United States criticized Eastern European nations for supposedly suppressing democracy, DuBois responded by stating that the U.S. "does not understand the term." Democracy according to DuBois is not simply "majority rule", but "effective state power in the hands of the masses" (DuBois, 1945).

The third postulate in Dubois's thinking involves his prescription for establishing a true democracy in the U.S. That democracy must be both antiracist and anti-sexist. It must be committed to the permanent eradication of poverty and unemployment. Workers must control the productive processes. Democracy must guarantee freedom of expression, even of "unpopular opinions," and insure civil liberties for every citizen. Educationally the democratic state must commit itself to the development of programs that break down social distinctions within the general population, and there must be support for cultural and educational institutions of national minorities (DuBois, 1943).

Dubois's fourth theoretical mandate was the imperative of socialism. Equality in the U.S. could only be achieved by total reconstruction of the society. This would involve the redistribution of wealth from the capitalist class and guaranteed employment, housing, education and health care for all citizens. Many of Dubois's educational perspectives resonate with social re-constructionist belief's that school should play a more active role in transforming society and bringing about greater democracy (Alridge, 2008). Democratic socialism can and must become the "common sense" of the working class, the brown and Black populations, and critical elements of the petty bourgeoisie" (Marable, 1983, 16). The fifth theoretical postulate of Dubois centered on his prediction about the U.S. Because a decisive struggle against racism requires the rejection of capitalism, America would evolve toward workers in control of production, antiracism and true democracy, or the country would degenerate into "military fascism, which will kill all dreams of democracy, or the abolition of poverty and ignorance, or of peace instead of war" (DuBois, 1951).

There is an inextricable parallel between the tenets of democracy and the educational legacy of the United States. Democracy and the right to it, as articulated by Dubois, suggest that like democracy, education is a democratic right for every individual. Like the case that he makes about the absence of true democracy in the U.S., education in this country has not really been tried, nor have Blacks been afforded true educational opportunities. In *The Education of Black People,* Dubois contended that democracy should mean "the opening of opportunity to the disinherited to contribute to civilization and the happiness of men" and that "Given a chance for the majority of mankind to be educated, healthy and free to act, it may well turn out that human equality is not so wild a dream as many seem to hope" (W.E.B. Dubois, 1957, 118-119).

The other theoretical lens employed in this study is Critical Race Theory in Education (CRTE). Using the foundation of Critical Race Theory established by legal scholar Derrick Bell, Gloria Ladson-Billings and William F. Tate, in their seminal work, *Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education,* introduced the premise that race remains a significant factor in society in general and in education in particular. They contend that the subject of race has remained under-theorized as a topic of scholarly inquiry in the field of education. In an attempt to redress this theoretical void, they proposed that CRT be used to develop a framework for examining the role of race and racism in education. They detailed the intersection of race and property rights and demonstrated how this construct could be used to understand inequity in schools and schooling. This study seeks to further expand the theoretical boundaries of Critical Race Theory in Education. Currently CRTE speaks to patterns of interest convergence and educational inequality in racial terms. This study will argue the case in class terms as well as race.

One of the most vital themes entrenched within Critical Race Theory in Education is the practice of "naming one's own reality" or the use of "voice." Critical Race scholars use parables, chronicles, stories, counter stories, poetry, fiction, and revisionist histories to illustrate the plight of Blacks and other People of Color in the United States. There are three reasons for the use of "voice" in educational discourse: "(1) much reality is socially constructed; (2) stories provide members of out groups a vehicle for psychic self preservation; (3) the exchange of stories from the teller to listener can help overcome ethnocentrism and the dysconscious convictions of viewing the world in one way" (Dixson and Rousseau, 2006, 34)

Voice is critical because political and moral analysis is situational: "Truths only exist for this person in this predicament at this time in history" (Dixson and Rousseau, 2006, 35). Social reality is constructed by the formation of stories about individual situations. These stories serve as interpretive structures by which we impose order on experience as it imposes order on us. This particular component is central to the unique situations that existed in Detroit, where distinct economic differences between Detroit Public Schools and the surrounding suburbs have existed for over fifty years. It is necessary to use voice because of the many untold grand narratives in Detroit that exist within the universalistic conception of educational problems and inequities in Detroit.

A second reason for the use of voice is the psychic preservation of marginalized groups. One factor contributing to the demoralization of marginalized groups is self-condemnation. Members of minority groups internalize the stereotypic images that certain elements of society have constructed in order to maintain their power. Historically, storytelling or voice has been a mechanism used to resolve issues caused by

racial oppression. The story of one's condition leads to the realization of how racial oppression developed, subjugated and inflicted physical and mental violence on a particular individual or minority group Blacks in Detroit have been subjected to this type of marginalization for decades. Instead of confronting the apartheid- like conditions that exist for Black children, socially constructed propaganda unconnected to reality has created barriers that distracted society's attention and further disenfranchised Black children.

Finally, voice can affect the oppressor. Most oppression does not seem like oppression to the perpetrator. Delgado argues that a dominant group justifies their power with stories or "stock explanations" which construct reality so as to maintain their privilege. Thus oppression is rationalized, causing little self-examination by the oppressor. The voice of a particular individual or group can catalyze the necessary cognitive conflict to jar dysconscious racism. (Delgado, 1989, p. 2073). For example, there are many educational initiatives in Detroit that initially had no malicious intent towards Blacks. Yet the consequences for Blacks were negative. However, Whites are not able to fathom these consequences because they do not affect their reality. The voice of those affected by the initiatives is thus needed to establish opposing realities, i.e., the Black perspective.

Inasmuch as voice and the realities of Black people are important to their socio economic condition, African Centered Education becomes a primary component in addressing the educational needs of Black children. African Centered Education approaches knowledge from the perspective of Africans as the origin of human civilization and the descendants of Africans as subjects, rather than objects, of history

and scientific observation. To ask "What is African Centered Education?" is to ask what teaching and learning are like when they are centered in African American and African cultural heritage. Lisa Delpit argues that one of the tragedies of education is the way in which the dialogue of people of color has been silenced (Delpit, 1996). African Centered Education eliminates that silence and reinterprets the dominant narrative to include the contributions and participation of African Americans in the American democratic experiment.

This study attempts to give voice to those individuals and groups involved in the African Centered Education Movement in Detroit and will offer those voices as a primary source of information about this Movement in particular, and about education in the Detroit Public School System in general. This study will outline the intricacies of the ACE movement to properly contextualize the attempt of Detroit citizens to make clear their intentions for the education of their children. Moreover this contextualization will be used to revisit historical dialogue on the effects of race on the actions and reactions of society in general, and specifically for how it has tainted the institution of education in the United States.

This study has implications for the construction of a new vision and a new theoretical framework for the delivery of educational services to Black people in the United States, a vision and framework which asserts Black agency and educational independence toward the goal of empowering and developing Black youth. Unfortunately despite all efforts the educational situation in America has continued to worsen for Black children. They continue to occupy the lower rungs of the educational and economic ladder with dismal statistics and few prospects for improvement.

CHAPTER ONE

DEFINITION, PHILOSOPHY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF AFRICAN CENTERED EDUCATION

It has now been over three decades since the emergence of African Centered education (ACE) in K-12 schools. Yet the scholarly literature is sparse in terms of theorizing ACE for K-12 populations. To be sure, there have been theoretical essays and educational pronouncements about ACE, but not a full working out of the theory-practice dialectic. What does it mean to implement ACE in the K-12 curriculum, to practice it in classroom instruction in the K-12 educational environment? Further, are there elements or components that are a *sine qua non* of African Centered education? For example, if a school has African American history courses in its curriculum but does not incorporate the Nguzo Saba, is that school African Centered? And in fact, what does it mean to incorporate Nguzo Saba, how specifically does one do that, what is the praxis involved? There is a lack of consensus among theoreticians and educators about what exactly and concretely is, or should be, involved in African Centered Education/Pedagogy. While there remains a need for such theorizing, which would represent the full scope of the ACE theory-practice dialectic, the core element that all, whether academic intellectuals or classroom teachers, agree on is that African Centered Education approaches knowledge from the perspective of Africans as the origin of human civilization and the descendants of Africans as subjects, rather than objects, of history and scientific observation. To ask "What is African Centered Education?" is to ask what teaching and learning are like when they are centered in African American and African cultural heritage.

In their historical narrative about Malcolm X Academy, the first ACE school in the Detroit Public Schools, Watson and Smitherman described the Malcolm X curriculum as one grounded in African and African American culture, but with a pedagogy that is "multicultural and includes study of all groups in the historical and cultural presence of the United States and world", (1996, 55). These researchers' use of "multicultural" should not be equated with current references to "multicultural education." In fact, given our Twenty-First Century hindsight, Watson and Smitherman's choice of this terminology was perhaps unfortunate. It should be made clear that multicultural education and African Centered Education are not the same. While ACE may employ some components of the multicultural paradigm, it is critical to understand that the multicultural paradigm fails to acknowledge and reify the individual's lived experiences. Thus, the multicultural approach is of limited value in developing a perspective on culture meaningful to the masses of Black people in America. The practices of multicultural education have essentialized culture. That is to say, the practice of multicultural education in public schools serves to turn culture into categories of membership to be "embraced" and "celebrated." Critical theorists call this act of treating a process or abstract construction as though it was a thing "reification." Culture is reified when people attempt to practice multicultural education because the culture comes to be understood as little more than a marker or signifier of difference. The outcome, however, for members of the "celebrated and embraced" culture is that they are still othered. In practice, the culture of "othered" children is summarized and abbreviated in the interest of incorporating them into the curriculum. Simply being included in the "faces, facts, and festivals" approach to multicultural education turns out to be a fancier way of

marginalizing Black children (Murrell, 2002, 41). In his discussion of the differences between multicultural and African Centered Pedagogy, Murrell describes a classroom of fifth grade students at a multicultural school, being taught by a White instructor. In the teacher's attempts within multicultural pedagogy, she presents a series of authors from various backgrounds for the children to use in making responses to written questions. In completing the assignment, a young Black male uses all African American authors in responding to the questions. Upon seeing this, the teacher reminds the student of the initial instructions concerning a multicultural society and that all authors equally possessed the information needed to complete the questions. After hearing the instruction from the teacher for the second time, the young Black boy retorted emphatically, "I know, Miz L. But I'm not multi. I'm Black!" (Murrell, 2002, xxi).

This vignette is useful in highlighting the differences between African Centered and multicultural pedagogies, namely the detrimental influence that a diversity agenda has when it eclipses the critical identity work that under girds powerful literacy learning for Black children. Knowing about diverse people and experiences should not supercede a child's own understanding of self and culture when they are learning (to use Paulo Freire's phrase) to "read the world." Young people need to find meaningful connections among language, literature and their lived experiences.

African Centered Education develops a system of practices that promotes the development and achievement of all children but is focused on the needs, lives, and cultures of Black children. Understanding the social cultural context of schools in relation to the achievement of Black children is to understand the human systems that make up school practices. This differs from the theories of proximal development and

reflective practitioning as articulated by Vygotsy and Dewey, who propose a generalized theme in education for all children. However, African Centered Education re-theorizes educational objectives with the Black child as the central focus, which is something early traditional educational paradigms failed to take into consideration. This is not to say that some elements of other educational perspectives and theories are not relevant to Black children, but ACE is a most effective tool for distinguishing useful from non-useful elements.

Historically, one of the main problems in conceptualizing African Centered Education was the lack of empirical evidence about its results and effects on African American children. Prior to its implementation in the Detroit Public Schools (DPS), many of the concepts of African Centered Education had been theorized and implemented, in one sense or another, but no organized efforts at implementation on a public scale had been attempted. The Detroit Public Schools was to be the first. However, because DPS was situating ACE within a public context, it could not use many of the exemplars that had been implemented in independent ACE schools. Laws and public school regulations would not permit certain subjects in the curriculum or exclusive student policies. For example, ACE independent schools place a strong emphasis on spiritual aspects of cultural development. Those parts of the curriculum incorporating religious aspects and practices of African people generally were the subject of great debate and, due to the legally mandated "separation of church and state," could not be implemented in publicly funded schools

African Centered Education is more than mere historical facts centered around time and space. It is more than a set of strategies and practices. It entails a philosophy of

education. It is based on the principles of Ma'at, which are truth, justice, balance, and order. African Centered Education brings order by teaching truth in a balanced manner in both content and process. Students are centered within their own cultural life experience. Classrooms are transformed into holistic learning environments with the student at the center of all learning (Kenyatta, 1998). The main goal of the African Centered curriculum is to correct the disarray and confusion in which Black children are educated by assigning purpose to the educational process. This purpose is one that counters the traditional assumption of obtaining an education to simply get a job, by promoting education as a process of preparation for living and making a life.

Tenets of African Centered Education/Pedagogy

While, as mentioned above, there is a lack of consensus among educators about how to implement or "practice" African Centered Education, particularly in the public school K-12 setting, this study takes as instructive the work of Peter Murrell (2002). Murrell has developed a conceptual framework for ACE that may be considered an ideal toward which ACE educators should strive.

Murrell argues that ACE is an instructional theory that realizes and implements a system of teaching in practice. This means that ACE pedagogy has to be from both an interpretive and a generative framework. That is, it is a theory that informs how teachers make sense of activities, behaviors, and all other manners of human behavior exhibited in the classroom. ACE theory is interpretive in that it is a system of ideas that permits the teacher to make good sense of the classroom scene and what transpires in the activity of learning. On the other hand, ACE is a system that is generative because the teacher applies that good sense in the generation of effective teaching practices, such as the

orchestration of classroom life and the design of instruction to bring about real learning achievement and personal development of students. The interpretive framework of African Centered pedagogy helps the teacher to incorporate the cultural patterns of Black children and construct learning experiences that provide developmental scaffolding for them. The generative framework of African Centered pedagogy helps teachers ensure that they organize students' experience within a familiar and supporting cultural and social fabric.

Murrell contends that African Centered pedagogical theory can be described as a set of seven premises and five practices (2002, 46). The seven premises of African Centered pedagogy encompass the theory and underpinnings of African Centered thought in general. The pedagogy is based upon situated learning theory and activity theory that assumes that cognition is a social and situated activity, and not merely a matter of individuals acquiring knowledge that is abstract and independent of the setting. The basic idea that human cognition and cognitive development is social and situated is significantly modified by the deep analysis of culture that African Centered pedagogy promotes.

The first foundational premise of African Centered pedagogy is that human social and intellectual development is socially and culturally situated in human activity. You cannot teach children cooperative behavior without situating them in the activity of cooperative behavior; you cannot teach systematic inquiry without doing systematic inquiry. This perspective, more than any other, supports the cultural psychology of African Centered pedagogy. This means that achievement depends on the teacher's skill in situating children in activity contexts that promote desired developmental and

intellectual achievement. Achievement is a function of both the individual's developmental history and the social and cultural support structures for that individual's accomplishment. In African Centered pedagogy, the teacher is responsible for designing the appropriate cultural and social support structures for learners. This may be equated with the central tenet of the socio-cultural theory of Vygotsky and the notion of a zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978).

The aims of socio-cultural theorists are the same as those of Black people in developing African Centered Education. According to Kirshner and Whitson, the research agenda of socio-cultural theorists is to determine what constitutes appropriate levels of knowledge within the zone of proximal development (ZPD) of learners. Determining acquisition of knowledge in the ZPD is also the focus of African Centered Education. This knowledge is viewed in both psychological terms, such as the acquisition of language proficiency and higher order cognitive processes, and socio-cultural terms, such as rules of turn taking in conversations or greeting elders. In any case, the important idea is that our inquiry of knowledge acquisition ought to be guided by an understanding of the social cultural context; that development proceeds in a context of social interaction and cultural embeddedness. Therefore, we look at student achievement performance and cognitive development as the product of individual's developmental history (progress), as well as the support structures created by other people and cultural tools in the setting.

The implication of this first premise is that learning and intellectual development are socially and culturally situated. Teachers should look at learning achievement as more than just a product of individual effort and activity. It is also the product of the

quality of the activity setting as well. The unit for analyzing learning performance shifts from focusing only on what the individual does to focusing on the activity of the individual within a context of social relationships and richness of the intellectual environment. Reference can be made to the work of Vygotsky, and the idea that we employ a dialectical unit of analysis (a unit that incorporates individual activity and the context of activity). Put simply, children's learning and development are conceived as a trajectory towards some developmental accomplishment in which the individual effort, individual capacity, and social supports from more capable others contribute to the development or achievement. The dialectic between individuals and groups is central to African Centered pedagogical theory as it is the foundation for the interactive system of learning and teaching.

The second premise is that the core of learning is a meaningful and purposeful activity, which is embodied in practices and represented by a system of signs to communicate understanding and a system of meaning making. A complete pedagogy, an action theory of teaching and learning, must account for construction of meaning and understanding on two planes: the internal mental life and cognitive world of the individual as well as the external social life or cultural world in which the individual interacts. African Centered pedagogy views knowledge acquisition as process involving the interaction of these two planes. Therefore, to understand how a child constructs meaning it is necessary to understand the presentation of signs and symbols in the learning environment, as well as how that child construes the system of signs in his/her attempts to make meaning. This second premise underscores the importance of human activity as the external representation of signs, sign systems, and cultural symbols that are

internalized as meaning when the child attempts to make use of these signs and symbols. Accepting these two ideas that meaning is made by our use of signs and that many signs are actually activities, then it follows that participation in activity is a form of meaning making. It can also be said that thinking is an activity of operation with signs, whether they be inside the head or a collective activity of several people.

The external representation of meaning inheres in human activity and in human sign systems. The internal act of constructing meaning, according to Murrell's ACE theory, is partly a process of participating in purposeful activity with others. Both the appropriation of signs as cultural symbols and the participation in cultural life through activity are significant components of learning in African Centered pedagogy. This process is akin to the "learning by doing" perspective of John Dewy.

The third premise of African Centered pedagogy is that meaning making is the principal motive of learning, not merely acquisition of information or new knowledge. Despite what educational theory has told us in our teacher preparation coursework, learners do not learn primarily because of reinforcement and reward, or even intrinsic interest and curiosity. They mobilize themselves to make sense of their social world and acquire the cognitive tools to more successfully negotiate it. The best example of this is language acquisition. People do not learn to speak through reinforcement, but through a drive to acquire the human capacity that dramatically amplifies the powers with which they can participate in the world. This drive does not end with acquiring a language. Language becomes the primary culturally acquired tool by which humans continue to acquire knowledge that enables their participation in the world. In the precursor to situated cognition theory and socio-cultural theory, connections are made to the notion of

appropriation (Bahktin, 1981). Appropriation, the use of new signs for one's own ends, continues throughout the development trajectory of human beings.

The idea of appropriation of cultural tools (e.g., language, symbol systems, material tools) is an important alternative to the intra-psychological preoccupation that psychology has had with the mind of the individual. As stated in the first two premises, African Centered Theory cannot be limited to an "inside the head" psychology if we take full account of how the child learns and develops through support from interaction with their cultural and social environments. The notion of appropriations forces an inquiry into human learning to consider both the internal intra-psychological (inside the individual) world of the learner and the external (cultural) inter-psychological (between individuals) relations that the learner has with people, customs, and tools (both physical and linguistic) (Kirschner, Whitson, 1997).

This leads to the fourth premise of African Centered pedagogy. The most important form of learning is the appropriation of signs and practices of worthwhile adult activity. Most educators have learned in developmental psychology courses that human beings always learn new information in terms of what they already know. The importance of this principle, that prior knowledge is essential to learning, is expressed in every tradition and type of learning theory. The notion of appropriation gives this principle action and honors the reality that human beings are more than mere information processors or information accumulators. People are capable of learning complex abilities and are motivated to acquire those abilities. Children learn not because they are merely curious or because adults expect them to, but because they seek participation in the world.

The fifth premise is that community and symbolic cultures are significant to the learning and growth of children. A social cultural community is where children negotiate meaning. Negotiated meaning in general is the fabric of social interaction and learning in any social scene. It is how people experience the world and engage in what they find meaningful. Children understand the complex abilities of reading, writing, and thinking to have value and importance because the communities of social beings that surround them do.

The sixth premise is that the development of children's capacity to think reason, communicate, and perform academically is a matter of practice, a matter of knowledge use that is enacted in socially situated and culturally contextualized settings. Much has been said about the activity settings appropriate for the successful achievement of Black children. On this account what makes exemplary teachers is not so much the wealth of knowledge and expertise they bring to the classroom, but their ability to enable the development of knowledge and expertise of others by orchestrating practice rich activity settings in their classrooms.

The seventh premise is that Black achievement is linked to conditions of schooling that reduce racial vulnerability (Steele, 1995). The flipside of this premise is that Black students under racial vulnerability experienced degradation of their academic performance as measured by tests (Steele, 1997). Often times viewed as a traditional education approach, the knowledge acquired from valid teaching approaches is misinterpreted by standardized tests. Taking the knowledge of Black children as discrete bits of information and determining intelligence or proficiency by the quality of a student's ability to recall and reproduce information they were given; and then to

describe what is nothing more than teaching to a test as a valid educational practice is ludicrous. No longer should high stakes testing have greater importance than effective pedagogy for Black children.

The idea of practice is central to African Centered Education because accomplished practice and cultural practices are the essence of the pedagogy. What most people mean by practice is an activity, a strategy, or an approach. In African Centered theory, practice entails more than action or activity. It also entails viewing the activity as a performance and understanding that performance as something that must be appraised according to whether results were produced for the student. An example is the focusing activity (sometimes referred to as "Harambee") for students in African Centered schools. The beginning of each day involves a series of quotes, sayings, pledges, or anthems that are curriculum-based and African Centered in their focus. All other activity stops during these periods, and children are often asked to relate this time to other parts of their day. The ritualistic nature of these times creates a space where the child can effectively redirect their attention to the learning environment. This is especially crucial for Black youth who come from negative home situations.

In Murrell's theoretical formulation, the following are the essential practices that constitute African Centered Pedagogy:

Engagement and participation practices

Identity development practices

Community integrity practices

Practice of inquiry

Meaning making practices

Engagement and Participation Practice: On the part of the teacher, these are actions and arrangements that encourage and promote the interest, engagement, and participation of students with each other and with the learning activity. These practices aim to provide sustained efforts and commitment with respect to learning activity and sustained interpersonal engagement with the community of learners. On the part of the learner, these are strategies and other means by which the learner mobilizes himself or herself to engage, put forth effort, and participate in the activities of learning (Murrell, 2002, 51). The teacher creating a topic or referring to a current event for which the students have little or no prior knowledge accomplishes this type of engagement. The teacher then develops the topic in such a way that it generates discourse among the students. Discussion of pros and cons in a debate type setting is most common. For younger students the sharing of opinions allows each student to express themselves to each other and communicate understanding to the teacher.

Identity Development Practice: On the part of the teacher, these are actions and arrangements that encourage and elicit productive self-exploration and self-definition in the context of meaningful rich inquiry about the world. Literature selections and topic selections related to social justice and the students' backgrounds are particularly important for the teacher. On the part of the learner, these are actions that involve trying out different roles, representations and expressions of self by discourse, stance, dress, and particularly, language. In general, learner practices of identity development include all means of self-definition and re-definition. Students are often times encouraged to explore the lives of famous Black Americans and the conditions in which they lived their lives. This process allows the student to identify with the lives of the historical or current day

individuals by comparing their lived experiences. A central theme for many Black children is the accomplishment of meaningful goals in the face of adversity.

Community Integrity Practices: On the part of the teacher, these are activities and arrangements for organizing the intellectual and social life of a community of learners. They require the teacher to incorporate cultural features (e.g., fictive kinship, communicative styles) and knowledge traditions of African American heritage. These practices also identify and support student initiative in building community integrity. On the part of the learner, these practices involve the actions of making and maintaining membership in a community. The learner participates in community integrity practices by joining, belonging, supporting other members in whatever the core activities of the group are.

Meaning Making Practices: On the part of the teacher, these are activities and arrangements for making explicit cultural models (especially sign and symbol structures) and cultural patterns to amplify the interpretative frameworks of the learners. These practices are particularly important for discourse practices and for engaging students in what Freire calls "reading the world" (1970). On the part of the learner, these are practices of inquiry that involve appropriation (taking for their own use), interpretation and consumption of cultural forms, signs, symbols, and other forms of symbolic representation of information and ideas, as well as developing a critical regard for how and what purpose they were produced.

Practices of Inquiry: On the part of the teacher, these are activities and arrangements for critically interrogating the use and consumption of signs, symbols, and other symbolic representations. Learner practices of inquiry are conceived as various

forms of recursive re-appropriation; they take on and use (or sample) the phrases, signs, and images of others for use in their own expressive repertoire. This involves making students aware of their appropriation of symbols, signs, and other representations of meaning in the act of expressing and creating meaning. The aim for learners is to develop the critical capacities to analyze, reflect, critique, and act to transform the conditions under which they live.

In his construction of African Centered Pedagogy Murrell appropriates these five essential practices from Wenger's discussion of social learning theory. Murrell adapts the work of Wenger (1998) and other situated cognition theorists who locate learning in the fabric of human enterprise and the context of human relationships and activity. These theorists advocate a perspective on learning that places learning in our lived experience in the world and participation with human activity. But ACE extends this framework to the African American Experience, first by adding engagement and participation (or mobilization) to the four components of social learning that Wenger discusses--Identity, Community, Engagement, and Participation--and then most importantly, by developing the pedagogy as a set of African Centered practices.

Learning, according to the epistemology of African American cultural heritage, is not an individual activity, but an inherently social activity. That is, from the perspective of African American heritage, learning is what results from learners facilitating interactions with caregivers and more capable adults in the cultural fabric of a significant activity. This perspective contrasts with mainstream cultural views of learning as an individual enterprise. The predominant metaphor of learning in both American popular culture and educational thought is that learning results from individual mental effort and

ability. Contemporary thought among some American educators has, in the last decade, come closer to recognizing the African Centered perspective as evidenced by the now trite and overused articulation of the African proverb "It takes a village to raise a child." Unfortunately, however, this perspective is not at all reflected in the core practices of public schooling in America (Murrell, 2002).

What African Centered Education Is Not

Inasmuch as I have described what African Centered Education is, or, according to Murrell, what it should be, it is also important to speak to what ACE is not. As stated earlier, African Centered Education is not multicultural. In debates about the relevance of African Centered curriculum and pedagogy, multicultural education is often mentioned as an alternative much more palatable to American society in general. While it must be acknowledged that multicultural education has been important in the movement for equity in education, it has proven to provide more impediments than advantages to Black children in public schools. Many of these impediments occur under the aegis of multicultural education practices. These practices should cause the informed educator to raise the question of whom multicultural education is for. Or, more specifically, who is multiculturalism designed to benefit? If we look at the literature on multiculturalism, it is clear that it is designed for White children, to expand and broaden their thinking and social perspectives.

Multicultural education prepares White children for a diverse world and helps them appreciate difference. As valuable as these lessons may be for White children, experiencing diversity and appreciating differences are not predominant needs for Black children. To expect them to benefit from such lessons in the same way as a White child,

within the current context of American society, may actually be detrimental to the unique learning styles of Black children. Knowing about diverse people and experiences should not supersede children's understanding of self and culture when they are learning about the world around them.

Multicultural education has been conceived as a reform movement designed to effect change in the school and other educational institutions so that students from diverse racial, ethnic, and social class groups will experience educational equality (Banks, 1993). In more recent years multicultural education has expanded to include issues of gender, ability, and sexual orientation. Although one could argue for an early history of the "multicultural educational movement" as far back as the 1880's, when George Washington Williams (1882-1883) wrote his history of African Americans, much of current multicultural education practice seems more appropriately rooted in the inner groups assimilationist movements of the 1950's. This involves acceptable behaviors, actions or practices designed to help African American and other "unmeltable" ethnics become a part of America's melting pot (Cook, 1954). The goal was assimilation through the reduction of prejudice against "unmeltable" ethnics. However, after the Civil Rights unrest and growing self-awareness of African Americans in the 1960's, the desire to assimilate was supplanted by the reclamation of an "authentic Black identity" which did not rely on acceptance by White America or its standards. This new vision was evidenced in the Academy first in the form of Black Studies, and later, when other groups made similar liberating moves, in the form of Ethnic Studies (Harding, 1970).

Here I argue that the current multicultural paradigm functions in a manner similar to Civil Rights law. Many of the gains and advancements that resulted from Civil Rights

legislation have regularly benefited White people, particularly White women. Instead of creating radically new paradigms to ensure justice, multicultural reforms are routinely "sucked back into the system." And just as traditional Civil Rights law is based on the foundation of human rights, the current multicultural paradigm is mired in liberal ideology that offers no radical change to the current order. My critique of the limits of the multicultural paradigm is not intended to denigrate the scholarly efforts and sacrifices of its many advocates, but to underscore the difficulty (indeed, the impossibility) of maintaining the spirit and intent of justice for the oppressed while simultaneously permitting the hegemonic rule of the oppressor. Thus, as an educational scholar I must unabashedly reject a paradigm that attempts to be everything to everyone and consequently becomes nothing for anyone. Instead scholarship must be aligned with the activism and philosophy of Marcus Garvey, who argued that the Black man was universally oppressed on racial grounds, and that any program of emancipation would have to be built around the question of race first. Garvey speaks to us clearly and unequivocally: " In a world of wolves one should go armed, and one of the most powerful defensive weapons within the reach of Negroes is the practice of race first in all parts of the world", (Martin, 1976).

African Centered Education does not promote colorblind ideology. Color-blindness and multicultural education have generally been superficial celebrations of difference, through food and festival activities, rather than an examination of how difference serves to disadvantage some and advantage others. This is another negative, destructive dimension of liberalism; thus the critique of colorblindness can be viewed as part of a larger critique of the liberal paradigm. The pernicious impact of colorblindness

is evident in subtle micro-aggressions against students of Color, for instance, the negating of pertinent Black history from readings, literature and school curriculums. The contributions of Blacks to American society are often oversimplified or generalized in both official and unofficial holidays, school activities etc.

Liberal discourse is deeply invested in the current educational system. It relies on the law and the structure of the system to provide equal opportunity for all. Educators must call into question faith in this system as an instrument of justice. It has become painfully apparent that the current system of education is not effective for Black students. How much longer can Blacks and other people of Color be expected to have faith in any system that continuously fails them? Any true critique of colorblindness and multicultural initiatives in Black and other communities of Color should be a call for action. The introduction of ideologically inept social policy should not dismiss the import of and need for a system beneficial to Black children.

African Centered Education in the Detroit Public Schools and elsewhere in the Nation is designed to bridge the chasm between the needs of Black children and their performance in school. It is only logical to link the heritage of cultural practices and learning practices in the Black Experience with the immediate school experience of Black students in ways to promote their development and achievement. If Detroit educators were to take the ethical and moral purposes of education seriously, they also had to take a closer look at the assumptions, practices and policies that are inimical to Black achievement as well as those assumptions, practices and policies that are beneficial to Black achievement. This was the fundamental motivation for the development of African Centered Education in the Detroit Public Schools.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ON AFRICAN CENTERED EDUCATION

> What manner of education will provide African Americans with the voice to sing the scared liturgy of their own culture? What manner of education will mold the African personality to thrive in a culture that demeaned its character denied its existence and coordinated in its destruction? How shall we sing our sacred song in a strange land? This is the fundamental contradiction that stands before African centered pedagogy in the United States. (Lee, 1994, p.295)

There has been much debate about the relevance and impact of ACE in improving the education of Black children in this country. In reviewing the scholarship on African Centered Education (ACE), it is important to consider both theoretical treatises as well as empirical studies of ACE's effectiveness. While there have been a number of theoretical works, the body of literature comprising empirical studies is, unfortunately, quite sparse. In fact, at the inception of ACE in the late 1980's there was no or conflicting empirical evidence about the effectiveness of culturally based pedagogical methods for educating Black children. To compensate for the lack of empirical data in this study, this chapter will review the available literature and theoretical works against a backdrop of historical relevance and necessity. Regardless of position pro or con on the relevance of ACE, it cannot be denied that the "traditional" American educational pedagogy has failed the Black child. This failure translated into a need for someone to do something? Detroit Public Schools turned to a relatively untested and untried educational paradigm in an effort to turn failure into success.

Jennifer Biggins (1999) engaged in a five-year descriptive study that sought to determine if the achievement test scores of students improved as a result of receiving instructions from an African Centered curriculum. She studied an urban elementary school (K-5) located in the Midwest that had adopted an African Centered curriculum. Utilizing the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, Biggins compared the achievement test score gains of the students in the school with an African Centered curriculum to the test scores of students from a school with a traditional curriculum. Biggins reported that her study found students who attended the African Centered School scored higher in both reading and mathematics than students in the comparable local norm group. She also noted that test scores for these students revealed an overall maturity in the area of science, a fact that was unmatched in the control group. This study by Biggins (1999) was limited in that it only examined the academic outcomes of students who experienced an African centered education in an elementary school. This research was performed as a quantitative study resulting in a missed opportunity to garner rich data from student's explication why this education was conducive to positive student outcomes. Nevertheless, this study provides a strong foundation on which to build further research in examining the impact of this educational model in middle schools and high schools.

Pollard and Ajirotutu (2000) performed a five-year study, which evaluated the implementation process of an African Centered curriculum for two traditional public schools in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, an elementary and a middle school. The researchers utilized in-depth interviews observations, surveys of administrators, teachers, parents, and students, as well as analysis of artifacts to gather the data for their study. Using various assessment methods, such as statewide testing, the Iowa Test of Basic Skills

(ITBS), the District's test results, and grade point averages, the researchers were able to capture academic outcomes of students over the five-year period. The study concluded that when the elements of strong stable leadership, shared vision, teacher's collegiality, and financial support were present, an environment was created that fostered increased academic outcomes for Black students. These outcomes were manifested as increased academic achievement, increased student attendance, and lower suspension rates for the elementary school (Pollard & Ajirotutu, 2001). Their study also demonstrated that when these elements were not present, as in the middle school's implementation process, student academic outcomes, suspension rates and attendance rates remained unaffected.

Pollard and Ajirotutu's study was qualitative. They collected essential data focused on the implementation process through interviews with administrators and teachers in the schools. However, one limitation here is that the researcher did not draw from data from students in their perceptions of and experiences with African centered education. The researchers relied heavily upon the assessments methods as the sources of evidence to indicate if the implementation of the curriculum had been successful by an increase in student academic achievement. Since academic achievement was the only outcome targeted, the researchers limited the study and did not seek to determine if an outcome other than student academic achievement was a valuable product of this education.

Joyce Lake (1996) investigated the intrinsic value of exposure to an African Centered course. Lake studied high school students in a midwestern school district to determine if participation in African American history classes affected the self-concept and achievement motivation of Black students. She used a pretest, posttest, and control

group, quantitative research design involving three high schools in which each student participated in an African American history course for twelve weeks. Lake concluded from her finding that the participation of Black students in an African American history course for twelve weeks did not increase student self-concept or achievement motivation.

Lakes study has several limitations. First, the length of twelve weeks for the study did not facilitate the comprehensive exploration of the targeted variables, while a study consisting of several years of ongoing exposure to African centered curses could render far-reaching results. Acknowledging the fact that Black children live with the effects of racism on a daily basis, it was naive at best to expect twelve week to offset decades of situated oppression. Another limitation was that Lakes study only identified the areas of self-concept and achievement motivation as the intrinsic values of interest in this study. The researcher did not examine whether students gained knowledge of their cultural heritage, acquired a sense of social responsibility towards their community, or even developed moral consciousness resulting from this cultural historical exposure. Additional study would be needed to ermine what other values may have been imparted as a result of participating in the course.

Shawn Ginwright (1999) conducted a study similar to that of Pollard and Ajirotutu. He examined the implementation of an African centered curriculum in a traditional public school in Oakland, California in 1992. The movement for the immersion of an African centered curriculum into this traditional school curriculum was a grassroots effort that resulted from poor academic outcomes of students at this high school. As a result of budgeting deficits in the school district, the school board proposed to close this high school whose student population was steadily declining. A task force

composed of community leaders, educators, parents, and professionals was developed and approval was given to restructure the school into an African centered focused school.

Ginwright studied the implementation process for three years, while performing interviews with community leaders, administrators, teachers, parents, and students. He also collected data through observations and school document analysis. The results of Ginwright's study revealed that implementing an African centered curriculum within a traditional public school required the commitment of all stakeholders. Ginwright was able to employ documentation of trends for the three-year period in student academic performance, dropout rates, suspension rates, grade point averages, and graduation rates to ascertain student academic outcomes. His results revealed that there was no significant change in student outcomes.

However, Ginwright did not attribute the lack of change in outcomes to the implementation process, but rather he concluded that the failure of the African centered curriculum to impact the academic outcomes of Black students resulted from the misdiagnosis of the problem of Black children in urban schools. His contention is that an African centered educational model is the imposed prescription of middle class Blacks to resolve the social and economic blight of lower and working class urban students. He further asserted that urban Black students cannot relate to this curriculum and, therefore, instead of offering a cure for the academic problems of Black students, this curriculum can only exacerbate the outcomes.

In Ginwright's study, a portion of his data was garnered from interviews with working class African American students between the ages of 14 to 19 years old that attended the high school. Ginwright asserted that he wanted to allow their voices to be

heard as they expressed their perception of the African Centered immersion project. He discovered that the students were more concerned with "making money" than learning African facts (p.231). Ginwright conjectured that students of low economic status were less likely to see values in receiving an African Centered education. However a limiting factor is that his research was conducted in a school environment that had unstable and un-supportive leadership and an un-invested teaching force due to high teacher turnover, which made it almost impossible to implement the African Centered educational model effectively. So his findings of no increase in academic outcomes for students could be caused by poor implementation of the educational model as much as the result of economic disparity between the implementers and the students.

There is a great need for more research on the impact of African Centered curricula and/or other culturally relevant pedagogical models. In particular, such research should focus on student results that include both academic and non-academic outcomes. Proponents of African Centered education assert the importance of Black children receiving their academic, cultural, moral, and ethical values from a curriculum representative of their ancestral backgrounds and origins, such as the Nguzo Saba and the principles pf Maat (Akoto, 1994; Karenga, 1998; Asante, 1992; Lee, 1992). It goes without saying that increasing academic achievement for Black children is an important component to educators. But it should not be forgotten that transforming the Black child into a person who is conscientious of the humanity of all people is a more compelling outcome of this education (Asante, 1992).

Although not a study of African Centered Education, Jeffrey Mirel's *The Rise and Fall of an Urban School System: Detroit, 1907-1981* (1993), is relevant to the topic

because it provides a foundation for understanding the development of public education in Detroit and the emergence of the ACE Movement in the District in the mid to late 1980's. Mirel's argument is that issues of governance, curriculum, and resources are inextricably intertwined. Shifting levels of available resources have had an enormous impact on the development of urban public schools, and political battles about resources have been one of the driving forces shaping virtually every aspect of urban public education. Mirel contends that the role of resources in the development of Detroit has been "downplayed" in favor of a focus on race, culture, and curricular change. Mirel asserts that anthropological aspects of the development of urban education in Detroit are only half of a dynamic process. He asserts: "We have been considering school as an abstraction, as an enterprise unrestrained by material demands and uninfluenced by the actual conditions in which educational policymakers community activists groups, teachers, parents and student operate" (Mirel, 1993 p.199) Mirel gives four reasons for his focus on resources.

First at the most fundamental level, the amount of money available to a school system is one of the crucial material constraints on public school development. In many ways these educational restraints define educational priorities, shape the organizational plans of school districts, and even influence changes in school curricula. Second the level of support for urban schools has rarely been steady. He points to war, economic depression and civil unrest as causes of major disruptions or changes in the flow of school resources. Third, the struggle for resources is invariably a political struggle. As such the alignment of interest groups and the shifting balances of power among these groups play an enormous role in determining both level of support for schools and the

power these groups have to influence school policy. Fourth, the amount of resources that school systems have is often a good indicator of the level of commitment that a community, or at least the most influential interest group within a community, has for public schools. Any investigation of the ebb and flow of educational resources and the ongoing struggles about them must take a long perspective that analyzes the connection between actual education policies and practices and the social, political and economic dynamics of a given place (Mirel, 1993, p. xiii).

While providing an extremely comprehensive history of the Detroit School District and accurate assessments of the financial and economic conditions, it is this researcher's opinion that Mirel failed to properly contextualize the role of race in the battles and issues about resources. Black workers and upwardly mobile middle class Blacks were a major force in the drastic changes in Detroit's economy. For its part, the Black working class deteriorated into an UN-working class, and middle class Blacks, being recent arrivals to middle-classness, generally had no assets they could fall back on. The result is that there were fewer and fewer economic resources that could be allocated to the Detroit Public Schools by the City's citizens.

We turn now to theoretical treatises on African Centered Education. The foundation of Afrocentric thought, at least in this post-modern period, is the work of Asante (e.g., 1989, 2003). In his seminal work, *Afrocentricity: The Theory of Social Change* (1989), Asante powerfully establishes the Black intellectual tradition and the African critical tradition, contributing a work that is central to any conversation on African Centered Education. Not limited to the theorizing of established scholars, Asante's work focuses on activists, Civil Rights leaders, enslaved Africans, and the

cultural practices of African people. Testifying to what Asante calls people speaking the truth, this is an active, not passive awareness. His text provides insight into the question of the components of Blackness and the ways in which those components are defined and expressed within an educational context. In dealing with schools the Afrocentric paradigm provides a major basis for redefining the educational process for African American children and youth. More importantly it speaks to the corrective measures needed (but long overlooked) to properly recognize the Black child as an individual with equal, if not more, complex learning needs than the traditional non-Black American student. African Centered Education is often referred to as putting the Black child at the center of all learning. In this work Asante makes the need for doing so central to the success and recovery of not only Black children but all African people.

Several conceptual ideologies combine in the theory of Afrocentricity: Black nationalism (the belief that Blacks share a common historical and cultural experience and should seek to determine their own destiny as a nation, race and people distinct from others); Pan Africanism (the belief that Blacks on the Continent and in the Diaspora should unite against colonialism and white supremacy); and Black Power (the belief that Blacks on the Continent and in the Diaspora should be able to achieve self determination, self sufficiency, self respect, and self defense through the power they possess.

Asante explains Africentricity as:

> A mode of thought and action in which the centrality of African interest, values, and perspectives predominate. In regards to theory, it is the placing of African people in the center of any analysis of African phenomena. Thus, it is possible for any one to master the discipline of seeking the location of Africans in given

> phenomena. In terms of action and behavior, it is a devotion to the idea that what is in the best interests of African consciousness is at the heart of ethical behavior. Finally, Africentricity seeks to enshrine the idea that Blackness itself is a trope of ethics. Thus, to be Black is to be against all forms of oppression, racism, classism, homophobia, patriarchy, child abuse, pedophilia, and white racial dominance (2003, p. 2).

While not an attempt to impose an African World View upon others (contrary to critics, e.g., Schlesinger (1992; Ravitch, 1991), Africentricity theoretically challenges the Eurocentric perspective in three ways.

First, it questions the imposition of the White supremacist view as universal and/or classical. Second, it demonstrates the indefensibility of racist theories that assault multiculturalism and pluralism. Finally, it projects a humanistic and pluralistic viewpoint by articulating Afrocentricity as a valid, non-hegemonic perspective (Asante, 1991, p.173).

The theory of ACE would be meaningless without a sufficient pedagogy to implement those theories. An African Centered curriculum provides the frame or guideline for African Centered Education. The delivery of the instruction will impact the quality of ACE. This instructional delivery is embedded in the pedagogy utilized by the educational institution. It is pedagogy that teachers use in their interaction with students. Various scholars and researchers have identified the objectives of ACE pedagogy.

According to Peter Murrell (2002), African American historical experience and culture must be a vital part of ACE pedagogy. He states:

> This pedagogy should provide teachers with a unifying framework for how they are to apply understanding of human cognition, learning, and development...[It] also guides teachers in how to situate those understandings in practice and to use these situated understandings to take full account of the lives, histories, cultures, and worldviews of children in diverse communities (Murrell, 2002, p. x).

In his formulation of African centered pedagogy, Murrell does not focus so much on the teacher's exhibiting the qualities of African Centered pedagogy as he does on the "system of practice" that produces achievement outcomes for African American children (Murrell, 2002, p. 16). Murrell's work draws on emerging research literature on culturally responsive teaching, incorporating what is already known about the social and cultural contexts that maximize African American children's learning, cognitive development and identity formation. This work charts new directions in exploring what is culturally relevant teaching as a system of institutional and professional practice. In line with Asante's challenge to Eurocentricism, Carol Lee (1994) posits that African Centered pedagogy is critical to the education of Black children and is a necessary defense against pervasive Eurocentric influences in education and society. The rationale is that ACE is needed "to produce an education that contributes to pride, equity, power, wealth, and cultural continuity for Africans in American and elsewhere" (p.296).

According to Lee, African Centered pedagogy is established upon the principles of Maat, an Egyptian-based concept put forth by Maulana Karenga in 1989. The principles of Maat acknowledge the divine image of humans, the perfectibility of humans; the teachability of humans; the free will of humans, and the essentiality of moral social practice in human development (Lee, 1994, p. 297). She further states that the

cultivation of this paradigm is essential to the "resistance to political and cultural oppression but also to sustain independent development" (p.297).

Several scholars who have written on ACE (e.g., Kenyatta, 1998) note the valuing system of the Nguzo Saba, as the foundation of African Centered pedagogy. This valuing system, also known as the Black Value System, is comprised of seven principles:

1) Umoja – unity;

2) Kujichagulia – self – determination;

3) Ujima – collective work and responsibility;

4) Ujamaa – cooperative economics;

5) Kuumba – creativity;

6) Nia – purpose;

7) Imani – faith (in ones self, ones family and ones people).

(Karenga, 1989)

The utilization of these principles in African centered pedagogy denotes that instructors must "commit to engage in democratic decision making processes, have faith in the possibilities of leadership that each person possesses, and dedicate themselves to serving the African American community" (Lee, 1992, 167).

Educators committed to African Centered Education are trying to work out pragmatic ways to operationalize this philosophy while teaching the traditional "three r's" to students. What does it mean to teach beginning reading, elementary arithmetic, basic science, etc., from the perspective of Africa as the center and African/African Americans as subjects? How can we set afoot a new man" who understands that education is not just about making a living but making a life? (Watson and Smitherman,

1996, p.57). As Dubois said back in 1933, the function of education is not to make men carpenters, but to make carpenters men. Lee was profoundly instructive in this area, pioneering one of the first Black schools with an African centered focus. Having blended theory and practice in African centered school for over 25 years, Lee believed that "Just because one is knowledgeable about Black history and culture and likes children does not mean one can effectively teach using and African centered pedagogy" (1992, p.167). Lee, et. al. has outlined ten principles of an African pedagogy: The social ethics of African culture as exemplified in the social philosophy of MAAT.

1. *The history of the African continent and Diaspora.*

2. *The need for political and community organizing within the African American community.*

3. *The positive pedagogical implications of the indigenous languages, African American English.*

4. *Child development principles that are relevant to the positive and productive growth of African American children.*

5. *African contributions in science mathematics, literature and the arts and societal organization.*

6. *Teaching techniques that are socially interactive, holistic, and positively affective.*

7. *The need for continuous personal study and critical thinking.*

8. *The African principle that children are the reward of life.*

9. *The African principle of reciprocity that is a teacher sees his or her own future symbolically linked to the development of students.*

Fundamental to African Centered Education is a historical point of reference from which to contextualize current conditions. Carter G. Woodson's *Mis-Education of the Negro* (1933) was published Afrocentric years before Asante advocates ACE as critical pedagogy. Woodson argues that the educational system for Blacks was galaxies removed from addressing the real-life material conditions that condemned Blacks to permanent enslavement. He moves beyond a limited functional purpose of schools for vocational training or useless liberal arts education, necessarily departing from education as imparting skills to re-conceptualizing education as teaching a man to do and think for himself (something the current educational system does not do for the average child). Woodson argues that education needs to relate directly to the Black Experience. This is what he meant by constructing an educational system that begins with the conditions of Black people and shapes instruction to provide them with the tools and mind-set to face the reality that awaits them in a primarily racist world. As Woodson viewed the educational system, as long ago as 1933, he argued a point that is critical today, in 2008: "...the emphasis is not upon the necessity for separate systems but on the need for common sense schools and teachers who understand and continue in sympathy with those whom they instruct" (Woodson, 1933, p. 27) Woodson engaged in Black critical pedagogy with his mandate that

> Real education means to inspire people to live more abundantly, to learn to deal with life as they find it and make it better, but the instruction so far given Negroes in colleges and universities has worked to the contrary. In most cases such graduates have merely increased the number of malcontents who offer no

program for changing the undesirable conditions about which they complain. (1933, p.32).

It would be a mistake, however, to categorize *Mis-Education of the Negro* as "Afrocentric" in the Asante sense. Rather, Woodson offers one for the very first scathing critiques of U.S. education—and long before it was popular to do so. He calls for Blacks to take control of their own education, for their own purposes, rejecting the absurdity of white people who had no problem with African Americans being the victims of U.S.-style apartheid, and asserts the idea that Blacks inculcated into the teaching of White supremacist racial institutions could do anything other than continue the brainwashing lies. He notes that "our most widely known scholars are trained in universities outside of the South. The large majority of the Negroes who have put on the finishing touches of our best colleges are all but worthless in the development of their people" (Woodson, 1933, p. 2).

Woodson critiques the education system, as it actually existed. "... Negroes were generally barred from high pursuits by trade unions; and, being unable to develop captains of industry to increase the demand for persons in these lines, the Negroes have not opened up many such opportunities for themselves" (Woodson, 1933, p.14) Woodson suggest here that advocates for Blacks to take control of the means of educational production, which would in turn place Blacks in position to ensure that that production would be in the best interests of Blacks.

Perhaps one of the most crucial lessons from Woodson has to do with how to counteract, how to "recover" from the "miseducation of the Negro." His message is that Blacks must stop aspiring to be White. His work is replete with examples of mis-

educated Negroes in the church, business, universities, and other domains of American society.

> They do not realize, however, that even if the Negroes do successfully imitate the whites, nothing new has thereby been accomplished. You simply have a larger number of people doing what others have been doing. The unusual gifts of the race have not thereby been developed, and an unwilling world, therefore, continues to wonder what the Negro is good for (1933, p.47).

Watson and Smitherman (1996) conceived of African Centered Education as a serious intervention strategy in the education of African American males. Their work chronicles the establishment of Malcolm X Academy in 1991 as the Nation's first public African Centered elementary school and assesses the educational achievement of the Academy's students three years after its founding. The researchers begin with a brief historical perspective examining the psychological mindset of White oppressors during the Colonial era. Whites strategically used methods to disrupt the social order of Africans. Males were to be used for the sole purpose of labor; their need for social interaction was ignored. Seeing the continuity between the past and present-day conditions, Watson and Smitherman write: "Although the deteriorating status of Black males has become an issue of national focus in the 1990's, plans for their destruction have been a long time in the making" (Watson and Smitherman, 1996, p. 1).

Watson and Smitherman detail the curriculum scope of African Centered Education as it was being conceptualized by the Detroit Public School's Male Academy Task Force (on which Watson and Smitherman served). This is important in a review of the scholarship on ACE because the formulation represents one of the early efforts to go

beyond theory (i.e., Africenricity) to educational policy and practice (i.e., ACE pedagogy). The curriculum was delineated in terms of six principles:

> **Afrocentric**- Students learn about their own ethnicity. Multiculturalism extends across subject areas, shows connections, and relates the experiences of African Americans and others to present-day conditions;
>
> **Futuristic** – Lessons stress 21st century careers and jobs and highlights African American and others in these career fields; preparation and training for high demand areas (engineers, computer technicians, robotics);
>
> **Linguistic** – The power of communication is taught by developing oral, written, and foreign language skills. Debate, forensics, public speaking, writing are used to teach students to think critically, to solve problems and to resolve conflicts;
>
> **Civic** – Emphasis upon teaching students to accept responsibility, first, for themselves and then for bettering the conditions and/ or relationships at home, school and the community;
>
> **Holistic** – The curriculum relates to the total person who has cognitive, aesthetic, spiritual, and personal needs that must be addressed; strategies for meeting the unique needs of males especially in areas of self-esteem and leadership;
>
> **Pragmatic** – Students will learn practical, useful skills that promote self-confidence and a sense of accomplishment; activities that involve building, creating, constructing (Watson and Smitherman, 1996, p. 40).

Of all the doubts about African Centered Education, legitimate or otherwise, the most pertinent was whether or not the curriculum would be effective and present itself as a viable alternative to "traditional" education. The embodiment of this realization would

be in the creation of the Malcolm X Academy, which would become the premier African Centered School in the country to offer an African Centered curriculum within a public school district. Malcolm X would be the first school of its kind to theoretically exist within the same practical space as the masses of Black children. While African Centered Education had existed in several private/independent schools across the country, the challenge was to deliver ACE to the masses of Black children, particularly since many, if not most, of those children's families had limited economic resources. The creation of Malcolm X Academy greatly altered this dynamic and increased the possibilities of a holistic educational alternative being offered to all Black children in Detroit.

Watson and Smitherman detail the success of Malcolm X Academy following a three-year period, which yielded some astounding results in terms of achievement. The District viewed the success of Malcolm X and those academies that followed in terms of nothing less than excellence. The academies were to be assessed in three areas: test scores as measured by the California Achievement Test (CAT), adherence to the student disciplinary code, as measured by the yearly percentage of code violations, and attendance. Malcolm X Academy met and exceeded any of the Detroit Public School districts goals in standardized testing. The District's goals in terms of reading and math were for 75% of the students to perform at or above grade level on the CAT. Watson and Smitherman's study showed steady improvement in all students enrolled in the Academy. The interesting dynamic is in the test scores of the Academy's two fifth grade classrooms in 1992-93, where all the boys scored at or above the grade level in both subjects. Watson and Smitherman describe the students' advancements in reading as "revelatory." Overall the 1st grade all male classes scored at or above the reading standards set by the

CAT. National averages showed Malcolm X Academy students in 1st thru 6th grade classes scoring an average of 30.33% higher in math on the CAT (Moore & Associates, 1995, p. 18-25).

In the third year of Malcolm X Academy's operation, 1993-94, there was an outstanding achievement in math performance by the seventh grade. At the time Malcolm X Academy was the only one of the three academies where the seventh graders outscored all other 7th graders in the Detroit Public School District. These results were from the Michigan Assessment of Educational Progress, a statewide test mandated by the Michigan State Board of Education. Of the 61 7th grade students taking the test, none scored in the lowest of the three levels of performance groupings used by the MEAP, and 93.4% scored in the top grouping. On a statewide level, this achievement demonstrates that Malcolm X's seventh graders outperformed their peers in such economically privileged suburban districts as Grosse Pointe, Bloomfield Hills, and Birmingham, as well as in traditional upscale academic enclaves such as Ann Arbor and East Lansing, Michigan. According to an analysis of MEAP scores of empowered school across the state, "Malcolm X Academy, an empowered school of choice, received among the highest seventh grade math scores in Michigan, second only to a gifted and talented school in Grade Rapids Michigan" (Detroit Free Press, June 20, 1994). Watson and Smitherman note that this type of achievement was realized in an urban public school that was predominantly Black and male. During the first three years Malcolm X Academy maintained the highest percentage of male students 93% 1991-92, 87% 1992-93, and 85% 1993-94, a gender proportion that was higher than that of the other two academies at the time. Furthermore it was noted that this type achievement was done where 67% of

the student body qualified for federally funded free lunch program. (Watson and Smitherman, 1996, p. 86).

In terms of discipline, Malcolm X continued this trend of exceeding District standards. While the District had set an annual goal of schools having no more than 5% code violation, Malcolm X had no more than 3% in June 1992. At every grade level Malcolm X Academy students' daily attendance exceeded that of other schools, with an average of 95% attendance each year. As one reporter put it, Malcolm X Academy had "bucked" the achievement trend (Detroit New, February 15, 1994).

The work of the late Dr. Asa Hilliard (2003) reaffirms a basic educational philosophy of this study. We should not begin with a search for student deficiencies as the explanation for their academic failure or success. Language and cultural diversity, poverty, crime and drug ridden neighborhoods, single parent, mostly female-headed households may determine opportunity to learn, not capacity to learn. (Perry, Stelle, and Hilliard, 2003) Hilliard examines issues pertaining to the achievement of African American children and proposes redefinition in assessing the standards by which Blacks measure educational achievement and success. He notes that:

When speaking of the "achievement gap" it is understood by virtually everyone that this does not refer to a gap between African and Asians or a gap between African and Latinos or a gap between Africans and anyone else other than Europeans. Therefore right away, it seems that something more than achievement is being discussed when the gap language is used. Framing the problem this way is itself problematic. Importantly, it establishes European average achievement as the universal norm, no matter what the quality of achievement may be, even if it's mediocre. Certainly dialogue about the gap is

seldom followed up by a detailed analysis of the achievement of the norm group. Closer scrutiny is usually heaped on those who perform poorly than those who "succeed." Reexamining the norm group's achievement would reveal that the typical discussion about "the norm" really may be a discussion about normative mediocrity (Perry, Stelle, and Hilliard, 2003, p. 137).

Crucial in Hilliard's work was the misidentification of the Black child. Based on the Black learning style, that child is often labeled non responsive or hyperactive. Labeling Black children or designating them as learning disabled often times places them in a special education track that many times they never return from, especially Black boys. While dispelling commonly held myths about Black intelligence, Hilliard calls for revolutionary teaching and transference of knowledge regardless of socio-economic barriers and circumstances. He acknowledges the prevailing paradigms currently occupying the educational agenda, but holds to the capacity from within the Black race to deal with them.

CHAPTER THREE
HISTORICAL OVERVIEW: THE CITY OF DETROIT 1980-2000

There are very few places in America where the issues of race, class, and economic neglect intersect as uniquely and concretely as in the city of Detroit Michigan. Detroit, described by Cornel West as one of the "original chocolate slices of America," was designated in 2006 as the most segregated city in the nation. Detroit, once the heart of the auto manufacturing industry, upon which many of its citizens, both Black and White, gained economic prosperity and social mobility, now teeters on the brink of bankruptcy and receivership. This economic situation affects the social dynamics of Detroit in very clear and distinct patterns not easily seen in other metropolitan areas. It is fair to say that Detroit has held symbolic meaning in America in every decade since World War II. In the 1950's it exemplified the best of postwar American consumerism and productivity; in the 1960's it was deemed a "model" Great Society city; in the 1970's it was called the "murder capital" of the then "troubled" country; and by the 1980's it represented the worst of what America (especially Black America) had become after decades of social, economic and political decay. In this most segregated city in the nation, racial patterns have created very clear and distinct boundaries between White privilege and Black disenfranchisement.

In this chapter the contours of the history of the City Detroit will be presented in a dialogue that highlights the collision of race, economics, and politics and the effect on the overall culture. Combined with the sweeping social and cultural changes that the United States was already experiencing, Detroit carved out a distinctive historical space in U.S history. While other parts of the country especially the South were supposedly working

on ways to weaken and eventually end segregation, Detroit at that same time had situation developing not to end but strengthen the institution of separation. Detroit is a "perfect storm" for observing the intersection of race, class, and economic neglect. One critical difference in which Detroit is unique is in the size of its Black population. It has the greatest number of Black residents, compared to Whites, of any major U.S. city whose population total approaches one million or more. In Detroit, there are 787,687 Blacks and 163,583 whites, with a total population of 951,270, according to the 2000 U.S. Census. While cities such as Chicago and New York have larger numbers of Black residents, 1,0065,009 in Chicago, and 2,129,762 in New York, they also have much larger total populations--2, 896.016 in Chicago and 8,008,278 in New York. Thus Detroit's disproportionate number of Blacks to Whites has led to its being dubbed a "Black city."

The city of Detroit is the quintessential embodiment of the American experience as lived by Black people. Since their arrival the African American presence in this country has always been identified by many Whites as serving the economic, political and social interests of the country, rather than in any way benefiting from them. The same is true for the city of Detroit identified as an essential hub for the United States, where the rapid pace of industrialization served as a catalyst for unique migration patterns that were directly affected by U.S. domestic and international policy. While beginning as a center of commerce and trade, the automobile industry turned Detroit into a modern metropolis. Combined with the U.S. military's need to fight two world wars, Detroit, in addition to the automotive industry, held importance with the Federal government and the U.S. Department of Defense. Factory and assembly line jobs

attracted immigrants from both inside and outside of the country. Those ethnic groups (i.e. Irish, Polish, Italians, Finns, Hungarians, and Blacks) came to Detroit and created their own enclaves in close proximity to the central business district. These enclaves served to maintain essential language, ethnic, and cultural practices of the groups.

Changes in U.S. foreign relations caused a decline in foreign immigration in the U.S. following WWI; domestic immigration increased bringing thousands of rural Southern Blacks and White farmers to meet the needs of Detroit assembly lines. Eventually, the European ethnic enclaves dispersed, and their members assimilated within the White population. This assimilation contributed to both the physical and ideological notion of those immigrants that while not White, it was better to be anything but Black. The increase in the White ranks brought about a need for more modern housing located farther away from Detroit and the central business district, thus setting the stage for what would come to be known as the "White Flight" phenomenon. At the beginning of "White Flight," in the 1950's, the dispersion of Whites (assimilated or otherwise) to the suburbs did not adversely affect Detroit. The City's non-Black ethnic communities maintained similarity with Blacks along economic and class lines. However, following WW II, there were fundamental changes that drastically affected the Detroit area. First, decentralization of the inner city, motivated by the increase in competition for jobs, caused the cultural enclaves once representing the rich diversity of the city to be dispersed. As the competition increased, manufacturing firms, commercial establishments, along with White residents (of Northern European descent) moved to the surrounding suburbs. Second, the immigration of Blacks from the South increased

transmuting the percentages of Blacks in Detroit from 149,119 in 1940, 487,174 in 1960 to 758,468 in 1980 (Darden, Stokes, Thomas, 2007).

The changing economic conditions in Detroit have always influenced perceptions about those who "Have" and those who "Have Not." The Great Migration, in part motivated by the automotive industry and its need for workers, played a significant role in the creation of the American middle class, which by default Blacks became a part of. Primary to the rapid growth and unprecedented success of the auto industry was the formation and collective activities of the unions supplying workers to the diversified automotive plant structure. Many Blacks gained social status and economic freedom as unionized autoworkers. Revisionist historians often refer to this period in an attempt to describe the enduring qualities of America and its ability to be colorblind and race neutral. In reality historical facts indicate that accompanying the financial growth of Blacks was massive resistance by Whites in response to the improved economic status of Blacks. White workers staged strikes and walkouts that in some instances crippled automotive plants and slowed production.

So great was the abundance of Blacks who migrated to Detroit to work that union management feared that White financial gains might be jeopardized should auto manufacturers (given their need to continue high rates of profit) ever decide to establish separate work agreements with the yet-to-be-unionized Black workers. The union's fear motivated its adoption of equal pay and equal opportunity. The sheer numbers of Blacks prevented the usual application of White racist policies. The resulting conditions yielded economic advancement to Blacks without regard to education, experience, seniority--or skin color. However, on the inside, unions were extremely racist, and many internal

battles raged about the status of Blacks within the union. Ultimately, though, and ironically, the overwhelming need to secure White financial interests forced the inclusion of Blacks in the unionized work force and the rise of the middle class in Detroit. The unionization of the auto industry created a large cadre of skilled and unskilled workers organized under assumed principles of fairness and equality. The socio-economic result of Black inclusion in the unionized work forces of the auto industry created the appearance of economic and social harmony between Blacks and Whites that in reality did not exist. While automotive production dictated the convergence of interests in the workplace, no such conditions existed outside of it (Darden, Hill, Thomas, Thomas, 1987).

Two class-structured groups became clearly identified in the politics of Detroit: 1) the White working class with a high number of Catholics (who at this time remained loyal to the Democratic Party), and 2) the Liberal Labor Black Coalition (LLBC) (Jennings, 1992). The LLBC was a combination of Black and White union leaders associated with the automobile industry. This group engaged in open and abrasive conflict with local Detroit businesses to shape both local and state educational politics in Michigan. These two groups comprised the voting constituency of the City. The LLBC was a combination of Blacks and White union leaders associated with the automobile industry. While the primary intention of White union leaders was to use Black votes to secure their positions and achieve objectives within the labor movement, Blacks used their strength in numbers as a platform to voice their opinions in local politics. Among Whites in the LLBC, support was sometimes split, with some Whites choosing to depart

from New Deal reform ideologies and take up political positions strictly along racial lines (Mirel, 1999).

National events of 1968 compounded the political problems of the City by increasing racial polarization. When nationwide riots broke out after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the gulf between Black and White Detroiters became even more pronounced (Jennings, 1992). Then with the assassination of Robert Kennedy two months later, White Democrats were robbed of the one candidate who still seemed capable of holding together the New Deal coalition, particularly the goals of the Catholic working class. White voters, who were still majority Democrat, rejected Democratic Party-supported tax increase proposals, signaling a theme that would be played out in Detroit for years to come: minority White opposition to majority Black reform issues. The support once enjoyed by Blacks as a part of the LLBC seriously eroded as Whites began exploring other political options that more effectively served their interests. They began to change political parties. In the late 1960's through the early 1970's, many Whites changed from the Democratic to the Republican Party, setting the stage for further solidification of racial conflicts between Blacks and Whites (Mirel, 1999).

The racial composition of the City was clearly identified by the boundaries established for Black and White neighborhoods. These boundaries played very important roles in the political questions that faced the City and represented a subtle resemblance to the South, with underlying issues of segregation and integration. Both Black and Whites failed to recognize the impending changes that the *Brown* decision and the 1964 Civil Rights Act, two powerful pieces of social legislation, would bring to the City. Whites refused to accept the implications while Blacks failed to utilize the opportunities.

The suburbanization of the White middle class made devastatingly clear the different standard of life for Blacks in Detroit and reflected a concomitant loss of interest in the City. Ira Katznelson and Margaret Weir refer to "defensive zoning"(Walters, 2003, 197) where working class people began to purchase residences in areas where they could assure their homogeneity. Assuring homogeneity included but was not limited to discriminatory policies that restricted the majority of Blacks from moving beyond City limits. The cities of Dearborn, Livonia, and Warren became therefore the biggest suburbs to which Whites fled from Detroit. Through restricted covenants, by which landowners would dictate to immediate as well as future purchasers that Blacks, Jews or other minorities could not occupy the property, served as a most effective tool in assuring the racially homogeneous and hegemonic order seemingly desired by most suburban areas. One of the most notorious was the city of Dearborn, where Mayor Orville Hubbard equated keeping the City clean with "keeping Blacks out." When asked how Dearborn kept Blacks out, the Mayor responded, "Every time we hear of a Negro moving in we respond quicker than you do to a fire." (Farley, Danziger, Holzer, 2000, p.157).

In the operation of restricted covenants, both within Detroit and the suburbs, point systems were developed to assess the swarthiness of appearance, religious affiliation, club membership, absence of accent in spoken English, neatness, and whether the prospective buyer's way of life seemed "typically American." This process usually categorically excluded blacks, Jews, "Orientals," and Mexicans. These residential practices produced a metropolis that had become exceptionally segregated by 1990. The most common measure of segregation is the "index of dissimilarity," which assesses the evenness with which Blacks and Whites are spread across the urban landscape. If a

system of apartheid were so complete that all neighborhoods were either exclusively Black or exclusively White, this index would take on its maximum value of 100% (Farley, Danziger, Holzer, 2000, p.157).

Over the last sixty years Detroit has become one of the most racially divided cities in the United States (Mirel, 1999). The surrounding suburbs have continued to grow in population and wealth, creating barriers between them and the systemic decay of Detroit. In Detroit perceptions often based in ignorance brought to bear issues of entitlement, almost always followed by questions of race and class superiority. Detroit's history of racial segregation is a clear example of the reactions of Whites when presented with issues of race and their willingness to take extreme measures to maintain their dominance within a community/society. The beginning of the massive decline in the auto industry created a new set of interests for Whites. With economic conditions deteriorating and the failure of conservative politics, Whites were losing their ability to keep the scales of advantage and privilege tipped in their favor. They began to see themselves as losers rather than self professed victors in the intense war for urban control that had been waged since World War II. Using their economic advantages, Whites created entire suburban communities that surrounded Detroit, far enough away with hopes that Blacks would not follow, but close enough to play a part in the regional political process that would allow them to one day return to the City.

The migration trends of Blacks and Whites reinforced each other; as Black in-migration increased, so did White out-migration. As these trends continued, those residents who remained were mainly the poor Black residents of Detroit. By 1975 Detroit had began its transformation into an isolated metropolis where poverty, crime and

illiteracy abounded. Rising unemployment, combined with massive population expansion, rendered the local government of Detroit unable to adequately sustain and provide basic governmental services for its residents. Fluctuating foreign and domestic economies and world markets adversely affected the auto industry. In response that industry began seeking cheaper labor markets in foreign countries, thus exporting more jobs than cars from Detroit. For its part, State government was unconcerned and/or unwilling to offer any worthwhile assistance that addressed Detroit's monumental dilemmas.

At the same time the rate of incarceration of Detroit's Blacks, particularly males, was growing exponentially. And funding for jails and prisons began to consume more and more of the State's budget. From 1985 to 2000, Michigan increased spending on higher education by 27%, but corrections spending grew by 227%. Corrections spending grew at 8 times the rate of higher education spending. In 1985, Michigan spent $488 million general fund dollars on higher education and $1.6 billion on corrections (Darden Stokes, Thomas, 2007 p. 217-220). Put another way, from 1985 to 2000, higher education funding in Michigan grew by $430 million, while corrections spending grew by $1.108 billion (Mauer, 2006). In 1988 40% of adult Black males were functionally illiterate with a high school dropout rate nearing 60%. The unemployment rate for Blacks in Detroit in 1988 was 55.6% compared to 16% for whites; by 1990, the Black unemployment rate was 66.0%. Black men were five times more likely to go to prison in the United States in 1988 than in South Africa during apartheid (Darden Stokes, Thomas, 2007). Also in 1988 statistics indicate that 9.43 million Blacks (31.6%) lived below the poverty line, a number not significantly changed since 1969. Homicide rates in 1989 were a staggering

61.1% for Blacks, compared to 8.2% for Whites. It was estimated that the majority of the crime committed in Detroit in 1988 was Black-on-Black crime perpetrated primarily by young Black males (Detroit News, August 1, 1989).

In metropolitan Detroit 27% of Black households received some type of public assistance in 1980, compared with 6.8 % of Whites. Whereas 25% of all Blacks were living below the defined level of poverty in 1980, only about 7% of Whites were. Furthermore, 44% of Black households with a female head were below the poverty level, compared with 24% of White women raising families as single parents. Underscoring the financial differences, in 1980 more than 50% of White family households received interest, dividends or rental income, a sign of investment capital and savings, compared with only 13.6 % of Black households in metropolitan Detroit receiving such income (Darden, Hill, Thomas, J., Thomas, R., 1987, 76).

Highlighted during the 1980's was the emergence of drug related crime in the Detroit area. Some of the most notable drug related crimes in the country occurred in Detroit. The rise of the notorious "Young Boys Incorporated" (YBI) and the terrifying effect it had on Detroit communities and their youth only served to exacerbate already negative conditions. The social systems had so decayed and local law enforcement had become so overwhelmed that the FBI and DEA had to give assistance to the Detroit Police Department in order to counteract the effects of the YBI drug empire on the Detroit community. Due to drug-related homicides, statistics on the life expectancy of Black males plummeted. It was estimated that 2 in every 10 Black males would not see their 18th birthday (Detroit News, August 1, 1989). Over half of the Black males between the ages of 20-29 would in some way become involved in the criminal justice system,

with almost little hope of any of this number graduating from high school. Nationally, Blacks represented 35% of the prison population but accounted for 12% of the U.S. population. Between 1980 and 2000, African American men were added to Michigan's prisons at 13 times the rate they were added to Michigan's colleges with the majority of the convictions occurring in Detroit courtrooms (Detroit Free Press, September 19, 1992).

The 1980's further distorted the ideals of democracy held by most Black people in Detroit. Always being defined and redefined by Blacks were the very basic concepts of the democratic myth as they pertained to individual and civil rights. The contradictory traditions of American Democracy clash time and time again throughout history as individuals of all races and creeds grapple with what should be simple principles with which all people can agree. This clash of simple principles represents a timeless battle between one class perpetuating the myth and another struggling to understand and come from under its influence.

In the last fifty years the notion of democracy for Blacks in Detroit and across the country have been ideologically framed within the Civil Rights movement. Traditional Civil Rights approaches to solving inequality have depended on the rightness of democracy while ignoring the structural inequality resulting from capitalism (Marable, 1983). However, democracy in the U.S. context was built on capitalism. In the early years of the Republic, only capitalists enjoyed the franchise. Two hundred years later, when Civil Rights leaders of the 1950's and 1960's built their pleas for social justice on an appeal to civil and human rights, they were ignoring the fact that society was based on property rights (Bell. 1987). In examining the historical events leading up to the Constitution's development it can be concluded there exists a tension between property

rights and human rights. This tension was greatly exacerbated by the presence of Black people as slaves in America. The purpose of the government was to protect the main object of society, property. The slave status of most African descent people in America (as well as the similarly restricted right of women and children) resulted in them being objectified as property. A government constructed to protect the right of property owners lacked the incentive to secure human rights for the African American (Tate, Ladson-Billings and Grant, 1993). According to Bell, "The concept of individual rights, unconnected to property rights, was totally foreign to these men of property; and thus, despite two decades of civil rights gains, most Blacks remain disadvantaged and deprived because of their race" (Bell, 1987, 239).

It is interesting that despite the fact that Black people in Detroit have borne (and continue to bare) the brunt of structural racism for years, especially during the period studied in this research, neither the academy, national or local news media have properly contextualized the situation in Detroit. The racial, economic and political composition of Detroit is unique. Nowhere else in the country have the intersections of socio-economic factors produced historical results like those in Detroit. The events that took place in Detroit in the 1980's inspired this researcher to critically analyze the question of why Blacks have not received more of the fruits of democracy in the 43 years of established Civil Rights legislation and 54 plus years since the *Brown* decision. What barriers have prevented progress in the improvement of basic life conditions for Blacks in Detroit? Why, what, or who has stood in the way of those barriers being removed?

In a word the answer is capitalism. In understanding why Blacks in Detroit and across the country have not made more strides toward they're due racial justice and

equality, one must first step outside the constraints of the race paradigm. Once doing so it becomes clear that while race may have been one factor among many, capitalism and the protection of white political-economic interests have served as the major factor. Marable who asserts that brilliantly addressed these complex issues:

> Black people, as a group will never achieve the historical objectives of there long struggle for freedom within the political economy of capitalism. Capitalism has shown the remarkable ability to mutate into various formations and types of state rule, but its essentially oppressive character, grounded in the continuing dynamic of capital accumulation and the exploitation of labor power remains the same. The U.S capitalist state will never be cajoled or persuaded to reform itself through appeals or moral suasion. Fundamental change will require a massive democratic resistance movement largely from below and anchored in the working class and among the oppressed people (Marable, 2000, p. xxxvii).

CHAPTER FOUR

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW: THE DETROIT PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM, 1980-2000

The Detroit Public School System has served as the battleground for economic and political self-interest and used as an experimental testing ground for racialzed capitalistically motivated school reform efforts for over fifty years. The impact of these battles has negatively affected the Detroit Public Schools (DPS) and the quality of education received by its students. In this chapter I will argue that capitalism, conflated with structural racism, under the conceptual guise of school reform measures, has been primarily responsible for the continued deterioration of the financial, administrative and academic infrastructure of DPS. In the name of reform, White capitalists and there political interests have continuously been placed above the academic needs of Black children in Detroit. This often racialized self-interest, without regard for educational legitimacy, moral or ethical implications has been upheld and supported by White voting constituencies and sanctioned by the State and Federal judicial systems. The result has been the solidification of White political and economic interests.

As one considers the historical analysis of the Detroit Public Schools presented here, this researcher calls attention to the duality of fairness and justice. Those Blacks who migrated from the South in search of employment were also in search of a better way of life for their families and quality education for their children. Historically Blacks have always equated education with democracy, believing that once properly attained an individual can pursue the fruits and freedoms that American society has to offer. Unfortunately for Black people in Detroit there has been a constant battle over fairness and justice in education that has permeated much of Black life and existence in Detroit.

From issues of where Black children went to school and the color of those they attended school with, Black K-12 education in Detroit has been contentious at best, racist at worst. Jeffery Mirel, in his analysis of the Detroit Public Schools, chose to view the dilemmas of the embattled district from an idealist standpoint with emphasis on discourse, mental categorization and attitude displayed through the pursuit of individual self-interest. While it cannot be denied that these elements do play a part in the overall outcome, they are not sufficient for proper contextualization of this time period. The history of DPS is best studied within a materialist context that allows for an analysis of race relations and economic retrenchment over time. Moreover such an analysis allows for an examination of the motivations and reactions of individuals (White) and their conception of how the interests of others (Blacks) may or may not coincide with their own. It is only when these interests are exposed to the analysis of capitalism and race that accurate assessments of the Detroit, and by extension, the American, educational system can occur.

Racist policies generated over the course of the development of DPS have negatively affected viable educational initiatives, such as the African Centered School Movement, by weakening the academic, social, and economic foundation on which the achievement of Black children depends. White self-interest, motivated by economics and politics, has created barriers that have yet to be overcome, not only in Detroit but throughout the Nation. Initiatives aimed at correcting the educational castration that has occurred in just the last half century have all been blocked in favor of upholding a tainted form of democracy meant only to meet the needs of the White elite.

In addition to race, the prevalent issues dividing the City were over school governance. Who would control the schools? Whites, Blacks, Liberals or Conservatives? In local politics, most Whites were Conservative. Blacks and those Whites supporting school desegregation usually were from among the Liberal ranks. During this period the majority of the School Board were, by definition of the times, Liberal, and all authority was centralized. This created a highly politicized situation; each Board member had allegiances, political favors and personal political agendas. There were calls for community control of schools, which boldly placed the issue of decentralization in the forefront of the political battle for control of the schools. The demands for dramatic changes essentially pitted racial separatists against racial integrationists and community activists against education professionals. Without question, the worsening conditions of the schools made decentralization hard to ignore as a possible solution. Then-State Senator Colman A. Young, a leader of the Black delegation in Lansing, introduced the first decentralization legislation, which attracted wide support from Detroit voters. The legislation called for a redistribution of power within DPS and the creation of community regions, with some key decision-making powers to be maintained by the centralized governance authority, i.e., the school board (Mirel, 1999, 197).

By the end of the 1950's, the population surge of Blacks in Detroit translated into the need for increased revenue, infrastructure expansion, and curriculum improvements. As the needs of the District mounted, so did the perceptions of White residents that those needs would be paid for by the minority (White taxpayers) to benefit the District's majority (Black students). In 1963 and 1964 a number of mileages and bond initiatives were put before voters to improve conditions for the District's nearly 300,000 students.

These efforts to raise additional funds to support the growing District were overwhelmingly voted down by Whites by significant margins, creating tensions in the Detroit community. Through their voting patterns White residents made it definitively clear that they were unwilling to provide additional funds for a school district that they did not control and that did not primarily benefit White students.

Integration & Decentralization vs. Racial Interest

In this debate over decentralization, the concern among both Blacks and Whites was whether community control would lead to increased segregation. Blacks were divided on this issue. Some called for an increase in "Black Power" and control, recognizing that Whites generally were unconcerned about the education of Black children. Coleman Young represented a significant number of Blacks that wanted decentralization which would deliver them the power they sought in the District as well as in the City once Black authority was established. Those Blacks who opposed decentralization supported integration and agreed with the position of the NAACP, which promoted integrationist policies in keeping with the 1954 *Brown v. Board* decision. For their part, Whites saw decentralization as a means of once again using their political interest to secure areas or zones of Detroit without Blacks. For both Blacks and Whites, the real issue was not decentralization of the District, but racial segregation of the District (Mirel, 1999).

Schools, like houses, represented racial territory and social status. More importantly, schools have always been among the central institutions in any community. Like the neighborhood church, the neighborhood school often embodies the collective values of the surrounding community. One reason why Detroit Whites resisted Blacks

moving into their neighborhood was because they knew residential integration would lead to school integration. This would further challenge their claim to what they perceived as their exclusive right to their racial space. This racially sensitive economic and political tone resonated in Detroit, in a number of court cases that represented the collective racial frustration of not only Detroit but also the entire metropolitan region (Farley, Danziger, Holzer, 2000).

Given the highly politicized nature of school desegregation and decentralization and the resulting effect on the City, the Detroit School Board developed a desegregation plan that spurred the bitterest battle to date on the issue. In 1970 the Detroit School Board adopted a plan that came to be known as the "April 7th Plan." It aimed to create a balanced distribution of Black and White students in eleven of the District's twenty-one high schools. It was in response to charges of discrimination by both Black and White residents who contended that students were being improperly transferred to schools on racial grounds. It was an attempt to combine the conflicting objectives of decentralization and desegregation. The plan was to take effect over a three-year period, beginning with those students entering the 10th grade in September of 1970. For the 11th grade, the plan was to be instituted at the opening of the 1971-1972 school year, and for the 12th grade during the 1972 – 1973 school year. The plan was designed to address segregation in a school system that was at the time 63.6% Black. It shifted attendance boundaries for 9,000 students (equally divided between Blacks and Whites) and changed the racial composition of eleven of the high schools. The most dramatic changes were at Redford, Cody, and Denby, where the proportion of Black students would increase from less than 3 percent to 29, 31, and 53 percent respectively (Miriel, 1999).

White resistance to implementation of the "April 7th Plan" was so intense that parents kept over 2000 students from school on the day the Plan was to be announced. Despite community outrage and one of the most tumultuous School Board meetings in history, the Board adopted the "April 7th Plan," and as one writer described it, "all Hell broke loose" (Miriel, 1999, 340). With the School Board pursuing desegregation instead of decentralization, State Senator Coleman Young and his constituents felt that the Board had jeopardized decentralization (Black Power) efforts. Young referred to the Board's decision as a "chicken shit integration plan" (Detroit Free Press, May, 1970) and immediately moved to introduce legislation that called for decentralization, requiring the District to assign children to their neighborhood schools. On July 7, 1970, Governor Milliken signed into law Public Act 48. Section 12 of the Act had the effect of delaying and ultimately blocking the implementation of the Detroit School Board's desegregation plan.

In what could be considered one of the last major political victories of the minority White population in predominantly Black Detroit, Whites mounted a recall effort. White groups from the Northwest and Northeast neighborhoods of Detroit spearheaded the successful removal of four of the School Board members that had supported the "April 7th Plan." Civil Rights groups and liberal organizations in the City were shocked by the first successful School Board recall vote in the history of the City. Then- Governor Milliken immediately appointed four new members to the Board who were opposed to school desegregation. Immediately following the appointments the Governor's Commission on Boundaries introduced its map of eight new decentralized School District regions. It was no surprise that the Commission divided DPS along racial

lines (satisfying White interest), giving political control of four of the regions to Whites and the remaining four to Blacks. Throughout this entire political debate, the NAACP was involved in the creation and implementation of the agenda of the Liberal-Labor-Black-Coalition. But with the unexpected political victory of White conservatives in the recall effort and the newly introduced regions divided by race, the NAACP and the other proponents of integration saw the courts as the only line of recourse for reinstating the "April 7th Plan." NAACP officials and the School Board members favoring integration formed a delegation that secretly met with lawyers in New York to prepare a desegregation lawsuit initially brought on the behalf of plaintiff, Ronald Bradley against the State of Michigan, represented by Governor Milliken. Later, as this suit wound its way through the courts, eventually landing before the *U.S. Supreme Court*, Governor Milliken took the lead on behalf of the State and ultimately, the case came to be known as *Milliken v. Bradley.*

This court case would come to be known as one of the most famous and far-reaching school desegregation cases in the United States. The case went to trial in the Circuit Court under Judge Stephen J. Roth. In what was an unusual finding for the legal system of this period, Judge Roth concluded that the Detroit Public Schools were segregated. Additionally, Judge Roth found that the State of Michigan had contributed to the segregation of the Detroit Public Schools with the introduction of the eight decentralized regions. This finding laid the groundwork for a desegregation order that would extend far beyond Detroit's borders. In 1972 Judge Roth issued a metropolitan, cross-district school desegregation order that included three counties and 780,000 students in fifty-two suburban school districts and Detroit. Roth's order was based on the

fact that school desegregation in accordance with the *Brown* decision could not be achieved within the geographical boundaries of the City of Detroit (with a school district now overwhelmingly Black, as a result of "White Flight"). He ordered the State of Michigan to develop a cross-district desegregation plan.

The interests of Blacks and Whites were once again put in opposition in the arena of education. Whites had already moved from Detroit to suburban areas as a solution to their dissatisfaction with the City and DPS and as a result of their unwillingness to coexist with Blacks. Yet Roth's ruling meant that they would be faced with the possibility of their children being integrated with Blacks either within the Detroit Public Schools or in their suburban school districts. In response to the objections by Whites throughout all three of the involved counties and the impending political implications, Governor Milliken announced that he would appeal Judge Roth's decision to the U.S. 6th District Court (Detroit Free Press, November 7, 1971). However, that Court upheld Roth's decision, setting the stage for the State of Michigan's appeal, through its representative Governor Milliken, to the *U.S. Supreme Court.*

In July 1974, by a vote of 5 to 4, the United States Supreme Court overturned Judge Roth's decision. Here again the principles of White supremacist ideology inherent in American society were supported and enforced by the legal system, this time by the *U.S. Supreme Court.* Forcing suburban White children to attend school with Detroit Black children, as had been prescribed by Judge Roth's cross-district school desegregation plan, was described in the *U.S. Supreme Court's* ruling as "punitive" to Detroit's White suburbs.

The *Supreme Court* mandated that the Detroit Public Schools would have to "scramble" to desegregate as best it could within City limits by scattering the few remaining White students in the City into predominantly Black schools. The same City that had been socially raped and economically pillaged by Whites and then abandoned now had to fend for itself. Chief Justice Warren Burger completely absolved Whites of any responsibility for the segregated schools of Detroit. Writing for the majority, Chief Burger boldly declared that: " No official acts by the suburban districts had contributed to the discrimination faced by children in Detroit... inter district plans would threaten local choice and governance." There were no benefits for Whites in Judge Roth's decision, and the right of Whites to separate from Blacks was legally upheld by the Supreme Court even in the face of historical judicial contradiction (Bell, 2001).

Critical analysis of the situation and historical facts support the conclusion reached by Justice Burger. Indeed, there had been no "official" acts; the actions common to racism and White supremacy are subtle and unofficial. Subtle was the fact that Whites had been major contributors to the problems in Detroit through White Flight. Subtle also was the fact that Whites, through their economic and political maneuvering, dictated where their children went to school, and they had far more influence in the political process than Blacks. Subtle but strong was the *Supreme Court's* support of the racist tenets of White Flight and its perpetual effect on the status of segregation in the Detroit area. Subtle but true was the fact that a desegregation plan would "threaten" the choice of Whites to educate their children separately from Blacks. Although completely contrary to State law, the *Supreme Court* had treated the White suburban districts as sovereign entities, rather than districts chartered and governed by pre-existing State law.

Given the law and the fact that the State of Michigan (not Detroit alone) was ultimately responsible for providing equality in public education, the State should have been ordered to devise an inter-district remedy as prescribed in the Roth decision. The interest of Whites to be separated from Blacks and to control the quality of education through economic channels that exclusively benefited White children was upheld despite the further educational disenfranchisement for Black children.

Despite its national implications, *Milliken v. Bradley* has received far less attention than deserved. As an urban and Northern school desegregation case, the ruling impacted the Detroit Public School System in three major ways. First, the case accelerated the decline of the school system by increasing the politicization of the schools and diverting attention away from essential educational issues. Second, the case intensified the opposition of the White working class (many of whom still resided in the City) to liberal politics and the ideals of integration and decentralization as options for addressing School District and other Detroit problems. Seemingly, Blacks and Whites would forever be polarized, with Whites unable or unwilling to devise a system in which fair and equitable social and educational policies could be developed for Black people in the region. Finally, with the District's budget problems not receiving proper attention and growing larger as a result of depleted resources, in the aftermath of having been denied adequate resources, i.e. tax increases, the Detroit Public School District suffered the worst financial crisis in its history.

Blacks faced an arduous task in assuming responsibility for an abandoned city left in socio economic ruins. Blacks possessed both the Blacks desire and ability, but the economic and political state of the district made change next to impossible. White Flight

and the ensuing Supreme Court decision had deprived/denied the City of Detroit of its right to remedy the situation, not to mention the right for Black children in Detroit to receive a quality education equal to that of the surrounding suburbs. The highly held notion of desegregation as an answer to the prevailing educational crisis came to be viewed as an exclusive benefit to Black children. This is not to suggest that integration was the answer to the educational crisis of the period. This period is of particular interest because it highlights Whites advancing their educational interest, using all political and economic means at their disposal.

Unfortunately the political and economic conditions of the District would only worsen when combined with those of the City. Detroit seemed headed for certain extinction (Detroit Free Press, October, 1974). A peculiar reality was ushered into the annals of educational and City governance history echoed by the conclusion of Judge Roth's decision that the Detroit Public School System was segregated. Despite the culpability on the part of local Whites and the State of Michigan, it would be left to those citizens that remained in Detroit to find a solution. *The Supreme Court's* sanctioning of the interest and desires of Whites to segregate their children forced Blacks in Detroit and across the country to struggle for ways to address the issues of class, poverty, race and illiteracy within isolated inner city districts for decades to come.

The Reform Era In Detroit Public Schools

This would not be the last time that similar problems would arise in Detroit nor the last of court interventions. Beginning in late 1978, the United States entered a period of education reform as tumultuous as any in U. S. history. Across the country reformers sought to revitalize public education through a series of reforms ranging from the complete restructuring of school finance models to redesigning local school graduation requirements. In some areas reformers looked at redesigning the ways in which schools operated in educating children. In the name of reform, city and state legislators went even further by conducting programs/experiments in school-based management, local school governance councils, state takeovers of urban districts, school business partnerships, content and performance standards, and the use of tax money to pay tuition for students at private and/or parochial schools. Of particular interest to this study is how these reform experiments continue to affect the Detroit Public Schools.

In 1980 the Republican National Convention convened in Detroit to nominate Ronald Reagan as its Presidential candidate. With significant poverty, class inequity, and continued segregation already in place, it would be the Reagan Administration and Republican conservatives who would give birth to the "School Choice era," which encompassed the "School Voucher" and "Charter School" era. These policies were hailed as viable educational alternatives. In reality, however, these racist school alternatives underserved their populations, promoted elite selection processes, and set in motion re-segregation movements more severe than that before *Brown v. Board.* The comprehensive ideology of "school choice" has turned public attention away from the challenge of developing excellence in the public school setting, with race as a strong

motivating factor. The drive towards school choice systems has had the effect of threatening the depletion of the resources that public schools need to remain viable (Walters, 2003, 196).

The 1980's represented one of the worst downward spirals in the delivery of public education in Detroit and across the nation. There was absolutely no accountability or responsibility taken for the academic cultivation of the 176,979 predominantly Black students in the District at the time. The majority of the students in the district were experiencing various levels of socio-economic depression. Neglect of the District's infrastructure that had begun in the 1970's continued to plague the District in the 1980's. With the looming budget crisis, the District was experiencing a shortage in certified teachers, and it lacked the funds to initiate new programs while consistently cutting those already in existence.

During these times of budget cuts and program eliminations Black children in Detroit suffered. According to a study done by the Children's Defense Fund, over 46% of the children living in Detroit during the 1980's were living in poverty, which was one of the highest rates in the country. Ominously, that number represented an almost 50% increase over what it had been in 1970. Detroit became the poster child for dismal statistics in relation to the educational progress of Black children. Data reported by the National Coalition of Advocates for Students in 1986 stated that Black children in Detroit generally fell below grade level as early as elementary school, and the gap rapidly increased, as they got older. In 1987 Black children averaged 99 points lower on the math section and 79 points lower on the verbal section of the Scholastic Aptitude Test than

White students. In 1988 40% of adult Black males were functionally illiterate with a high school dropout rate nearing 60% (Hopkins, 1997).

During the 1980's Detroit Public School educators struggled over ways to provide quality education to students. Thought to be a first step, in 1981 voters reversed the 1971 decentralization act and recentralized the District, resulting in the school system being run by an eleven member board, seven members elected from local districts, the remaining four elected at-large. The newly centralized Board put the progress of Detroit students first on its agenda. Failure in the schools was thought to be a direct consequence of poor classroom environments, lack of order and discipline, and declining academic standards. A 1984 study by the Federal Monitoring Commission found that fatal shootings or stabbings in or around schools, assaults on students and teachers, and a ready supply of weapons and drugs on school grounds were characteristic of all Detroit schools, especially the high schools (Detroit News, July 15 1984). In 1987 a survey reported that over half of Detroit teachers reported that violence was a frequent, if not daily, part of their school experience. Teachers also noted that violence in the schools was the result of only a few students creating an atmosphere where the majority of those students who wanted to learn were surrounded by danger and disorder (Detroit News, December 10, 1987).

During the 1983-84 school year, there were slight improvements in the performance of children on the California Achievement Test and the Michigan Educational Assessment Program Test (MEAP) during the 1983-84 school year, but not enough to affect the District per pupil funding from the State of Michigan that required marginal increases in standardized testing to receive maximum funding (Detroit News,

October 30 1983). As far as the performance of Detroit high school students, unfortunately there were no gains made in any of the secondary schools with the exception of Cass Tech and Renaissance High. All other schools remained severely academically and environmentally troubled. The Chair of the Federal Court Monitoring Commission called the achievement of Detroit high school students "deplorable" (Detroit News, February 11, 1986).

Graduating seniors lacked the basic reading and math skills necessary to succeed in the modern workplace, as evidenced by their performance on the ACT. In 1987, the average ACT score in Detroit was about fourteen, more than four points below the national average. Students in Detroit had the lowest ACT and SAT averages of the ten largest school districts in the nation (Detroit News, September 20, 1989). A Federal oversight committee, in place to monitor school desegregation mandates, issued regular reports on conditions of the Detroit School District until it was dismantled in 1989. Detroit's academic and economic failures were national news all throughout the 1980's. It became clear that more drastic measures would be needed to affect change in Detroit.

In addition to the fiscal concerns, poor academic standards also faced Black children in Detroit. The loss of revenue strained the ability of the School District to deliver adequate services to students (Darden, Hill, J. Thomas, R. Thomas, 1987). Planning programs aimed at increasing academic achievement was difficult, and actual implementation of those programs next to impossible. State and Federal agencies introduced several academic programs and management models into the Detroit schools that were completely unrelated to the crisis in Detroit and that the District could not financially afford. Any independent initiatives undertaken by the School Board that were

not in sync with the agendas of the Michigan State Board of Education or the Michigan Legislature were met with fierce opposition. Many Federal programs that did exist and were designated to address inner city crime, poverty, and illiteracy were underutilized or simply not implemented by various State agencies.

In many instances the status of Detroit Public Schools was either over or under generalized depending on the particular aspect of the District in question. There were various assumptions made by local and state agencies that looked only at the district from the perspective of its size and not the realities in which it operated and existed. Many State legislators believed that the curriculum in DPS was sufficient solely because of the State and Federal aid allocations. Given this assumption when funds were made available by various public or private agencies, Detroit would often times be overlooked or not considered with the assumption that there were smaller district with greater need. Because of funding, and despite local reports DPS was not seen as having a financial crisis. The more general opinion was that the financial crisis was due to mismanagement, which continued the unfair characterizations of those Blacks officials governing the District.

Whites in the surrounding region, through their State legislators and other elected officials, continued to have significant influence on Detroit and the money and assistance it received. Through influence on various State committees, panels and commissions Whites strategically conveyed their opinions about the District and its economic and academic viability. This garnered great hostility between District and State officials. In many instances the State would hold and or delay aid in one area until compliance in other areas were met. This was generally the case in term of the District having the

ability to purchase bonds and borrow money from the State in times of deficit. In one particular instance, the Michigan State Board of Education wielded its influence in the selection of Dr. John Porter as the District's Interim Superintendent after the resignation of Dr. Arthur Jefferson in June of 1989. Before the State Board for consideration was permission for Detroit to purchase land bonds to finance building renovations. There was no decision made on the sale of those bonds until the selection of Dr. Porter as Interim Superintendent.

Influence not imposed through the Legislature was mandated through the judiciary. With the precedent set in the *Milliken v. Bradley* case and in subsequent cases, Detroit was between the proverbial rock and a hard place, with the majority of the court cases containing obvious racial biases and overtones, which were decided in the favor of White interests. Race being the obvious motivation for the apparent isolation of DPS, in conjunction with Whites' continued dissatisfaction with the City, it seemed Detroit would be repeatedly punished for situations beyond its control. The question of control of City and School District affairs was one yet to be resolved between Detroit residents and the surrounding suburbs.

The budget deficits in DPS began to grow larger than at any other time in the history of the District. In 1978 the deficit was 10 million and rose to over 160 million by 1989 (Mirel, 1999, 348). The Detroit Board was restricted in its ability to respond to this deficit by the limited money it could request through tax increases and the negative reactions to such requests, particularly those coming from the City's White residents (by this time a minority in the City). The District was forced into a deficit spending mode that increased by the millions as the District addressed numerous other issues. At the

same time, there was an expectation of increased student achievement with decreased resources.

The Detroit Federation of Teachers used the 1980's to become the most important interest group in Detroit educational politics. As the deficits grew, it would set the stage for countless standoffs between the District and the unions over wages and salaries. Having become a source of stability and conformity in the 1960's and 70's, the DFT provided job protection and security for its members. Not always the victor, the DFT became an integral part of the decision-making process in the District, with any major financial decision almost always having to have its blessing. Under these conditions, balancing the District's budget would have been an enormous task for any school board, Black or White. The DFT forced the District into massive debt as the District yielded to the demands of teacher increases in wages and benefits that the District could not afford. Local media and political critics ignored this fact altogether as well as the willingness of Black voters to do whatever was necessary to support the District through various mileage and tax increases. Enormous costly teacher contracts were entered into by court order despite the predictions of local analysts that these contracts would only add to the future financial problems of the District. Almost 100% of any tax increase the District requested between the late 1970's and 1990's went to compensate union contract concessions. At times, over half of the Detroit Public Schools' budget was spent on the wages and salaries of its employees, of which teachers were the majority (Detroit Free Press, September 16, 1982).

In 1982 the Board attempted to reduce a 37 million dollar budget by asking the unions to accept salary and fringe benefit concessions. The DFT rejected the request,

stating that the Board should not expect teachers to bear the full burden of reducing the deficit (Detroit Free Press, May 12, 1982). After negotiations came to a standstill, teachers walked off the job, eventuating in a seventeen-day strike. Binding arbitration produced a contract in which the DFT agreed to 20 million dollars in concessions set up as a loan to the Board. Theses concessions, however, failed to end the deficit, causing the Board to freeze salaries for the 1983-84 school year. Even with the freeze on salaries, the budget shortfall in August of 1984 was estimated at over 43 million dollars (Mirel, 1999, 375).

In 1981, John Elliot became the president of the DFT, the first Black man to hold that position. The change in the leadership of Detroit reflected a new political reality for the City. Blacks occupying key political positions became the theme for almost all major political offices in Detroit. Since the 1970's Blacks had been a voting majority in the City; that had an impact not only on leadership but on the political decisions of the District as well. Millage elections of the past that had caused major confusion, chaos, and division were much more calm and productive. Since the 1940s, Black voters had consistently supported higher taxes for the schools, and that support did not waver in the 1980's (Mirel, 1999). Between 1977 and 1985, Detroit voters approved 8 out of 9 requests for tax increases for the School System. However, increases in property tax assessments had little effect with the majority of Blacks in the City not owning homes or businesses, and those that did exist continuing to leave the City at record rates.

Often school officials of this period are remembered for the financial scandals and blamed for the lack of progress of the District. Taking into account the financial situation of the period in terms of expenses for educating a child in 1988 alone, if all the money

reported to have been lost at the hands of Black officials were accounted for and used for its intended purpose, Black children would have still been educationally underserved. Little attention was given to the complex matrix of support needed by Black children. While discussions of financial resources usually were articulated in terms of amount of funds alone, the conditions under which funding resources were allocated needed to be taken into consideration as well. All of Detroit's Black superintendents, beginning with Arthur Jefferson in 1975, have been forced into an academically unhealthy preoccupation with financial matters, which has prevented them from addressing the academic needs of the District's students.

During this period, School Board members came under criticism for malfeasance and misuse of public funds, which was often cited as the reason for the District's financial problems. School Board officials were cited for excessive travel expenses and the use of chauffeur-driven cars. The offense of first class air travel was defended by School Board member (now convicted felon) Alonzo Bates, who declared "We as Blacks don't have positions that young people aspire to. We have Blacks as performers but we have no managers or executives. I want young people to see me traveling first class and say 'That's a position I want to be in'" (Detroit News, September 2, 1987). Notably there were no students traveling with Mr. Bates on his European excursion, and probably none would have known about his travels had it not gotten the attention of the media. While the actions of the Board were irresponsible and inappropriate for a school district in fiscal crisis, financial facts (not speculation) dictated that even if all the money misused on traveling expenses and chauffeur-driven cars had been recovered, it would not have made a dent in the massive DPS deficit (Mirel, 2000, 419).

Detroit's need for reform in the broadest sense continued while maneuvering through bad economic times in the face of White interests. In 1989, rather than allowing the Detroit School Board to select its Superintendent, the State Board of Education forced the selection of former State Superintendent of Education, Dr. John Porter, for the position of Interim Superintendent for a year. His charge was to plot a financial course for the District that would avoid the looming 700 million dollar deficit and rescue the District from a State takeover. Porter was appointed to take the helm but soon lost the confidence of the Board, which initiated a search to replace him (Detroit Free Press October 2, 1989).

Dr. Deborah McGriff, Schools of Choice, & Empowerment

In March of 1991 the Board selected Dr. Deborah McGriff, making her the first Black female superintendent of the District. The new superintendent immediately laid out a plan for dealing with the demands of the District, while at the same time addressing calls for checks and balances coming from not only City residents, but the surrounding region as well. Central issues were the scandals and mis-management of District finances that were an unfortunate part of Detroit's history. The public's lack of knowledge about how the district spent money from State and Federal allocations was of grave concern to local and State officials. There was a need to make transparent not only the business of the District but its needs and goals for academic improvement. In full concert with the Board, Dr. McGriff moved to learn from Detroit's past, to open dialogue, mend fences, create harmony, and share the decentralization experiences she had gained in New York City, Cambridge, and Milwaukee.

The issue of decentralization would prove to be one of Dr. McGriff's more monumental efforts due to decades of centralized power over what should have been

individual school and community-based issues. Local schools were included in few, if any, decisions that directly affected student achievement and the surrounding communities. Dr. McGriff issued directives that initiated empowerment, diversity, and choice concerns to be gathered and included them in the District's strategic plan: "Design for Excellence." In this plan the issues of decentralization would be addressed by actually transferring authority to the local schools, an initiative originally introduced by former superintendent, Dr. Arthur Jefferson—school-based management. Committees formed at the school level would be given direct authority over certain aspects of their school, e.g., curriculum and programs aimed at meeting the needs of the individual school, taking into consideration the surrounding community. Support for these initiatives would come through the system of Empowerment. Empowerment efforts would be primarily funded with Federal money designated by the Clinton Administration for "empowerment zones." These were areas with the highest concentrations of poverty and blight in the country. The Detroit area received one of the largest Federal empowerment grants due to the severe socioeconomic problems that plagued the City.

Dr. McGriff and the Board made all schools eligible for Empowerment funds and advocated one accountability system for schools. Meetings were held with union members, and a study conducted by Arthur Anderson Public Accounting firm was initiated to consolidate and refine the Board's Empowerment policies that were to be followed by school-based teams in the management of the school and its finances. School-based management and Empowerment provided unique opportunities to teachers at various schools. Special negotiations were opened between the District and its unions, especially the Detroit Federation of Teachers. In those negotiations DPS outlined the

benefits of Empowered schools and the connection between student achievement, increased parental involvement and the eventual restoration of public trust. The possibility that trust in the District could be translated into bond initiatives supporting the improvement /upgrade of facilities and teacher salaries was also a goal.

At the heart of the Empowered Schools concept were what would become African Centered Male Academies. They had been proposed as a result of and due to school-based management teams consisting of parents, teachers, school administrators, and community members providing input about curricula and pedagogies to positively impact the education of Detroit's children. The main purpose of exploring the concepts of African Centered curriculum and single sex education was to address the staggering statistics of young Black males. Under the terms of Empowerment the academies would be able to adopt special curricula and initiate programs specifically designed for inner city Black males. Even though the District already supported single sex schools for girls (due to teenage pregnancy), the idea of opening all male academies sparked additional controversy for the already embattled District. The subject of single gender schools and African Centered education became a major point of contention of Dr. McGriff's administration and would once again put Detroit and its educational efforts on the national stage.

Detroit and its racial constituents differed over aspects of the Empowerment concept. Proponents of the concept were at odds with mainly non-Black union interests that focused on economic power and the base of its control. The Detroit Federation of Teachers, supported by the AFL-CIO, was concerned that the District was attempting to override the authority of the unions in favor of a plan that operated outside the

collectively bargained, unionized model by allowing teachers to pursue endeavors that would separate them based on school association and the communities they worked in. From the union's standpoint, DPS was viewed as promoting a concept of individualism and independence that would greatly reduce, if not eliminate, union influence in the City. The union was one of the few remaining organizations at the time where Whites were still able to influence Detroit politics. However, educational reforms fostered under the Empowerment model stood to transform the District by meeting the needs of its students while simultaneously addressing State concerns about decentralization and fiscal management.

A viable system in Detroit meant that issues of inequality and under funding could no longer be ignored and/or perceived as Black inability to manage the District. Blacks properly managing their own educational institutions would raise issues of accountability and equity that the State and surrounding suburban districts had been unwilling to address. The real benefits of the Empowerment initiative were portrayed to the public by the DFT in a negative light at the expense of the potential greater good for Black students. Detroit was on the verge of creating a viable educational platform that relied mainly on its community and dedicated teachers. Notwithstanding the interest of Whites in the region, the Detroit initiative conflicted with the national agenda as it pertained to Black children. Detroit was on the verge of a self-reliant system of education that met the challenge of the *Milliken* mandate to devise a remedy from within the City's borders. Detroit stood ready to join the discourse in calls for reform in welfare publicly financed assistance programs, as well as reform in public education. Opposition

to Empowerment sought to prevent what was being attempted in Detroit from spreading to other parts of the country.

Protest & Opposition

Given what the unions stood to lose they yielded to the influence of AFL-CIO and the National Organization of Women (NOW) who sought to attack the District on the grounds that programs developed through Empowerment, namely the African Centered Male Academies, violated the civil rights of girls in the Detroit Public Schools. Further, some Blacks and many Whites contended that African Centered academies would return the City to segregationist times. Blacks and Whites battled in the court of public opinion about how Black children should be educated. However, it is striking that there were no such conversations on the education of White children. Issues of entitlement to resources were again being debated, and Detroit was once again ignited in controversy. Meanwhile the educational achievement of the District's children continued its downward spiral.

Having received national attention but being unsuccessful in destroying the resolve of those Black residents dedicated to pursuing what they felt was in the best interest of their children, the AFL-CIO and NOW filed suit against the Detroit Public Schools. The lawsuit was based on the premise that the Detroit Public Schools had discriminated against girls through its endeavors to open male academies. The district was accused of violating Title 9 Federal legislation, which prevents discrimination against girls in the establishment of school sports programs. Those residents and groups agreeing with the AFL-CIO and NOW organizations accused DPS of attempting to segregate Black children from White children by proposing culturally based educational programs. On July 22, 1991 Judge George Woods ruled that single sex schools did

violate Federal legislation. This decision prevented the establishment of all male schools. However, his ruling did not address the curriculum. Therefore, African Centered Empowered schools were created, and those schools were mandated to maintain student populations that included boys and girls at a rate of 70% male to 30% female (Detroit New, December 14, 1992).

It is noteworthy to mention that in this decision where the interests of Black children were the primary concern, strict adherence to and interpretations of the law were mandated. The District attempted to appeal Judge Wood's decision to the U.S. Supreme Court, but the Court refused to hear the case, thus upholding the findings of the lower court. The Supreme Court had been more than willing to intervene on behalf of White students in 1974 but ignored the dire needs of Black students in 1991. The recognition of sovereignty granted to suburban Whites opposed to their children being integrated into the Detroit Public Schools was not granted to Blacks seeking alternatives to educating their children within the City (Mirel, 1999).

Dr. McGriff felt that if the power and benefits of decentralization were to contribute to systemic change in the District, many more changes had to occur. Facilitating these changes was easier than generating the political will necessary for systemic transformation of the Detroit Public Schools. McGriff believed that the community, parents, and educators of Detroit would accept and meet this challenge. It was her goal to become the first large urban school district to successfully educate all of its students. Although her plans were well thought out and had majority support from the Board, the dynamics of the struggle for power within the District proved too difficult.

In March of 1993 Dr. McGriff resigned to accept a position as the Communications Officer for the Edison Foundation.

Following Dr. McGriff's departure, Dr. David L. Snead was selected as Superintendent. He was an administrator from within the ranks of DPS who had previously served as head football coach and principal of Cass Technical High School. He was able to facilitate much needed change in administration and infrastructure given his intimate knowledge of the district. Shortly after his appointment, Detroit voters (to the dismay of many suburban and outstate Whites) surprisingly passed a 1.5 billion dollar bond initiative for infrastructure and capital improvements to the District. Even though most Whites were no longer residents of the City, there was considerable White interest in how the bond money would be expended to accomplish its intended goals. There were few individuals and companies in the City with the resources to facilitate the massive rebuilding effort called for in the bond. Attention then surrounded what companies outside the City would receive the multi-million dollar contracts. After a series of failed attempts to steer the majority Black School Board to hire specially designated State contractors, charges of financial mis-management were again hurled at the District. So intense was concern about the allocation of the bond monies that in 1996 then- Governor John Engler froze all bond funds until "stability" could be achieved in the District's finances (Detroit Board of Education Papers, 2001).

Not much educational reform occurred under the Snead administration. Dr. Snead did little to help or hurt the African Centered School Movement that had been initiated under the McGriff administration. Mired in financial scandal, Dr. Snead stepped

down in 1996, and in 1997, Dr. Eddie Green, former Deputy Superintendent for Student Services, was selected to lead the District.

In his short tenure, Dr. Green would introduce what would prove to be one of the best educational reform concepts since the African Centered All Male Schools, the "Whole Child Development Concept." In complete alignment with the goals and initiatives of the African Centered Educational Movement, the Whole Child Initiative sought to incorporate within the school structure support services that addressed the socio-economic needs of children. The Whole Child concept was one of the first in the District's history that acknowledged the District's responsibility for addressing these needs that often times prevented children from coming to school prepared to learn. This initiative called for counselors, psychiatrists, nurses, social workers, and special education professionals to be based in individual schools, rather than centrally based. A host of feeding and health care programs were put in place to improve the overall condition of the child in preparation for academic achievement. Significant results were developing as a result of this radical new approach to student success, but the initiative would be cut short by the State-sponsored takeover of the Detroit School District.

The State Take Over of Detroit Public Schools

In 1999 Governor John Engler instituted legislation that removed the locally elected Detroit School Board and replaced it with a Board appointed by him and Detroit's Mayor at the time, Dennis W. Archer. Voters in Detroit were stripped of their constitutionally mandated selection of an elected school board. The same Black voters who could approve such a huge bond proposal were denied the right to decide those who would be in charge of spending it. So enraged were City voters and District parents over this

disenfranchisement that little attention was given to the poor student achievement that occurred under the Reform Board. While reasons for the takeover were reported to be fiscal in nature, in addition to an alleged failure to promote academic achievement, facts show that out of the State's 386 school districts in Michigan, 150 others were in worse shape than Detroit, both fiscally and academically (DBEP, 1998-1999).

Central to the takeover was the fact that not only had Black children been disenfranchised, but also Black people in general. The ability of Blacks residents to elect their own public school officials had been stripped away under the guise of State concern for the education of Detroit's children. Following its selection, the Reform Board appointed then President of Wayne State University, Dr. David Adamany, to serve as the CEO of the Detroit Public School. The Reform Board fostered the perception that schools were no different from businesses, and that when run efficiently, they would properly educate children. The Board attempted to completely change the ideology and philosophy of education by changing the traditional title of the District's head from General Superintendent to Chief Executive Officer (CEO). Adamany was the first such CEO and would be successful in navigating the District through yet another teacher strike and the implementation of new legislation that resulted in the end of certain bargaining units altogether. Strict spending provisions were handed down to District administrators, along with changes in the curriculum that were cost effective but ineffective in student achievement. This period also marked the official end of Empowerment and any real support for the African Centered Educational Movement (DBEP, 2000-2001).

After one year, Dr. Adamany, having accomplished his objectives, stepped down and Dr. Kenneth Burnley was appointed to the CEO position. Dr. Burnley carried on in

the manner of his predecessor, consumed with financial matters, unyielding to the educational imperative of the District. Toward the end of the fourth year of the State takeover, it was reported that not only had the majority of the bond money been spent, but also the District was facing one of the largest deficits in its history. A district that had been financially in the black and in possession of a 70 million dollar rainy day fund in addition to a projected positive fund balance for the 2001- 2002 school year at the beginning of the State takeover, projected a 200 million deficit, layoffs of teachers and support staff and additional impending financial burdens by its end in 2005 (Detroit Free Press, May 16, 2005). The cause of the sudden decline in finances was said to have resulted from a massive decline in student population. Detroit's students were now enrolling in charter schools that surrounded the District and in some cases were within the District's boundaries. The exodus of these students was attributable in part to the serious health and safety issues for students that resulted from years of neglect to the District's 300-plus school buildings (DBEP, 2003-2005).

Through structural racism and economic exploitation Whites have maintained a foothold over Black people. The history of the Detroit Public School System is but a small piece in this national agenda. This research has attempted to properly contextualize that history of Detroit Public Schools while correcting the social and political inaccuracies that would misinterpret Blacks as anything other than agents of their own destiny. While not having advantages bequeathed to Whites, particularly those in the middle and upper classes, there has never existed a point where the primary concern for Blacks was not the education of their children. In the Detroit narrative, like that of many other urban school districts, the structures of economic power and White racialized

interests were purposeful and designed to maintain White privilege. The actions of Blacks (successful or not) were a direct counter to those interests and actions, as Blacks sought to set their own educational and political agenda.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Development of the African Centered educational Movement in Detroit

> If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war. As it stands, we have allowed this to happen to ourselves. We have even squandered the gains in student achievement made in the wake of the Sputnik challenge. Moreover, we have dismantled essential support systems, which helped make those gains possible. We have, in effect, been committing an act of unthinking, unilateral educational disarmament (*A Nation at Risk*, 1983).

This report from the U.S. Department of Education's National Commission on Excellence is often cited as the origin of current school reform efforts. Stating its conclusions in brief but dramatic terms, this report is considered an accurate description of the educational system in White America. One could magnify those same results a thousand times and not even begin to scratch the surface of the educational condition of Black children in the Detroit Public School System.

In this chapter those conditions faced by Black children in Detroit are discussed in detail. Statistical and other socio-economic data is presented to further elucidate the necessity for immediate intervention to alleviate grim circumstances. The actions of those educators answering a call to action in Detroit are highlighted not only for their effect on ACE but for historical accuracy as well. In addition to that accuracy, this study deliberately presents a counter argument to the dominant conversation on the education of Black people. The perception of Blacks as victims obvious to their purpose or destiny

will be demystified. Blacks will be presented as agents of their destiny, very well aware of the need to alter a course that would eventually lead to their destruction.

In the mid 1980's a study conducted by Ira Krantznelson and Margaret Weir observed that "democratic education" had begun to suffer because of changes in American society (1985). They called attention to the role of class issues in the suburbanization of the middle class and the concomitant loss of interest in inner city schools. They argued that:

> More and more Americans, including members of the working class, have been able to purchase residence in areas protected by defensive zoning to assure homogeneity. Housing and schooling markets have displaced educational politics as key forums of decision-making. As a result, public education, which had been the repository of egalitarian aspirations and opportunities, has become more and more a force of social division and inequality (1985, 27).

In their conception of this "homogeneity," Katznelson and Weir took into account economic and demographic forces, including race, as the factors responsible for structural problems in urban schools. Rather than conceiving the crisis as one of educational "standards," as the *Nation at Risk* report had done, the analysis of Katznelson and Weir acknowledges the persistent effects of race and economics in the quest for educational access and excellence in urban/Black schools.

During the 1980's the Detroit Public Schools was in search of reform efforts to address a social and educational crisis that equaled, if not exceeded, the crisis of other urban school districts in the State as well as the Nation. As the educational plight of Black children continued to deteriorate, concerned Black educators, from within and

outside of the District, began conducting serious conversations about the dire educational situation of Black children in Detroit. They were also responding to calls from the local community to do something and to do it quickly to save the City's Black youth, particularly its Black males. In an interview conducted in July of 2007, Kwame Kenyatta, a community activist, and later, Detroit School Board Member, addressed the community's needs and concerns at that time:

> Some support in trying to raise these young Black males. The fathers are not home. In many cases they are either locked up or they are somewhere else. They have other alternative lifestyles, and they are not actually engaging in raising these children. So there was some examination of that, looking at the prison environment, looking at the overall justice system and how Black males are entangled in that system. And then we begin to talk about...how do we reverse that? If the adult Black male is not in the home, he is not in the church and in some cases, not even in the school. Where do we find these young men? Most of all, we don't find them in the community. We find the young Black male in one or two places, either in the street or in the school—and only there because they are mandated to be in school. And when they are not there, they are in the street. So how do we deal with them at our front door, as educators?

During this time, it was estimated that single mothers headed over 85% of the households in Detroit; the fathers were either incarcerated or separated from their children for various social reasons (Hopkins, 1997). Young Black males were left to interpret life for themselves. With the major influences of crime and drugs and the poor economy and unemployment, schools and education were not a consideration for most

Black boys. Community members decided that there should be a gathering of the minds in a conference setting to address the issues. In preparation for the conference, held in conjunction with the Detroit Urban League in various locations around the city, Detroit educators referenced information from various studies detailing what had become a national epidemic: the destruction of scores of Black males at a disproportionate rate compared to their White counterparts.

Dr. Eugene Cain conducted one of the first studies, which specifically called attention to the situation in Detroit. At the time, Dr. Cain was Assistant Superintendent for School and Community Affairs with the Michigan Department of Education. He is currently Chief School Administrator of the Shabazz Public School Academy in Lansing, Michigan. Cain's study, entitled *The Black Child in Crisis* (1986), was initiated under the direction of then-Governor James Blanchard. The purpose of the study was to create and delineate the various crisis situations facing children in the State of Michigan with hopes of creating a lobbying tool to attract much-needed Federal funds. It was also to be used as a tool to garner votes from Blacks in upcoming political challenges. After designating the areas with high concentrations of low-income and minority children, those areas then applied for State funds (seed money) to identify unique crisis situations and plot strategies to resolve the identified crises. With the assistance of the Detroit Urban League, the Detroit Public Schools arranged the first meeting of Detroit educators, social service agencies, and local community organizations that became members of the Michigan Interagency Committee on the Black Child that specifically highlighted the plight of Black children in Detroit, with an emphasis on Black Males. It would be the work of this committee that would serve as the theoretical and organizational catalyst for

the African Centered School Movement in Detroit by primarily assisting this Detroit delegation in researching and disseminating vital information about the plight of Black children.

Dr. Cain's final report was a compilation of reports and programs from all the participating areas of the State, but none generated attention as great as the report from Detroit. Of all the crisis situations and statistics highlighted in the *Black Child in Crisis* report, none identified a need for immediate intervention greater than that of Detroit. It noted the many adverse conditions Black children faced in public school settings. Inadequate per-pupil funding, lack of proper resources, and insufficient number of certified teachers in critical curriculum areas were among the findings of the Detroit report. The study concluded that the majority of the situations identified were beyond the child and his/her immediate family situation. Instead it was the failure of the overall educational system to address the needs of its students. Contributing to the report was Dr. Joseph H. McMillan, of the University of Louisville, who wrote:

> There is no way that this Black child can cause a crisis. On the contrary the Black child is a victim of 246 years of slavery, 91 years of segregation, and 32 years of the most insidious kind of racism and discrimination known to man. In this respect the Black child and the Black family are in crisis. In an era of cut backs, rollbacks, take backs and go backs, the most oppressed people in the history of this country are certainly in danger (1986, 59).

This report seriously conflicted with commonly held educational theories and opinions of the period that purported that it was in fact the failure of students and their families to fully take advantage of educational opportunity that accounted for the lack of

achievement. Contrary to popular opinions, Cain's study blamed the lack of educational success on the District and on State officials for their lack of action to correct the inadequacies of failing school systems. This report stepped outside of classic racial thought and restructured the discussion on Detroit schools. It was this reassessment of responsibility and educational objectives that caused Black educators to re-conceptualize the Detroit district and its problems in radically different ways. In its analysis of Black children across the State, Cain's report concluded:

> The Black child suffers from the physical, emotional, political, economic and psychological consequences of the Black condition in America. He not only bears the scars of antebellum slavery, but also the stripes of modern day slavery whose tendrils extend deep into the heart of the ghetto. Unemployment, joblessness, mis-education are inextricably linked to high crime rates, high prison rates, increasing suicide rates, high rates of homicide, etc. The percentage of Black children in poverty is a staggering 86%. While children as a cohort group are America's poorest, Black children are unquestionably the poorest set of people in America (1986, 60).

The Black Child in Crisis report would be one of the first to assert that Black children were not in any way responsible for their situations, but in fact were the victims. This tone is one that would resonate in the research sought out by individuals and especially by the impending formation of the Male Task Force.

It was the influence of the findings of the Michigan Interagency Committee on the Black Child, together with the already emerging work of individuals in Detroit that created an atmosphere that demanded action. The literature, research and leadership of

individuals like Dr. Eugene Cain who had been instrumental in developing Black History classes in DPS, were highly sought after by District officials as Detroit experienced its Black awareness renaissance. Another such individual was Dr. Kay Lovelace-Taylor, former Executive Director of Professional Development and Technology for Detroit Public Schools, who was a tireless advocate for Black children during her time in the District. Through her work in professional development she imparted the importance of meeting the needs of Black children by any means available. When presented with the prospect of ACE for DPS, she immediately began to explore avenues to bring it into Detroit schools. Dr. Lovelace was instrumental in facilitating the meetings of the Michigan Interagency Committee on the Black Child that was later to be followed by the formulation of the Black Child in Crisis Conference.

The late Dr. Clifford D. Watson (who will be discussed more fully in a later chapter) had been a warrior for the ACE Movement since its inception in Detroit. There is not a phase of the Movement that was not influenced by his works in major ways. To this day, he is considered by many to be the father of the African Centered Educational Movement in Detroit. Ms. Dahia Shabaka, currently Director of the Social Studies Department for Detroit Public Schools was then, as now, a major contributor to the infusion of ACE in the District's curriculum. It was the work of Ms. Shabaka and others that presented the first conceptual view of ACE for implementation in DPS classrooms. Presently Ms. Shabaka leads an effort to reintroduce ACE to Detroit, but the initiative has not received the necessary support due to continual changes in District leadership.

With the assistance of these and many other community and civic leaders, the "Black Child In Crisis" State initiative gave birth to the first "Black Child Placed in

Crisis Conference," held at Detroit's Marygrove College in the spring of 1987. The announcement of this first Conference caused great controversy among local and State educators and legislative officials for its implications and apparent indictment of the public school system. Over 780 educators, parents, and concerned community members attended it. The Conference gained national attention and was attended by educators from across the country. These conferences were held annually in Detroit until 1997. Each conference addressed national themes in education with specific attention to the Black child in the context of Detroit.

Conference leaders let there be no doubt that there had been failure in the District, and that Detroit students were innocent victims of that failure, and thus had in fact been *Placed* in crisis. In an interview conducted in July, 2007, Dr. Kay Lovelace-Taylor, one of the originators of the Conference concept stated:

> I underlined the word" placed," because I did not want people to have the presumption that these children were already in a state of crisis. They were placed in crisis through certainly the School District, through their family situation, through the community, through the school climate and culture--all of these factors helped place the child in crisis. The African American Child was in crisis in 1987 and remains in crisis in 2007.

She indicated that the District's first objective was not to plot strategies based on opinions from outside the District, but to first deal with opinions from within. There was no consensus among Blacks that there was a problem in the educational system of Detroit—even though the situation facing Blacks had been outlined in the developing research and despite the escalating Black-on-Black crime and the resulting effects of

drugs and accelerating murder rates. There existed a clear divide between the Black middle class and the poorest of City residents who were being directly impacted.

In question was the willingness of Blacks with the intellectual wherewithal and resources to act on the situation in Detroit. Clearly it had become apparent that if changes were to be made it would have to come from the Black community itself. While attention in this research has focused on the interest of "others" in relationship to Black people in Detroit, there existed a need for the Black community itself to set aside issues of division in order to address the impending problems from a unified perspective.

In examining the situational and attitudinal factors that informed Black interest in improving education in Detroit in the early 1990's, I paraphrase a thesis originally presented by Walters (2001): The inconsistency and patterns of Black perspectives on education in Detroit suggest an incoherence influenced by the race, class and politics of the surrounding region. This influence defined the way Blacks in Detroit pursued their educational interest in the face of socio-economic decay within the Black community that was occurring in epidemic proportions.

A common theme in both the interviews with Kenyatta and Lovelace-Taylor was the discord within the Black community relative to addressing pressing issues. This discord and dissent, which have occurred at various periods in the history of Black people, have distracted and delayed progress in the movement for Black liberation. Some Blacks asserted that the problems in education lay with Blacks themselves and their inability to access the resources available to them. Other Blacks, disconnected from the myth and fiction of American Democracy, were able to peel back the layers of capitalistic hegemony and see the crisis in education for Black children in Detroit for what it was,

"savagely" unequal. These individuals countered the inaccuracy of dominant stories about the educational experiences of Black children in Detroit, with the intentions of pioneering a new way.

Following the economic and social devastation of the 1980's, there was a need for change in the culture and mindset of Detroit in the 1990's—change that responded to the educational crisis that was literally robbing Black children of their future. Black youth had not been motivated or otherwise encouraged to care about or seek education, and were unconcerned with any type of change. Teachers were unwilling to be responsible, placing the blame for failure outside the classroom. Administrators were frustrated and defensive about not having viable solutions to address the failure that they, as leaders of the local school District, were responsible for. Many parents in Detroit were so burdened with the daily task of survival (employment, maintaining housing, utilities, food, clothing etc.) that becoming involved in local school affairs was furthest from their minds.

In an attempt to address these and other concerns, one of the first goals of organizers of The Black Child Placed in Crisis Conference was to move beyond complacency and the victim mentality used in identifying problems within the Black community, and to serve as agents of information about how improvements in education and student achievement were to be brought about. Both during, and at certain times throughout, the school year special committee sessions of the Conference were held, where speakers from across the country would consult with Detroit educators and parents on the crisis of Black children and share current research from other urban centers. Having personally attended many of those special sessions during, as well as after the completion of my undergraduate studies, it is my view that the information shared in

these sessions contributed to the synthesis of ideas among the Detroit educators on how to proceed in developing a viable solution.

Since the motive forces of history are complex and varied, it is this researcher's contention that the work of the Michigan Interagency Committee calling specific attention to the plight of Black children, in conjunction with the intellectual re-conceptualization that took place during the initial Black Child Placed in Crisis Conferences created the synergy that laid the groundwork for the African Centered Education Movement in the Detroit Public Schools. The momentum created by this movement eventually lead to the creation of three African centered academies in 1991 (Malcolm X Academy, Marcus Garvey Academy, and the Paul Robeson Academy) and the subsequent changes in the Detroit educational structure that continued long after the conferences ended in 1997.

Detroit's Male Academy Task Force

Dr. Clifford Watson, founder of the Malcolm X Academy in the Detroit Public Schools, had long been known in the Detroit community as the father of African Centered Education in DPS. His vision and educational concept of all-male African Centered schools took root in the form of Detroit's Male Academy Task Force, established in 1989, with broad-based membership of professionals and community representatives. The members of the original Male Academy Task Force, appointed in 1989, were:

- Dr. Arthur Carter, Chairperson of the Task Force and DPS Interim Deputy Superintendent for Community Confidence

- Dr. Erma J. Gibbs, Grant Proposal Writer, DPS Office of Grant Procurement
- Mrs. Vernice Davis-Anthony, Assistant County Executive, Health and Community Services
- Dr. Noah Brown, educator, Detroit Youth Home
- Mr. Joseph Gilbert, Principal, Mackenzie High School
- Mrs. Barbra Gilchrist, Parent
- Dr. Alvin Ramsey, Center for Humanistic Studies
- Dr. Geneva Smitherman, Professor of English, Michigan State University
- Dr. Thomas Steel, Community Confidence Office
- Honorable Ricardo Solomon, Member, Wayne County Commission
- Dr. Clifford Watson, Principal, Woodward Elementary School

There were additions to the Male Academy Task Force after the submission and approval of its proposal for the creation of African centered male academies to the Detroit Board of Education in 1990. Those individuals were:

- Dr. Linda Leddick
- Mr. William Schmidt
- Ms. Beverly Schneider, Detroit Public School Human Resources Department
- Dr. Otis Stanley
- Mr. William Aldridge

The primary charge to the Male Academy Task Force was to develop an educational alternative to alter the course of academic and cultural destruction in the Detroit Public Schools. At issue for this group was to determine where the District was going wrong and why Black children in Detroit were failing so dismally. In addition they were charged with determining a way of altering the disproportionate numbers of Black males becoming incarcerated or losing their lives on the streets of Detroit. How were teachers and the District failing these students? Most importantly, how could the educational failure and decay be stopped?

One major objective of the Task Force was to maintain hope while taking seriously the dilemma that faced the District. As the Task force explored themed or specialty schools concepts, attention was given to special educational projects already in place in the District. Schools designed for designated segments of the student population included Frederick Douglas Academy and Barsamian School, which had been created to address the needs of boys identified as needing alternative or special education assistance, and the Boykin School, a school for pregnant teenage girls. Additionally, there was Medicine Bear Academy, a school for Native American children, and Academy of the Americas, a school for Hispanic children. However, the rationale and need for these schools did not compare to the crises of Black children, specifically those of the District's Black males. It was quickly realized that an immediate intervention designed for Blacks males had to be devised.

The concepts of single sex education and military style schools were among the first consideration of the Task Force. Additional questions surfaced about the effectiveness of all-male schools. Would these schools simply corral Black males into

central locations, while the culture of violence and low academic achievement continued? Would merely eliminating girls improve educational achievement? Detroit educators realized that simply changing the location or gender mix of children would be a futile endeavor. Further, they realized that traditional educational practices had failed Black children. Thus whatever the new approach, it had to make paramount the Black child and his or her specific educational needs.

Individualized student needs have never been the focus of traditional educational pedagogy in the United States. The public school system, as it was structurally designed in Detroit and elsewhere, did not look at ethnicity—including Blackness--as a separate entity that required special educational considerations in curriculum or policy. However, by 1990 in the Detroit Public School System, it was patently clear that culture class, and race were paramount in the formulation of a philosophy and pedagogy that would address the deteriorating educational conditions of Detroit's school children. While there had been various theoretical studies and treatises and even educational programs in African centered education, primarily in Independent/Private Black Schools, there was no empirical data about the success of neither ACE, nor educational programs relevant to large, urban public districts, such as Detroit. Activist Kwame Kenyatta states:

> What happened is that through Dr. Kay Lovelace's work and the African Child Placed in Crisis Conference, we took into consideration all of those approaches, all of those theories and in many cases, we began to implement them where others were not able to. For instance, in Philadelphia, there was Molefi Asante, who is considered the father of Afrocentricity. Yet in the Philadelphia School System, there was no African centered Education. At Temple University [where Asante

was on the faculty and had established the first doctoral program in African American Studies] there was no African centered education. So we took some of his theories, as well as some of the others, and developed the resolution for Detroit Public Schools, we actually then began to codify [African Centered Education]. We began to implement those theories that other folks just talked about as theories. Detroit became one of the first places that began to implement that. It became a part of the curriculum in terms of choosing the books, how classrooms were set up, how the male and female academies came about, even if they were not all-male or all-female. There was still a means and a way for which we were able to implement that educational forum. So there were other approaches, other paradigms that were discussed, but we found that this was the best paradigm in order to get the best results for the problems that we were facing and that still face the African American community today (Interview, July 2007).

Changing the culture of education in Detroit meant acknowledging the failure of Eurocentric pedagogy that had dominated not only Detroit but also the country. It also meant Black educators had to take a certain amount of responsibility for not having made concerted efforts to address these failures earlier. Despite great criticism, the Task Force explored this radical change in pedagogy. While economics was a major factor, it could not completely (or adequately) account for the breakdown in education, nor in the family social structure and community that had occurred in Detroit. One of the major failings of Eurocentric educational philosophy in relation to Black children that became clear to these educators was that it failed to include an accurate portrayal of the entire American societal landscape and the contributions of individual groups. Further, Eurocentric

educational philosophy failed to take into consideration the unique learning styles, culture and economics of Blacks, in contrast to Whites. Clearly, Black males had already been identified as subjects or in many cases as the problem in the school and community, but no one attempted to understand these children and the problems that stymied their positive development into productive individuals. As Kenyatta explains:

> The good thing about the selection of African centered education as an alternate approach and pedagogy is that it takes everyone from their center. Although there were criticisms that African centered education was somehow a racist form of educational instruction, it actually practiced a pedagogy that was necessary for all students from all different cultures and economic backgrounds. It was the conclusion that African centered education was the only approach that would start with the Black child and not from a comparison to a White child to establish a model of what a Black child should be. This African centered pedagogy was not good for just Black boys, but for Native American, Hispanic, and European boys as well. No child should be educated from a perspective other than that of their heritage first. It is then and only then that these young men, and any other child, can accurately take part and determine their place in the truly global educational community. Everyone taken at their center and at their place in history and in time and what the outcome should be for them in their particular community. So it would not and did not, I believe, discriminate against [anyone], but there was such a fear of African Centered pedagogy taking front and center stage that it was made a race issue because of that fear. Even though your Eurocentric pedagogy has been at the center stage of all of our education, whether we were Asians,

whether we were Black, whether we were Native American, it didn't matter. We all were indoctrinated with a Eurocentric pedagogy and so to change that created a level of fear in people. So they began to holler discrimination, sex discrimination versus racial discrimination, the whole thing (Interview, July 2007).

Kenyatta's account of the response to the introduction of African Centered Education from educators and members of the local community is accurate. Immediately, the racial legacy so common too much of Detroit's history was center stage once again. Suddenly a number of community groups formed in direct opposition to African Centered Education as well as the Male Academy concept for what was deemed "segregationist" and "sexist" aspects. In the very beginning of the public debate, objections to ACE were not as prevalent as the attention given to the grim statistics characterizing education in Detroit. Taking the position that something had to be done, community members, along with the local newspapers, sanctioned the DPS proposal while Black and White educators cautiously looked on (*Detroit Free Press*, February 2, 1991).

The educational model proposed by the African Centered Education/Male Academy Task Force would challenge the leadership of the District. How could such a plan be devised without adding to the District's already grim predicament? Could the District see its way past its ailing financial crisis to focus on matters of student improvement? Responses from groups such as the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and the National Organization of Woman (NOW), as well as from individuals, to the introduction of African centered education are pertinent to the contextualization of not only the importance of the ACE Movement in Detroit, but also the period in which it

was introduced. The racist anti-Black segregationist reactions were representative of the overall practices and discourse pertaining to the education of Black children in Detroit and the United States. To be sure, throughout the 1980's and in specific periods in Detroit's history, adhering to the interests of individual racial or political groups has always presented the greatest barriers to educational advancement in the City. The introduction of ACE was a concept somewhat before its time in terms of school reform while at the same time long overdue in addressing the needs of Detroit. While its basic components were being implemented in different ways in different places and situations, never before had all aspects been considered for implementation in a large, racially charged urban area such as Detroit. Never before had a city with the demographics of Detroit planned to emphasize a culturally based, Black-oriented curriculum as an alternative to the educational hegemony common throughout the country. African Centered Education countered the national agenda on the education of Black children.

Negative criticisms of the plan to implement African Centered Education took several forms. The NAACP and the Detroit Urban League both voiced concerns solely based on race, not education, which seemed strange given the involvement of both organizations in *Brown* and subsequent court cases. Early on, then-Mayor Coleman Young had advised caution to all involved recognizing the passion of the individuals and holding a unique perspective on Detroit's past and the potential of the situation to incite violence (*Detroit News*, February 1993).

During this period, new leaders emerged from the ranks of inner city Detroit to take the lead in School District affairs. The Hope campaign formed with the backing of a wide variety of interest groups, including the Greater Detroit Chamber of Commerce, the

Metropolitan Detroit AFL-CIO, the Detroit Federation of Teachers, civic organizations such as New Detroit, and a host of grass roots community organizations. Both of the major daily newspapers and other media outlets endorsed the HOPE Team. The objective of the HOPE Team and the understanding of the Black community were that educational improvements, such as ACE, were paramount.

HOPE was comprised of Frank Heyden, David Olmstead, Lawrence Patrick, and Joseph Blanding. The campaign issues that were stressed by the HOPE team were the moral integrity of its members, their desire to restore public confidence in the School Board through their commitment to wise stewardship of funds, their ability to get the school system's fiscal house in order, their promise to run schools more efficiently and effectively, and their plans to introduce pedagogical and management improvements. Many of these improvements were encompassed in African centered education (Mirel, 1999).

The Hope Team would attempt to bring about ACE through the Empowerment and School of Choice concepts. Support for Empowered schools had received approval from the DFT in previous contract negotiations and was seen as a form of school-based management, which was viewed as a reform in and of itself. The HOPE team began exploring different models of management as they continued to work to gain control over more seats on the School Board to push through their initiatives, which required more negotiation with DFT and time for project expenses to be built into the District budget. The benefits to the District and the potential losses to DFT were points of contention that neither side was willing to compromise on in the beginning. Real progress was not made in the discussion of either Schools of Choice or Empowerment until the selection of Dr.

Deborah McGriff in July of 1991 as the new Superintendent, replacing Interim Superintendent, Dr. John Porter (*Detroit Free Press*, February 2, 1991).

From the recommendation of ACE by the Male Academy Task Force through the introduction of Empowerment and Schools of Choice, Detroit residents were cautiously receptive to the School Board's efforts at reform within the District. Each concept considered separately drew no major concerns, but the combination of the three-sparked contentious debates equal to those over decentralization in the 1960's and 70's. At issue for the unions was the "threat" of Empowerment to the job security of local teachers. Because of already existing union contracts, teachers in Empowered schools, which would later be conflated with the African centered academies, were required to sign wavers allowing flexibility in the assignment of responsibilities and tasks not addressed in the traditional union contract. Teachers excited about the possibilities of these Academies began signing wavers without the union's knowledge. The union, seeing this as having a negative impact on its membership, accused the District of union busting and purposefully undermining negotiated contracts. The relationship between the School Board and the union would only worsen as the principals and their union joined in voicing their concerns about the increase in the duties of school principals without additional compensation.

There were reactions from the general public on the District's position in regards to the unions. Given the number of unions in Detroit and the historical significance of the labor movement in the City, there were concerns that a trend was developing that might affect other union contracts with the District. The HOPE team desperately tried to convince the unions and the public that its proposals were neither anti-union nor

impractical. The Detroit Federation of Teachers' (DFT) allegations about gutting contracts and the loss of job security were dismissed as "a parade of imaginary horribles" (*Detroit Free Press*, September 1999). Board members, attempting to fight back, declared that it believed that it (the Board) was more for teachers than the union, and that the dispute was really about who was in control, DFT or teachers. DFT countered with the argument that its members were in favor of a centralized system and not new management strategies, to which the Board responded, "The centralized system of management representing the business as usual mentality of education had failed. Put simply, bureaucracy has not worked which is exactly why the Board is pursuing empowerment" (Mirel, 1999, 425-426). Eventually a twenty-seven day strike ensued as a result of the Board's insistence on Empowerment. In the midst of angry exchanges and a back-to-work injunction that teachers ignored, the two sides eventually settled. The final contract contained a face- saving provision that allowed the District to increase the original number of Empowered schools from three to forty-five. However, the terms of Empowerment were minimal, with teachers only able to waive "non controversial" sections of the contract, such as preparatory hours, length of meeting times, and level of involvement in school management matters.

Beyond the union contracts and political bureaucracy were the apprehensions of the public surrounding the implementation of African centered academies. Many of the groups which were formed in response to the proposal for African centered education, such as United Citizens of Warrendale and Parents for Better Educational Choices, which had supported the unions in their struggle over the creation of Empowered schools, became galvanized along racial lines. There were mild spats in the newspapers between

these groups and individuals who debated the relevance of ACE and the "real" problems facing Black children. Superintendent Dr. Deborah McGriff announced that the first of the African Centered Academies would be the Malcolm X Academy, to open in an independent location in the fall of 1991, with Dr. Clifford Watson as principal. Malcolm X at that time was housed in the Woodward Elementary School building, of which Watson was also Principal. Malcolm X would expand its program to the Leslie School building in the next year. Two other male, African Centered Academies, Paul Robeson and Marcus Garvey Academies, were slated to open the following school year (*Michigan Chronicle*, May 22, 1991).

It was Dr. McGriff's conceptualization of combining the concepts of Empowerment, Schools of Choice and African Centered Education to address low educational achievement that moved the stalled reform efforts forward. Empowered schools would receive greater decision-making authority by consulting with parents and representatives from the community on educational programs tailored to the school and its needs instead of relying on central office personnel who were disconnected from schools and their daily operations to make informed decisions. Schools of Choice would grant parents and communities the opportunity to create themed schools to meet the needs of a given area. So was it proposed that Empowered school academies implementing African centered curricula be created in the District. These came to be known as African centered academies. The synthesis of community concern and educational need was designed to serve as a catalyst for school reform efforts that could possibly be adopted as a model in other parts of the country. Nowhere else in the country at that time had it been proposed that a community have this level of

unprecedented influence on a public school system for the purpose of an educational intervention specifically designed for Black children (*Detroit Free Press*, August 8, 1992).

With the general agreement that action was needed in regard to Black youth, the initial stages of the Academies were executed with little or no public criticism. While questions and concerns loomed around the subject of ACE and the impending question of race, the state of Black children and the school system was a situation that could not be ignored any longer. In addition, it is important to note that the ACE Academies did not open solely as African Centered schools, but also as Schools of Choice and Empowerment.

On one front, the unions, mainly DFT, waged negative public media campaigns against Empowerment and Schools of Choice in their dispute with DPS. On another front, the AFLCIO joined forces with National Organization of Woman (NOW) and filed a lawsuit against the Detroit Public Schools on the grounds of discrimination against female students. AFL-CIO and NOW sought to use their influence to attack the District about programs proposed under the Empowerment plan. Having no real grounds on which to challenge the District on ACE, sex discrimination was the only legally viable option for moving the issue to the courts and bringing the District's plans to a halt. In fact the opening of Malcolm X Academy was delayed for nearly thirty days as the case was adjudicated in the courts.

Federal legislation, in the form of Title VI was designed to protect female students from discrimination in the allocation of funds for athletic programs. The lawsuit made a comparison between the funding of athletic program and the Empowerment funds

as they pertained to female students. Allegations were made that the District was attempting to return the City to the segregationist era and wanted to again divide the City along racial lines. Notwithstanding the fact that the City was already segregated, the lawsuit and ensuing controversy did, in fact, push residents further apart as both Blacks and Whites battled in the court of public opinion about how Black children should be educated. Issues of entitlement to resources were again being debated, this time not from the perspective of Whites living in the City (as had been the case in previous years), but from the perspective of Whites as State taxpayers, including those who had fled Detroit concerned about the money given to Detroit Public Schools in per-pupil funds. Detroit, as was commonplace, was once again embroiled in controversy, and the education of its students derailed (*Detroit News*, October, 1990).

On July 22, 1991 U.S District Court Judge George Woods ruled in favor of the lawsuit filed by NOW and the AFLCIO, finding that correlation between the Title IX Federal legislation and Empowerment did pose potential discrimination against female students. The ruling prevented the establishment of all male schools on the basis that such an action violated the Civil Rights of girls. Again there was public outcry against what was interpreted by Detroit residents as another obstacle in addressing the needs of young Black Males. African entered schools were created, with changes in the all male concept that was redesigned to maintain student populations that mixed boys and girls at a rate of 70% male and 30% female. In the aftermath of the decision those schools wishing to proceed with Empowerment procedures were allowed to do so amidst great scrutiny (*Detroit Free Press*, August, 1991).

It is noteworthy to mention that in this decision where the interests of Black children were the only considerations to be taken into account, strict adherence and interpretations of the law were followed. This was a direct contradiction to the Supreme Court decision in *Milliken v. Bradley* that stipulated Detroit devise its own plans to address problems that faced its students. The courts were more than willing to intervene on behalf of White students in 1974 but ignored the dire needs of Black students in 1991. The issue of Detroit Public Schools and its ability to develop single sex schools was appealed to the Supreme Court, but the Court refused to hear the case. The recognition of supposed sovereignty granted to Whites opposed to their children being integrated with Blacks in a cross district busing plan was not granted to Blacks seeking alternatives to educating their children within the City.

Malcolm X Academy was scheduled to move to its own facility in the next school year (1992) in the former Leslie School building, located in the Warrendale community on the west side of Detroit. Warrendale was a predominantly White working class neighborhood on the border between Dearborn and Detroit. The city of Dearborn was known for its racist practices against Blacks and for its tactics preventing Blacks from moving into Dearborn. White residents of Dearborn and Whites on the opposite side of Dearborn's border city seemingly shared the opinion that Malcolm X Academy did not belong in Detroit's Warrendale community. Although the Leslie School building was in Detroit, and not Dearborn, White residents of Detroit's Warrendale community strongly resisted the placement of the Academy in their neighborhood. They would present some of the strongest resistance to African centered education on record.

District officials, in an attempt to calm fears and answer concerns from the community, held several meetings in various locations in the Warrendale community. At one such meeting, held in the Warrendale Community Church not far from the Leslie School building, feelings of the majority White community were publicly vocalized. This researcher was present as the Black staff and parents of Malcolm X Academy arrived at the meeting to jeers, boos and comments of "Niggers, go home," "No jigaboos in our schools," and "We don't want you in our neighborhood." Encountering such behavior in 1992 was surreal. Until that point, this researcher had only observed such behavior in books and movies from the 1950's and 1960's.

During the meeting, which was conducted by Dr. McGriff, following the agenda was difficult, if not impossible, due to the repeated interruptions and negative chants from the crowd. As Dr. McGriff attempted to lie out the purpose of the African Centered Male Academy concept, an older White lady interrupted McGriff, stating, " All I want to know is whether or not these kids will be searched before being brought into our neighborhood." When asked what she was referring to, she replied "for weapons." To appreciate the full impact of this White citizen's question, note that at that time, Malcolm X Academy was comprised only of students from kindergarten to fifth grade. Additional concerns expressed by the Warrendale residents ranged from the number of Blacks being allowed in the neighborhood to the occupation of the parents of the Malcolm X Academy students and whether or not parents would pick their children up from the school site or from a designated location outside the Warrendale area (Rasmussen, Nexica, Klineberg, Wray, 2001).

Since school officials were unable to reason with the residents of the Warrendale community, the final decision to proceed with the placement of Malcolm X Academy in the Leslie Building came from then-Mayor Coleman A. Young. He reminded the residents through the local media that Warrrendale was a subdivision within the City of Detroit, and that it was not Dearborn. The Leslie School building, therefore, was under the jurisdiction of the Detroit Public School Board and subject to its mandates and decisions. Amidst continued objections and, unfortunately, threats of death to the children of Malcolm X Academy, Mayor Young provided full police protection for Malcolm X students (Detroit Free Press, September, 1992).

Malcolm X Academy moved into its new home, the Leslie School Building, in Detroit's Warrendale Community in September 1992. The first day of school for the Academy's students was not unlike those of students in the deep South during the Civil Rights era. School buses escorted by police cars flanking each side with helicopters overhead, neighborhood residents some carrying protest signs and others throwing bricks will forever be the memory of those kindergarten through fifth grade students coming to Malcolm X Academy that September day. The Academy was in this location from 1992 to 1994. During this two-year period, there would be a series of challenges to the validity of African Centered Education and the rights of the Warrendale residents to not have the school in their community. Several lawsuits were filed challenging the authority of the School Board in the placement of Malcolm X Academy in the Leslie School building. Ultimately those challenges were dismissed for the very reasons that had been given by Mayor Young. Reacting to defeats in the courts, some Warrendale residents committed acts of vandalism to the school building, writing racial slurs on the doors and

walls of the school, along with declarations of "White Power" and the drawing of symbols of hatred, such as swastikas. Other residents gained the attention of local and national media who reported countless stories on the racial tensions characterizing Detroit over the issue of education (Detroit Free Press, July 20. 1992).

Groups from within and outside of Warrendale sponsored forums on the use of the name "Malcolm X," contending that the name was racist and promoted hatred of Whites. Ignorant of the history of Malcolm X, Whites spread inaccurate historical information about Malcolm X that fanned the flames of racial division. Malcolm X was portrayed as a hate monger equal to that of Louis Farrakhan whom the majority of Whites referred to in attempts to identify examples of Black racism. Warrendale residents reported that school official were creating a school for Black militants and would be trained in the Malcolm X facility. Residents even went as far as to give reports of hearing children chanting Black Power and down with White people after school hours in the Malcolm X building (Hartigan, 2001, 148). The Board's explanation about the selection of the name Malcolm X—a symbol of the change possible in Black males who may have made bad decisions in their lives--fell on deaf ears. Both Warrendale residents and their White supporters outside the Warrendale community insisted that Malcolm X was a symbol of hate and that African Centered Education was a curriculum that promoted hate against White people and violence among children (Hartigan, 2001, 148).

In addition to the ignorance and emotion present in most situations and conversation involving the subject of race, it became apparent that the racism involved in the dispute over Malcolm X Academy was not so much about Black and White but more about racial space. Warrendale was characterized in some media account as a "white

enclave." Residents were upset by this designation and regarded it as a charge that their neighborhood was defensively segregated. In response, they pointed to the fact that Blacks had been moving into Warrendale over the past decade and that the area was quietly and steadily integrating, despite appearances linked to protest over the academy. They also perceptively challenged the way the significance of whiteness only seemed apparent in an interracial clash. They chastised editors over their inattention to the suburban areas that one resident characterized as "whiter than we are", where residential segregation worked more subtly but more emphatically, where schools could remain predominantly White without drawing any attention to their maintenance of sharp racial boundaries. Warrendale Whites were as bitter about the ability of suburban White to elude such objectifications as they were about the academy (Hartigan, 2001).

Dr. Clifford Watson became the voice of the African Centered Educational Movement for Detroit Public Schools, countering the propaganda from Warrendale in formalized settings where voices of reason could be heard. He was interviewed on several national media talk shows, Sally Jesse Raphael, Montel Williams Show, Phil Donahue, Good Morning America, and ABC Nightline. It was Dr. Watson's interview on the Nightline program that would spark the most controversy in the already heated debate over the academies to date. In these interviews Dr. Watson repeatedly reiterated national statistics, the Detroit condition and the need for the District to address the plight of Black males in Detroit. In response to the many questions pertaining to the concerns of various individuals and groups, he asserted the slogan of the Academy's namesake, declaring that Blacks in Detroit had reached the point where they were going to provide a quality education for Black children in Detroit "by any means necessary." From his

political vantage point as a Black Nationalist, Dr. Watson in no uncertain terms informed audiences and the general public that Black children for far too long had been the victim of society's neglect, and objections to Blacks developing a plan to better their children was simply a continuation of the injustices historically perpetrated against Blacks in the United States.

Detroit Public Schools African Centered Education Resolution

On February 2, 1993, after the establishment of three African Centered Academies in Detroit, the Board of Education formally established what ACE would be in addressing the current crisis of Black children. The Board adopted the following resolution on African Centered Education:

> WHEREAS the students of the Detroit Public Schools are entitled to an education and curriculum based on truth, balance, order, harmony, and reciprocity so that each student will understand that self-determination is fundamental for participation in a culturally diverse society;
>
> WHEREAS the students must be centered in their own historical and cultural heritage, which fosters positive self-esteem, develops group identity, and provides for entrepreneurial activities that encourage collective work and responsibility;
>
> WHEREAS the Detroit Public Schools must therefore assure that the entire curriculum enables Detroit Public School students to develop a knowledge and understanding leading to an appreciation of their own heritage/culture and respect for cultural diversity;

WHEREAS the Detroit Schools must provide the means to coordinate the development and implementation of the curriculum as well as provide for the continuing research of content to ensure truth, balance, order, harmony, reciprocity for students, parents, staff, and the community at large;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the General Superintendent of the Detroit Public Schools directs staff to (1) develop procedures and guidelines for textbook selection; (2) review all textbooks and instructional materials to ensure that they are accurate, complete, and free of stereotypical views of any group whether expressed or implied by statement, visual image, or omission; and when necessary (3) develop supplementary material when textbooks and other commercially available materials fail to meet guidelines for comprehensive and accurate instruction.

And, finally be it RESOLVED that the General Superintendent directs the staff of the Detroit Public Schools to develop a comprehensive Afrikan Centered Education Program that includes research and curriculum development, staff development, Pre-K-12 curriculum guides, an implementation time line, and other resources needed for curriculum development and implementation.

The adoption of a formal resolution on African Centered Education by Detroit Public Schools was the first of its kind in a major U.S. urban school district. Beyond its recognition of the dire circumstances facing the African American children, it challenged the education they received by departing from "traditional" pedagogical methods. Detroit in essence made a decision to adhere to its mandate to teach children as opposed to educating them. African American children in Detroit had already received an education

that had started them on a path of destruction, they now had to be taught the lessons of who they were, and what they were capable of accomplishing Education as it had historically been delivered to African American children had failed. Detroit Public Schools realized that it had a responsibility to provide a viable educational alternative and that it could do so through ACE. Although it had been theorized and never tried in a public school system, DPS harkened the words of Dr. Martin Luther King's and addressed the "fierce urgency of NOW!"

Following the adoption of the resolution, rumors and ignorance surrounding the issue of African Centered Education continued to grow, some so volatile that 24 hour DPS security and Detroit police provided building security to Malcolm X Academy. As well there was an increased police presence during the school day in light of continued bomb threats and violence towards Malcolm X Academy children. By far Malcolm X students, more so than students at the other ACE Academies (Marcus Garvey and Paul Robeson), received the brunt of the criticism and retaliation during this period. In the spring of 1993 while children were practicing baseball on school grounds, two gunshots were fired in the air over the heads of children and teachers (Detroit News, March 31, 1993). Following police investigations and reactions from local Black grassroots organizations, the School Board decided that in the best interests of the children and the residents of Warrendale that Malcolm X Academy should be moved to another site.

Debates over ACE were far from over even with Malcolm X Academy's move from the Warrendale area. Because the ACE Academies continued to utilize Empowerment and the control it afforded the school principal and parents in selecting curriculum and support programs, the DFT raised concerns about the advantages that

teachers at ACE Empowered schools had over those who were not at such schools. The DFT made constant allegations of the misuse of Empowerment funds against various principals and falsely alleged inequity between schools in terms of what was being provided for children. So accustomed had DFT become to the inefficiency of the District that when an attempt was made to eliminate the bureaucracy with a method that directly impacted children in the schools, it was resisted. School busing--which allowed (through Empowerment) attendance at the ACE Academies by those children not living in the immediate areas surrounding the Academies (which by definition were also Schools of Choice)--was criticized to the point of elimination. DFT along with the local media were responsible for taking the entire Empowerment and School of Choice issues out of context by characterizing them as inequities among Detroit children, rather than reform measures that could have aided the much-needed turn around of the District.

At the height of the African Centered Educational Movement in Detroit, there were six African Centered Academies, three that were predominantly male, and three that were predominantly female. In addition to Malcolm X, Paul Robeson, and Marcus Garvey, there were Mae C. Jemison, Catherine Blackwell, and Erma Henderson. All African Centered schools employed the same curriculum and operating procedures in the implementation of their individual programs during this period. The principals of the first three academies Dr. Clifford Watson, Ray Johnson, and Harvey Hambrick, interpreted ACE and implemented it according to the individual focuses of their particular schools. At Malcolm X Academy African Centered Education was emphasized in the core curriculum areas across all subjects with an emphasis on social studies and language arts. Paul Robeson, where there was a focus on entrepreneurship, had an

emphasis on math along with community empowerment. Marcus Garvey had a primary focus on the Black community and self-reliance with an emphasis on economics and political influence in the Black community, which was in keeping with the life led by Marcus Garvey.

Since the inception of ACE in the Detroit Public Schools, there have been many schools that have adopted some aspect of African Centered Education but only a few that have maintained a formal African Centered Educational focus. As with any idealistic philosophic endeavor within society, maintenance resides with the leadership and those committed to the goals. Given changes in the leadership of the School District and the effect of those changes on programs within the District, African Centered education has not been a priority for a number of years now. Yet the original three—Malcolm X, Paul Robeson, and Marcus Garvey--have exemplified the standards and commitment to African Centered Education despite the political firestorms that have engulfed Detroit schools. The Catherine Blackwell, Erma Henderson and recently, during the 2006/2007 school year, the Finney and Holt Academies, comprise those schools employing full ACE programs (DBEP, 2006). Despite the exemplary performance of African Centered Education in the face of its many challenges, lack of support from the community ultimately has contributed to its decline. Detroit Public Schools has not only been subject to the interests of those outside the District, but the lack of action from those within. For various reasons Blacks have been bombarded with such a barrage of socioeconomic priorities that the continued pursuit of educational excellence for Black children has taken a backseat to the ultimate goal of survival.

Inasmuch as the broader society would lead one to believe that the symbolic gains of *Brown v. Board* have advanced educational accomplishments for Blacks, the reality is that Black children are worse off today than at any other point in time (Bell, 2004). The goal of this research is not to suggest that African Centered Education is the only "salvation" for Black educational advancement. What is suggested is that Black people have identified the problems and theorized many possible methods for addressing them. This research suggests that it has been the systematic hijacking of resources and the manipulation of political and legal systems that have subjected Black children to massively inequality, and perpetual widening of the difference in achievement between them and their white counterparts.

CHAPTER SIX
VOICES OF THE STRUGGLE

In U.S. history the contributions of Black people to education and other areas of society are often silenced in the name of White revisionist history, which aims to continue a hegemonic message to support the myth of American democracy. The lived experiences of Black people have often been misplaced in the catalog of history at the hands of a capitalistic society motivated by race and sustained by a convenient amnesia that allows society to ignore the atrocities of the past. In the U.S. Blacks lend a unique voice and personal perspective that conveys knowledge and wisdom to empower them to continue to strive for freedom and equality on behalf of future generations.

"Voice" may be simply defined as the assertion and acknowledgement of the importance of personal experiences as sources of knowledge. We need to be clear, however, that the term "voice" in the singular does not imply that there exists only one "voice." The stories will differ, and although there are many voices, these voices resonate in concert to depict common experiences. This approach argues for an examination of different frames of knowledge, or advocates that we "look to the bottom" and begin to value the knowledge that exists there.

This chapter gives voice to those African American pioneers involved in the struggle for African Centered Education (ACE) in the Detroit Public Schools. This research recognizes and utilizes the personal narrative of those involved in the African Centered Educational Movement as a valid form of evidence. Using "voice" involves the telling of a story never before considered relevant within the American narrative of education. In so doing, this approach challenges the "numbers only" (quantitative) approach to documenting inequity or discrimination. The single most important function

of the use of voice in this research is to counteract the narrative of the dominant society in relation to the educational history of Detroit. Dominant White society asserts narratives designed to remind it of its identity in relation to other groups and to provide a form of shared reality in which its own superior position is seen as natural." This scholarship will subvert that reality by providing a counter narrative that challenges the validity and authenticity of the dominant story. In this chapter we present the ACE Movement in Detroit from the perspective of individuals that actually participated in it.

In the Biblical tradition, Proverbs 29:18 states, "where there is no vision, the people perish." In the 1980's in Detroit, there was a group who recognized the problems in Detroit and sought to provide that missing vision. These individuals would, at times, have to wage fights single-handedly against a school district motivated by personal interest. Additionally, at times some of these individuals would fight for similar causes in the same district but be unaware of the mutual causes they shared. In the stories/ voices of those individuals we can witness the genesis of African Centered Education in Detroit.

Dr. Clifford Watson

One individual who never yielded in sounding the alarm on the plight of the Black male was Dr. Clifford D. Watson, often referred to as the "Father of African Centered Education" in Detroit. Not only was Watson a staunch proponent of ACE, he was a major driving force in the push for Detroit to adopt ACE as a corrective to past failures in the education of Black children. Originally a math and science teacher for DPS, Watson served as Principal of Peck elementary school from 1980 until 1986 and Woodward Elementary Schools from 1986 until 1990. He was the founder of the Detroit Public Schools' Malcolm X Academy, the nation's first public school to offer an African Centered curriculum. In addition to his work in ACE Dr. Watson developed a series of African American History and Science curriculum materials to address student deficiencies in those areas. He authored *African American Pioneers in Science* (1984), which was widely used in science classrooms across the District.

Dr. Watson's concern for Black children was unmatched. He was completely dedicated to finding educational solutions for Black children and abhorred the constant rhetoric that had become commonplace in the discourse on Black education. After becoming Principal of Peck Elementary School, he responded to the developing Black male crisis, which he referred to as "daily genocide" by instituting the Nation's first elementary school drop prevention program. It was recognized by *National Drop Out Prevention Magazine* and was the precursor of the Detroit School District's Male Academy concept. An innovative theoretician, Watson combined the sports interests of Black males with tutoring for these males. Strategically he scheduled basketball games and practice on Saturdays. The prerequisite for playing or participating was an hour of

tutoring in the student's weakest subject. Watson soon had over 100 boys clamoring to attend school on Saturday, an almost unheard-of phenomenon in inner city urban education.

Despite recent findings by the "No Child Left Behind" federal legislation, it was Dr. Watson and his work that pioneered the preliminary results of ACE showing the effectiveness of culturally based education, utilizing unique African Centered benchmarks to increase student achievement. The opposition from district and union officials often met Dr. Watson at the inception of many of his initiatives. He was known for his "stand off" type methods in providing the best possible educational opportunities for Black children. Once when questioned about the sense of urgency in which he conducted all matters concerning his students, he responded "Everything I do is urgent when it comes to the education of my kids." There are many stories depicting the battles between Dr. Watson and then DFT President John Elliot, on issues over teachers being paid for Saturday School, and their duties as they related to work performed in empowerment schools and schools of choice. Dr. Watson served notice to DFT and all other district unions that Malcolm X was off limits for anyone who was not for "his babies" (Education Weekly, November, 16, 1993).

Having received his doctorate in Education from Wayne State University in 1970, Watson had accumulated a wealth of information on educational research and programs outlining their successes and failures, and tailoring them for possible uses to Black children. He brought his expertise and knowledge to bear on all groups and committees he worked with. It was from that knowledge and from his work on various committees that Dr. Watson originated the first proposal for all male schools to be implemented in

DPS. He developed his concept after having discussed his idea with various local and national educators and took into account all levels of criticism on the relevancy of the concept and its effect on Black children. It was his vision of an all-male school that brought focus to the many issues in Detroit and lead to the organizing of the Male Academy Task Force.

It was Dr. Watson's belief that one of the main reasons young males emulated the worst aspects of society was because that was all that they saw on a regular basis in their neighborhoods and home environments. Mostly headed by women, young males were devoid of positive role models to pattern their lives after. Dr. Watson's solution to address this problem was two fold. In all the programs facilitated by Dr. Watson he ensured that positive Black men, both from the educational and local communities, primarily staffed them. From its inception the Male Academy Proposal called for it to be staffed by as many male as possible, covering the entire school curriculum. Dr. Watson recognized the importance of young males seeing an adult male in positions other than the gym and the janitor's office. In addition to positive male role modeling, this method also had a significant impact on reducing the number of incidents involving misconduct in the schools that resulted in school referrals and other disruptions in the school environment. The presence of positive males greatly increased the ability of teachers to deliver effective instruction and ultimately the African Centered benchmarks.

Second, Dr. Watson in conjunction with the African American Language and Literacy Program of Michigan State University directed by Dr. Geneva Smitherman, instituted the "My Brothers Keeper Program," a male mentorship program especially designed to provide alternate views of life to young Black males in addition to exposing

the youth to the college environment at the elementary level. At the inception of the My Brother Keeper's Program in 1990, exposure to college tended to be only at the high school level. Watson and Smitherman designed complete emersion programs within the school culture of Michigan State University that not only provided mentorship and scholastic encouragement, but also exposure to the dominant culture which was not a common experience for most inner city youth.

Dr. Watson's influence on the culture of education in Detroit was felt throughout the district. Dr. Watson was a master at rallying the local community of parents and other grass root activists to the causes of education. It was those parents and community members who worked with Dr. Watson both before the creation of Malcolm X Academy, and afterwards that were the driving force behind the African Centered school movement in Detroit. His work with the Black Child Placed in Crisis Committee was invaluable for his recognition of the problems that faced Detroit and its children and his commitment to change. He laid bare the real problems in the administration and curriculum of DPS, often times to the embarrassing displeasure of District officials.

Dr. Watson battled for the cause of African Centered Education all across the country often serving as the poster child for Detroit and its actions taken on behalf of Black children. He served as a star witness for the district in the many court proceedings challenging DPS over the creation of Malcolm X Academy and its all male school concept. It was towards the end of the 1990's that Dr. Watson would learn that he had developed cancer. Despite the onset of his disease he continued his often-hectic schedule, putting his health second to the fight to maintain the educational environment he had fought so hard for. When he no longer could ignore the deterioration of his health,

he worked at home handling school district business between his many doctors appointments, often coming to the school after hours. Dr. Watson did not relinquish his duties as principal of Malcolm X Academy, often quoting Dr. Martin Luther King "He who has not found something for which to die, is not fit to live." Dr. Watson died as the principal of Malcolm X Academy on March 19, 1999 from complications due to cancer. Ironically, the death of Dr. Watson preceded the signing of legislation sponsored by Governor John Engler instituting the state takeover of Detroit Public Schools by one week. Then Detroit Mayor Dennis W. Archer, the newly appointed head of Detroit Public Schools, in accordance with the legislative initiative, would send police to Dr. Watson's funeral to escort the elected school board members to clean out their offices, in light of the creation of a newly appointed reform board. Many community members note this period as the beginning of the end of the Detroit Public Schools and the empowerment of education for Black children for which Dr. Watson and countless other educators had dedicated their lives. His physical presence is truly missed, but his spirit in the struggle to provide Black children with quality education "By Any Means Necessary" lives on.

Dr. Eugene Cain

At the foundation of the African Centered school movement in Detroit was the initiation of the conversation on the Black child, and those issues relative to their plight, undertaken by the Michigan Department of Education (MDE). As mentioned earlier, it was the involvement and financial support provided by the MDE that served as an initial catalyst for the African Centered Educational Movement. In particular there were a number of individuals who played significant roles in bringing the plight of the African American child to the public's attention. In many cases these were individuals who had previously worked with or in the Detroit Public Schools and who had gained an accurate sense of the conditions of Black children.

Dr. Eugene Cain served as the Deputy Superintendent of Education for the State of Michigan. He is currently Principal of Shabazz Academy, a charter school in Lansing, Michigan. At the request of then-Governor Jim Blanchard, Dr. Cain, along with other colleagues, compiled a report on the plight of children around the State. Through funds made available by the State, participating groups were asked to identify the different crisis situations and develop means by which to address them. Not surprisingly, the plight of the Black child in Michigan came out of these reports. It would become the focus of a national debate. It was Dr. Cain's previous work as a teacher in DPS and his work with politically conscious, activist educators that contributed to the spirit of what would later become the ACE Movement.

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R: I feel as though what we did laid the groundwork for the African Centered/African Studies Movement throughout the State. If you go back to the rebellion of '67, a lot of

things came forth. I was teaching at Foch Junior High School; that's on the East Side. The Assistant Principal, James Long, went to Cooley High School. And he asked me to come over to teach Black history at Cooley, which was very rare. What was happening is that Black folks were moving down Fenkell. Cooley was a Jewish high school by and large. It was a haven for Jewish kids in Detroit. The school was the last bastion for the White Jewish community, which was having a lot of issues at the time in dealing with race. So Mr. Long said to the Cooley Principal, "I have this young Black teacher who really would relate well to both Black and White kids and he knows his history." In the '60's, it was almost unheard of for a Black person with three years of teaching to go into a high school position. When I got to Cooley, the school had about 3,000 students and eight Black teachers. And I never will forget, one day one of those teachers said to me, as I was coming in, "Cooley was a good school until you came here." This was a Black teacher who told me this. "Cooley was a good school until you came here and got these kids all stirred u" But I had nothing to do with it. It was because of what was going on [in the society]. We had a big walkout at Northern High School, and then you had a walkout at Cooley High. The Cooley parents and I went to see a Reverend Featherstone, who had a church over on Puritan, and we established a Freedom School. The school talked about the history of people of African descent. And I volunteered for that.

I: So this is all in the era of the decentralization that was becoming an issue in Detroit.

R: Right. And actually you had a population shift in Detroit. Blacks were largely confined to a few areas on the West Side, but they were mostly on the East Side. But then after the rebellion [the "Civil Disturbance," according to the Kerner Commission Report],

White folks left the City. I also taught economics. I had one class, which was a lot of fun.

I: What were your feelings as a Black educator about the conditions? Was there anything that influenced, inspired or affected you to get more involved as an educator? Because it seemed like there were a lot of Blacks at that period that knew the problem, but for whatever reason decided not to get involved or didn't necessarily move toward a solution.

R: Well it was a commitment. And the commitment went back to the day Malcolm was murdered. Nineteen sixty-five was the year I graduated from college. Malcolm was going to make a speech at Tuskegee, and we had it on the board. I remember a group of us sitting on the fire escape of the dorm talking about it. And I remember we put our hands out and said, "Wherever we might wind up, we will never forget this, but we will be committed to improving the condition of our people." And I stay committed to that. Coming from a Historically Black College where in our library we had a mural called, "The Amistad," portraying the so-called "mutiny" of these African slaves on the ship...so I was reminded and plus, you know, when I was in school in Birmingham, Alabama, we had Black history. So when I came to Detroit, I couldn't understand why we didn't have that history in Detroit. My group started out as a club, called the "Negro History Club." And it became so popular that the people downtown heard about it. I remember a lady by the name of Delores Minor who came out and said, "Oh you are doing some fantastic things with these kids." I didn't see anything "fantastic" about it...there was this board in the back of our room, and it really needed resurfacing and I asked if we could get it fixed because we couldn't use it. They didn't come, so I said okay, we'll make a mural out of it. And the kids made this beautiful mural. It got a lot of attention from everybody, it

became like a little local shrine. People would come in and they'd go take a look at the wall...Then all of a sudden I started having these visitors coming from University of Michigan and downtown...They had something called, Project FAST, Federal Aid for Staff Training. Delores was able to get a grant that allowed us to study the history and culture of people of African descent from Eastern Canada through the New England states. And we traveled for six weeks--Detroit educators--for six weeks we went everywhere to places you've never heard of, talking about the contributions of people of African descent.

A number of us branched out from that tri We had so much information that we wanted to share. In '67, the rebellion jumped off. And all of a sudden, who is popular? The people who had this background, this knowledge... So I started just putting my thoughts down because what I felt was absent from a lot of what we were trying to articulate was that we did not have a conceptual model. We were going on sheer emotions. And I felt that there was a need for somebody to do what White folks did: sit down and think this thing through and conceptualize.

When the region concept/decentralization came into effect, Region 1 was the region [for Black Studies]. It was under Dr. Zodi Johnson. Zodi was a different kind of regional superintendent. She was very, very Black in her thinking. The other ones were cautious, careful not to disturb, after I got this job and I'm the kingmaker. But Zodi was an activist. Zodi had working out of her central office, Dr. Watson, he changed his name, and I don't know what his Muslim name was.

I: Clifford Watson?

R: Yeah, Cliff and he became the spokesperson for Black history and Black Studies. I taught a graduate class, called "New Perspectives, Teaching the Black Experience," at Wayne State from 1970-74. Word got out and Zodi heard about me. She said, "Mr. Cain we have all these issues out here...what I'm trying to do is make this legitimate because my other colleagues don't see this as legitimate history and I just need something like a paper." And she paid me to go off and write a paper it was an important piece, which conceptualizes Black Studies, and I created a model for it, Zodi used that to the hilt. Everybody got a copy of it. She had me to go from school to school, mostly high schools, to discuss this. But I was always telling her, "You know, Dr. Z, high is a little late we need to focus on elementary schools. But that didn't happen Dr. Mel Chapman was superintendent of Region Four. He heard what I was doing with Zodi. He said, "I read this little conceptual paper, that's fine. But how can I get a real live curriculum?" And so I wrote a curriculum for Region Four...Next thing I knew, people in the State Department of Education wanted me to come on. And I came up as the State Social Services Coordinator. We came up with a series of symposiums outlining crisis situations concerning children throughout the State. The cities of Kalamazoo, Benton Harbor, Lansing, Detroit, Pontiac, and so on, were to take these crisis issues and create solutions to address them in their own community. My unit put together this booklet, and I shot all of the photographs for the publication.

I: What was the Governor's intent in all of these Statewide efforts? What was his eventual goal?

R: Political.

I: It was all political.

R: Well, he wanted votes...He came out; he sent subordinates out, but I didn't see any real heart felt commitment on his part.

I: Was there a title that the Governor gave to that initiative? Was there any particular focus for the project?

R: Black Child in Crisis.

I: I guess it is safe to say you've been involved in the African Centered Educational Movement in Michigan from its inception, involved in the origins of it. Do you have any particular feelings about how African Centered Education has affected overall education, in the state of Michigan, in the United States?

R: Spotty, it's very spotty. If you were to talk to students who have gone through my program over at Shabazz Public School Academy many of them go into the Lansing School District and you hear them saying, "Those kids from Shabazz are really cocky." I don't think they are cocky; it is just that they have a good sense of who they are. They see themselves on the walls day in and day out. I've seen some programs, no more personality than that of a monk. And they call themselves African Centered...There is something that has been lacking in the community, and I have not quite pinpointed it yet. Take the reaction to Malcolm X after African Centered schools were introduced in Detroit. There was a huge following. But then the following fell off and I'm not ready to say it was because of a lack of funding because the community that surrounded the school was very much involved. They still had the option of bringing the children to the schools, but yet the enrollment declined and interested seemed to decline...

I want to come back to my perception as to why some of the schools have struggled. I think that we as a people have always found it difficult, to walk with rebels...All these

other folks had difficulty getting enough people to rise up and we've always been suspect, the rebels...And the fact that these rebels were trying to open eyes and give them information about who they are and why they were in the state that they are in reminds me that there are some people who will look at the situation and say, "I accept it, there is nothing I can do." There are others who look at the situation and they go into delusions, they become clowns and you know, nut cases, so to speak. They say "No, this ain't happening to me." They become almost buffoons. Then you have other groups that say, "I'm going to fight this stuff." And I think as a people, we haven't decided what we want to do, whether to fight it, accept it, or what...We put Malcolm X's image on our letterhead; it is on everything we do. And it is everywhere; you go by the school, maybe visit here sometimes and see red, black and green everywhere and some of our board members are just not comfortable. They like the idea of being a board member, but we don't truly have an African Centered board. They are far from it.

Dr Kaye Lovelace-Taylor

Given the tumultuous effects of 1980's Detroit on the public schools and on the broader community, direction and focus were required if an effective paradigm for improvement was ever to be established. Dr. Kaye Lovelace-Taylor, as the Executive Director of Professional Development and Technology, recognized and understood the situation of the District better than most. Through her position she was able to see the failures of the curriculum as well as the failure of the teachers of that curriculum. Dr. Lovelace-Taylor contended that there was no consensus among District leadership about problems and solutions. She provides an account of the African Centered Education (ACE) struggle and contextualizes the status of not only ACE but also education in general across the United States. In many respects her views identify educational issues surrounding the Black child as occupying second-class status among Blacks and Black leadership. Devastation of the intellectual ability and cognitive futures of Black children and the need for reform are not dominating the national headlines, as are the more social, cultural issues. Clearly Dr. Lovelace represents the frustration among many educators seeing what needs to be done and being all but handicapped in taking action.

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I: As we previously discussed, I am asking questions relative to the African Centered School Movement in Detroit. I wanted to get your opinions and/or thoughts about the Movement from the beginning of the initiative in Detroit. First, what were the actual events, concerns or problems that caused the Male Academy Task Force to be formed? In your own words, please describe the atmosphere in both the City and the school district.

R: I think across the country we were really concerned with what was happening with African American children as we are today. It hasn't improved much. What we were concerned about then, as we are now, is that African American children do not seem to be achieving at the same rate and degree as other ethnicities. And what was alarming is that we had a new emergence of Hispanic children who were achieving higher than African American children. I only bring that to your attention because I think that provides something of a backdrop in terms of what our concern was then, in 1992. We continue to ask ourselves why is it that African American children are not achieving and what is the District doing to make certain that we are making some kind of gains in achievement? And what could some of the problems be?

I was in charge of professional development at the time. But my love was what could we do for teachers and principals that would change their mindset around how they were teaching children? Now I want to be clear about this statement. It didn't seem to matter whether we were Black or White. What seemed to matter were the perceptions that people have of African American children based on past stereotypes. So that's an important part to me that even though our heads were clear about what we needed to be doing, our stereotypes, through perceptions, were heavily ingrained within us. I'm not trying to create blame here. What I'm saying is that at that time we struggled with trying to determine where we were going wrong. Why aren't our children achieving? What's happening with them? My conclusions were that we had the wrong mindset; there was a negative perception District-wide that African American people were for unforeseen reasons deficient. That's my impression of the tone that existed. I don't think that district administration; central administration even saw the issues for what they were.

I got involved because of Dr. Eugene Cain. He started what was called "The Black Child in Education Crisis Report." He was with the Michigan Department of Education. I picked up on the title and decided that I wanted to replicate it for Detroit and called it, "The Black Child Placed in Crisis." And I can't tell you how many people tried to make me change that name, because I used "Black Child Placed in Crises and underlined "placed," because I did not want people to have the presumption that these children came already in a state of crisis. They were placed in crisis through the School District, through their family situations, through the community, through the school climate culture all of that helped place that child in crisis.

I: Were there any types of ideological or philosophical differences among the members that presented problems in the group setting or achieving its goals or improving the education for black children? I'm interested in the dynamics of the group, because I know when you talk about a topic as controversial as education; you bring in a lot of personal philosophies and ideologies that sometimes clash in groups of this kind. So I'm interested in were there any differences on the philosophical or ideological level that caused problems for the group?

R: The biggest one for me was that we always pointed the finger at everyone else except ourselves. That continues to be a sore point with me. I don't think that children are responsible; adults are responsible. When we sat in those planning sessions--I will not use names here--but I will give you an example. This was a key person on the committee, and I happened to come downtown for a meeting and got on the elevator with her. You know what she said? "I'll be glad when we get through with this Black mess." Now she was Black, but has a total mis-conception of what I and others in the district were trying to

accomplish. When I held those conferences, there was an uproar. Usually you get a hundred people or you know, two hundred people. We had 780 people at the first conference. Now to me, what had happened is that you've touched a nerve of the community. When people turn out like that, there is something that they are searching for. Something that they are looking for, something that the committee is not responding to. Because at that point in time, we had the attitude that if these parents would just get their act together... And Bill Cosby has that [same attitude]; if the parents would just do something. But they (parents) don't know what to do. If they knew what to do, they would do it. Are they responsible? Yes. Are they responsible for making kids get to school? Yes. So I'm not saying they are not responsible. What I'm saying is that we have overlooked a critical piece and that is providing the kind of in-service for parents that would allow them an opportunity to try to discover what it is that they need to do.

I remember holding a conference for parents, and I'll never forget [this]. They had paper bags and they put dollar bills in them and that was the payoff for the parent to come to this meeting. Now, maybe the parents liked it, I don't know. And I can't tell you the amount of money that was in those paper bags. To me that was so demeaning. It is always said, "Well you know if you feed them, they'll come." Well you know what, that hasn't been my experience. And I've worked all over the country now. Did you ever stop to think that they might be interested in their kid without you feeding them? You see that's a stereotype. That's a perception that we have. The other thing they say is, "You have to put the kids on stage and then they'll come. You know, have an act and they will come." Well, this is my take on this and how I differ philosophically and ideologically. If you take the time to show parents how their children are achieving and the lack of that

achievement when compared with other groups of children, they get it. And they will come and they want to know what they should do about it. Nobody is going to come to your school to be beat u Nobody is going to come to parent-teacher conference for you to tell them how bad their kid is, they already know their kid is bad. They know their kid is failing, so they don't need you to tell them that. They need to find a place where they can come, a community center. I would say take it even out of the school, some place where they can feel safe, respected and that people are there to help and work with them to help with this issue. Not stand over and lecture them.

Here is another point where I differ philosophically. And that is African Centered Education isn't there just to teach African American children what took place in their past history. It is there to teach the world what took place. African Centered Education was put in because there is a lack of correct identifiable research and information on the life and contributions of Africans and African Americans. That is why you have to have African Centered Education. It was put in to clean up the textbooks, to make certain that history was corrected, if you will. And that kids would not continue to be taught lies.

I: Because the White man wrote the history and so, therefore, it is written, you know, with them in mind. So anyone else's history is just kind of messed u They are correcting that now and people see that now, but that's after what? 200 years of crying in the wilderness about it. But, when people say to me that African American children need to be brought up so that they understand who they are, [I have to remind them that] it is not just African American people or children; it is everybody who needs to understand who we are. And that to me is a big difference. We did the African Centered schools and their curriculums were designed around African and African American principles, procedures,

laws, past concept--all of that. But I always felt that this should be in every school. Everybody should know this.

When I put on the conferences, I asked another leading curriculum person, who happened to be White, why she wasn't there. She said, "Oh I thought that was just for Black people." So you see the mindset. The mindset is what is so critical in this process, the perceptions that people have about what needs to happen. If you don't come together as a group on that, it is very hard for you to move forward, because everybody is moving forward in a different direction. Some are moving forward with just wanting to have African Centered schools. Other people are moving forward with wanting to clean up the history books and some of us were moving forward trying to introduce to everyone that Africans and African Americans had a major contribution in the building of this country, as well as other countries.

I: Were there any reports, be they local, state or national that the group either utilized and/or looked to as it fulfilled its charge?

R: The one that I told you about in the beginning, "The Black Child in Crisis." And that goes to your number 5: "Were there any key figures or documentation from the Movement that you feel deserve special attention in a study of the African Centered Movement?" I think Kwame Kenyatta, I think certainly Dahia Ibo Shabaka, I think the African conferences that we held, and the African American child conferences--all were key. I think having Asa Hilliard come in, he did an awful lot. Well, I can't just say Asa, because there were so many of them that came in, but Asa was a huge part with special education. Molefe Asante, great contributions this stuff was so new that we had to call on the experts across the country. And so we brought them in to provide workshops for

us and we did that over those three days. And we did these special seminars with principals...trying to wake up people, if you will.

Too many, but we tried. . Mary Bacon, Mary Francis Berry, Eugene Cain, James Comer, had him in several times, Jewelle Taylor Gibbs wrote on Black boys, as well as Janice Hale Benson, Ron Hurndon, Patricia Russell McCloud, Aubrey McCutchen, Barbara Sizemore, Reginald Wilson...I'll tell you who was totally impressed by this and this was in 1993, that was Deborah McGriff. I was absolutely surprised. Craig Beverly. Haki Madahubti, Maulana Karenga, Alvin Poussaint. I'm telling you we had the high and the low end coming into his conference to try to change people's minds about how they were treating kids. You see I'm getting back to what I talked about earlier. It wasn't about how kids come to us, it is how we receive kids and what we do with them once they are in our charge...What age has taught me is that you better look closely at the person's work before you start naming them. Everybody has a gift. And everybody brings that gift and gives that gift the best way they know how. Now you might not agree with what they've done. I'm sure a lot of people didn't agree with the things that I've done. But I brought my gift and I put it out there as best as I knew how. And that's all you can ask.

I want you also to list Basil Davison. At the time he came to our conference, he was 79 or something... 6'3" or 4" and White, Englishman, wore an ascot...everybody in the world says, "What the hell did she bring this man in here for?" Well, because if you ever remember, "Out of Africa," " African Civilizations Revisited," the documentaries. That's who wrote it, Basil Davison. And it was so astounding to me...We need to read and understand who has been in the forefront of some of this stuff. If you ever saw that

beautiful documentary on Africa... Oh yeah I had everybody, you name em, I've had em. That was to give everybody a different perspective.

I: How, if at all, do you feel that the African Centered School Movement has affected the state of education in Detroit and the U.S. and what are those effects?

R: I wish I could say that okay, for the children who attended the school or schools; it was the most wonderful thing that could happen to them. Because you had caring teachers, you had an educational environment that suggested that they were wanted, loved, respected, honored, cherished, all of that. You had parents who were involved and who made a conscientious decision to send their children there. So you had strong parental involvement. You had kids who knew that what was expected from them. And you had teachers who knew that they had to produce and not, because you had a principal who was looking at those lesson plans and making certain that they were on par with what children should be learning. Now we have the standards movement and all of that. But when Ray and Cliff [principals of the first ACE academies in Detroit] and those guys did that, they were looking at those curriculum portfolios to make sure that they had everything in there that the children were expected to know and be able to do at Grade1, at Grade 2, Grade 8, and so on. So if children had the opportunity and it was a true opportunity to attend those schools that was magnificent.

Now I'm going to answer in terms of how I see the impact across the United States. None, in my opinion, none because African American children are still scoring lowest across the country, now lower than Hispanic children. If they have the opportunity to attend an African Centered school and see it is more than just an African Centered school, it is a school where there are people who have made a conscious decision that

children of all ages, of all colors, of all backgrounds can learn. And that's the perception that has to be in the mindset to start off with. When you go into other schools, children walk through doors, if they look at little raggedy, if they look a little Black, if they look a little tattered, then this is a child of poverty, this is a Black child, so therefore, it is a child from a single parent--all this baggage comes in with this kid. The kid doesn't come in with the baggage; it is placed on the kid once he gets into the school with all those perceptions.

If African Centered Education had made a strong impact in Detroit and across the United States, you would see African American children achieving. So you have to ask yourself the question: Are African American children achieving in general? A response to that question is, "No they are not." In select schools are they? Across the country you have all-Black schools with the children achieving at high, high, high rates and it is because of what people try to do in these African Centered schools. But when that doesn't transfer...If all of this is true, then wherever these children go they should be able to achieve if you do the same thing.

I: What are your feelings about the recent recognition of culturally based education, single sex education, by the No Child Left Behind Act? It seems as if that's what they told Detroit wasn't possible, necessary and/or relevant 15 years ago.

R: What we know is that we have to be the originator. We have to be the designer. Our name has to be stamped on it. And so, therefore, the No Child Left Behind has taken all of the research across the country and believe me they looked at what these schools were doing--the African Centered schools, as well as those schools that were simply all African American populated...So that yeah, what I think about it is that if they had only

listened 12 years ago. If they had only put it in place 10 years ago, if they put it in place now.

I: As I mentioned before, I'm conducting my study from the interest convergence theory. Fifteen years ago it wasn't in the country's interest to look at these objectives, culturally based education, single gender schools and classes, education as a way of helping children. It wasn't until these problems started to filter into the dominant White community or to the White children that now they are revisiting these issues. It's all a matter of interest for the United States.

R: In the '60's and '70's, we had leadership, but we lost leadership starting in the '80's and '90's. We haven't had any real leadership in the last twenty years. And I'm talking about African leadership, African American leadership...I fear that African American communities are soon going to lose their voice completely. And I say that because I see it so clearly here in Arizona...We have only a 3 percent, 6 percent population of African American across the entire State and only 3 percent in Phoenix. Phoenix is third lowest in achievement in the United States. Do you think they are even mentioning anything African American? Mention Hispanic children. And you watch Florida, California, Texas, Louisiana, to some degree, New York, you watch the population explosions and you see what the concentration is going to be and that is where the focus is going to be. I don't think I'm a pessimist, but I worry greatly about where African American children fit into the scheme of things. Where do you think they fit? No Child Left Behind comes ten years later and they just color it something different, call it something different, No Child Left Behind, but what child has been left behind? The African American child. But we don't say that, we say "No Child Left Behind." My point in bringing this up is that

"No Child Left Behind" in my mind meant the African American child twenty years ago, ten years ago. No Child Left Behind now I'm going to tell you it's the Hispanic child.

We don't have the leadership. We've been so involved with fighting against [Don Imus], for example, and all of that. It may be a shame for me to say this on tape, but that's a small issue in relation to the educational situation of Black children. I don't give a doggone because if you get in my face...I'm just going to slap you. I can take care of that myself. I don't need to bury the N word and all that kind of stuff. I need to find out what's going to happen to the education of our children.

Dr. Arthur Carter

Dr. Arthur Carter served as Deputy Superintendent of the Detroit Public Schools from 1989 until 1999 and is currently Superintendent of the Highland Park Public Schools. Dr. Carter chaired the Male Academy Task Force responsible for the genesis of the African Centered Education Movement in the Detroit Public Schools. Dr. Carter provides invaluable information on the Task Force and offers insight about elements, both positive and negative, surrounding the formation of this group.

I: Dr. Carter, what were the actual events, concerns or problems that caused the Male Academy Task Force to be formed? In your own words, describe the atmosphere in both the City and the school district during this time period.

R: It was recognized that there was a general decline in the academic performance of, primarily, Black males. It was the violence, the unusual arrest rates, and the gang activity that preceded this particular period of time with the number of gangs that operated in the Detroit metropolitan area, but specifically, in Detroit. It was the recognition that African American males were in rapid decline in terms of being able to compete, and their arrest rates were the primary reason for the overcrowding of the Wayne County Juvenile Detention Center, which I would later become responsible for. All of these factors painted a mosaic of a not too favorable prognosis for Black males in that particular generation and those were just some of the issues. So it was in that light in those discussions that came forth the idea of this...single gender task force.

I: Were there any types of ideological or philosophical differences among the members of the task force that presented problems in achieving its goals of improving education? Were there any relevant issues that may have possibly stood in the way of the task force

being formed?

R: There was a unity of purpose; I've never witnessed anything like that, not since nor before in my forty-five years of being involved in education. But these were special times. There was unity. The ideas came from Dr. Watson who eventually became the principal of Malcolm X Academy. It was generated out of some of his thought patterns. But actually in terms of fueling some of his thoughts, there was a conference that started probably the year before or two years before I came to the Detroit Public Schools called "The Black Child Placed in Crisis." Those were very powerful conferences with people like Asa Hilliard, who had a profound impact, I believe on Dr. Watson and certainly on myself and others who were involved. Then there was the Oregon papers [Portland, Oregon "Baseline Essays"] and other thought-provoking research. "The Black Child Placed in Crisis" brought together all the giants and scholars of education, like Leonard Jeffries to name one. One of the first things that came out of the period preceding the Male Academy Task Force was development of what we called the African Heritage Cultural Center. We developed that; Warren Oly still serves as the Director. There was a one-time exhibit. We pulled together a number of people who said let's do something that's spectacular to show the ancient Black presence and how that impacted the world. We had planned a one-day, two-day exhibit at the State Fair. It turned into three days with 65,000 people, including CNN. And then it went out of existence. It was all put in a warehouse for a year and then we found a building where it is currently housed, the Old Redford library. But that's a whole other story. But that was a part of the atmosphere that preceded the task force dealing with African American males in specific crisis. And so the whole task force came out of that thought pattern. There were several of us who

did not want to see this service as a flash in the pan. There would be a conference once a year; that wasn't enough. We had these various task forces to have these other issues periodically brought forth. That wasn't enough. So out of that came the idea of a task force to consider and develop all male academies...It was a time when we were trying to be as creative as we could. We challenged, as a part of this movement, the whole concept of Halloween. How do you get from Halloween to African Centered Education? [Here's how.] The Board of Education passed a resolution indicating that October 30 and 31 would become Ancestors' Day in the Detroit Public Schools. Now that was not our original idea. Amini Humphrey who is the founder of the Aisha Shule School, which is now a charter school, first brought it forth. [Converting Halloween to Ancestors' Day] was a part of the building blocks of putting this whole piece together. It was those kind of discussions that brought forth the idea of this Male Academy Task Force.

I: After the formation of the task force, do you recall any issues involving the all-male and single sex components, i.e., for my research I found that the educational plan was originally to be all-male, and then the focus changed from all-male to African Centered. Were there any major paradigm shifts? What caused the change?

R: I think it was the thought process. It was an evolutionary process that occurred. You start connecting the dots. Here we have a Black child placed in crisis, we have the African Heritage Cultural Center, and we have this thing called Ancestors' Day in light of the Halloween celebrations--the whole impact. It was the African American male placed in crisis that became the cornerstone (primary concern) of this whole movement. So, it was only a natural evolutionary process to move in that direction. I mean, given all the facts, given the history, given the statistics at that point, it was quite natural [to go that

route], and I don't recall any conflict...In the Detroit Public Schools during that time, the Board was unified on this issue; the Superintendent was [in agreement with the concept], we had other people who were very much involved, who believed. And I think that the speakers who came during the conferences--that was like a revival. Like starting a quasi-university; most of the teachers had not been exposed, even those who went to Historically Black Colleges didn't understand. They understood American history and African American history; they didn't understand the world perspective. That is, they didn't have that perspective in terms of Timbuktu or Sancerre in Timbuktu or the three empires and how that evolved...So it was like a new awakening, a new awakening and I think some of that had occurred during the Harlem Renaissance and before, but not to the degree that we saw it happening not only here, but in New York and in Los Angeles. It was some twenty years after the riots, which were reactive, [but] during this time it became proactive, [around planning] to build something...And it just didn't occur here, [in addition to New York and Los Angeles], in Chicago there was the DuSable Museum. There was a unification of people, Leonard Jefferies talking about the Statue of Liberty and giving the real story on that. People were inspired to go ahead and strike out and make their contributions. And the single gender academy... was an important element, probably one of the most important. This is the first time that we wanted to inject an educational component on a regular, consistent basis by creating a school. It turned into three schools [then] into four schools [and more].

I: How were the members of the group chosen? Were any tasks assigned to members or members chosen because of any specialty they had? What was the prerequisite, if any, for being a member of the task force?

R: Well, Dr. Watson, whose idea it was, was key...He recommended various people to serve on the task force...Some were people who had participated in the Black Child Placed in Crisis Conferences. There was a natural nexus there the task force was relatively small. My assignment was to research single gender education in other cultures. So we looked at whales, we looked at some things in England; we looked at a couple of African countries. In every group we found that the research was very positive in terms of males. First of all it wasn't always the Black male; it was about establishing the facts. I remember this was the discussion we had early on. The first issue was to establish whether single gender education made a difference, no matter what the race was. We found that to be true. The second effort was to look at Black males. We looked at other examples of single gender educational institutions, for instance, an all girls' school in Philadelphia that dates back 150 years and is still in existence. It has never been challenged and is operating today. And so we looked at that and we talked to people there to get the female perspective. And that's when we started to look at the Mae Jemison Academy. Of course, [by this point] Dr. Watson was at Malcolm X; we had Harvey Hambrick at Marcus Garvey and Ray Johnson at Paul Robeson.

I: Was there any pressure from the Board of Education to consider other alternatives to addressing the problems in Detroit Schools? Were there any other community or major factors at that particular time? Was there an attempt to influence the task force to consider other alternatives or were their other alternatives out there being considered simultaneous with the existence of the task force?

R: None that I can remember...It was quite spontaneous. We have principals who started wearing African garb. For instance, one of our board members here, Ms. Alma Greer was

a principle during that period of time in Detroit. But she adopted, adapted to the old African Center movement. She has long since been retired as a board member here. There were a number of principals who caught on and started an African [educational presence], not a detailed empirical orthodox way of looking at it in terms of an African Centered school, but pictures appeared, books, reading lists, books on ancient history and African American history appeared on reading lists. It was a time of significant change. The rise and fall of the urban school district was mentioned, the protests, clothing and protests at Northern [High School]...then eventually the advent of [Arthur] Jefferson coming in as the first Black superintendent. But this was more endemic, this was revolutionary in terms of a thought process, rather than a political movement. It was a belief structure that people really believed that this was the way to move... We had people at every level, multiple levels, it wasn't just top down...We had principals, you had administrative assistants in the Schools Center Building, you had assistant principals, you had teachers, so it was sort of a unity of purpose at that point.

I: What were the reaction of the task force to those organizations and/or members of the public that opposed your efforts? Did that have any significant impact on how and what actions the committee was taking in the proposals it was generating?

R: I think the challenge presented by NOW and the ACLU moved the group to acknowledge the whole concept of, for instance, Mae Jemison, a female academy...I attended several meetings as far away as Port Huron and other places talking to the NOW people, talking to the ACLU people who were philosophically opposed. Then there were people like the psychologist, Dr. Kenneth Clark, who had testified for Thurgood Marshall [in Brown vs. Board]. He and I had a chance to converse on this subject. He was dead

set against it; he said it was a push back to the days of segregation. I mean that was a pretty big wallop...a punch to the midsection coming from such a distinguished person like Dr. Clark in terms of all he did in the school desegregation cases during the Civil Rights era. But he would not change his position; he just sat there shaking his head. So that was significant...You had some of the old guard in organizations like NAACP saying, "No, they didn't view our efforts as progressive." They viewed them as steps backwards rather than forward.

I: It seems that African Centered Education, the Male Academy Task Force, and single sex education issues all became intertwined. How, if at all, do you feel the African Centered Education Movement has affected the state of education in Detroit and the U.S. and what are those effects? Do you think that that Movement, the joining of the two concepts, has affected education in the United States in any way?

R: I think just to the contrary. I think that we slipped backwards. I think that there has been a regression since those days. Case in point, the Board tried on two occasions to destroy the African Heritage Cultural Center. They had moved to close it down. There was a bond issue. This was like during the mid '90's, $1.5 billion, the largest bond issue set forth in a school district ever in the history of the United States. Part of that we carved out. We said we were going to build a home for the African Heritage Cultural Center on the site of where the old library stood. We secured the money. I was present at every meeting. I wanted to make sure that that money got to [where it belonged]; it was $3.4 million [for] a small building. I think it went up to maybe $4 or $4.5 million before it was all over. But Warren--I have to give him all the credit-- he was there every step of the way watching the construction of this building. All of Adult Ed became involved; it

played a major part in the passage of that bond issue. What happened was, the Board made a decision not to move the African Heritage Cultural Center into the new building, which was constructed for the Center. The auditorium, the architecture, everything was African Centered. I mean the whole building. The first building ever built in Detroit that was truly an African Centered construction. At first, there was congruence between the cultural center and education, and it was like a school for maladjusted kids. After that, when Dr. Burnley [former DPS Superintendent] came, he moved to close it.

I: Given the mixed reaction of the public, both currently and from those of the Civil Rights era, given all the battles in court and endless explanations in defense of African Centered schools, given all of this, was the African Centered Education Movement successful or unsuccessful?

R: Well I don't want to say that it failed. But if it had been successful, there would have been no need to bury the word "Nigger" a few months ago...I think there were other movements that came in while we were dealing with African Centered Education...the Hip Hop piece, for instance. I'm not castigating the Hip Hop Movement because I think there are some pure African forms there, but I don't think it remembers the ancient days. It doesn't remember or has no reference to what happened 600 or 700 years ago or thousands ago with Black people. It is the here and now, and many people don't have a problem with that. There is a new generation that has no reference to the struggles and the teachings of people like Carter G. Woodson, Asa Hilliard, Leonard Jeffries, and some others...I think [African Centered Education] is still there, but its like a cottage that's been overrun with leaves and with trees and vines and is still there, but you can't see it.

I: Are there any aspects that you feel need to be highlighted about the African Centered Education Movement? Given the purpose of my research and your experiences, is there anything that you would identify in discussing the ACE Movement in Detroit and say, this is something that I think is key to what happened or didn't happened-- any aspect of the movement that you, Dr. Arthur Carter, would highlight as significant?

R: I think that the decline of the popularity and progression of the Movement occurred with the dissolution of "The Black Child Placed In Crisis Conference"; perhaps it did outlive its purpose. But the idea was to establish such an entity (this was before my time)...to be something that served as a catalyst to make other things happen. When... people started wearing African garb, when the Ancestors' Day piece caught on and the idea that academic achievement in the White world and Black achievement could be legitimized as coexisting...We want black folks to go to school, but it is more of a European dominated concept of school, rather than looking at it as a cultural force, not a segregationist force, but a cultural force, like the Jews who can live in both worlds. And they could be a secular Jew, but with some trace, some identity with their ancient heritage, knowing who they are, where they came from. We have lost that. We were almost there during the Civil Rights period, but we didn't quite connect, didn't quite have all the pieces

I: To what extent would you say that race, in terms of how the District was managed internally and influenced externally, to what extent, would you say that race played a part in that?

R: You mean by the managers themselves or by externals?

I: I'm sure then as now, that there were forces or shall we say, opinions, on the significance of African Centered Education. Do you recall or would you say that those influences slowed you up? It certainly didn't stop you. I'm just interested in were there any aspects of race that you can recall either now or then that you would point out as something that Blacks in their agency in determining what is going to happen next in education should look at?

R: I had a conversation with Coleman Young [long-time Mayor of Detroit]. I said to him one day--he was still mayor and I was Chairman of the County Commission in Wayne County I said, "Mayor Young, it seems to me it would make sense if you, as the Mayor, took over education." He said, "You are right, but I'm too far along now. I'm about to make my exit at this point." He said, "Were I a younger man, I would take on that fight. I would take it on without any regrets. I would take it head on, but it is too late for me at this point."

I: So I would interpret that as gaining greater control, Detroit playing a better or a bigger part in what Detroit did and how Detroit did it.

R: Yeah, I think.

I: From the Mayor's perspective that was seen as very powerful?

R: Yeah, I think that since then though that there are other forces that Detroit is no longer [situated for this kind of control from the Mayor's office] that was Camelot which is a non-African Centered comparison, but it was. But it does not exist any more. I mean, the water system he [Mayor Coleman Young] fought to keep the water system...Now that's independent and an issue, the high unemployment, the middle-class, the Black middle-class [in the City] is in rapid decline. During his administration, it was the Black middle-

class of his generation that kept him in office, voted him in office, my parents' generation. They went to school with him, knew him, he was progressive; always a rebel. He was Paul Robeson's bodyguard. I met Paul Robeson when I was fourteen, in my godmother's home. So there is a rich cultural history of African Centered concepts that were not announced or pronounced [until] Coleman was elected. Those factors do not exist [today] Aisha Shule is an African Centered charter school. There aren't many. Originally that was part of the thinking, that some of the charter schools would also become African Centered. But what the charter school movement has turned out to be is a movement impacted by outside influences; primarily Black and White management companies dominate the charter school movement. So...the whole idea of African Centered Education is in decline. We have one here in the Highland Park School District that we have chartered since I've been here, the George Washington Carver Charter School. But by and large, the African Centered influence has waned.

The other factor that's different now is No Child Left Behind that has set some very specific standards and a State mandated curriculum. I'm not necessarily opposed although I think some of the things in No Child Left Behind should be abolished. I don't see that they are contributing anything to the excellence of urban education. Now we have a new law that mandates a curriculum for high schools. But there is no place in that curriculum for African Centered Education. So, the forces are already wiping out the slate.

I: Right, which is sort of strange given some of the reports that have been generated from No Child Left Behind; in March of last year they gave particular credit to single sex education, culturally-based education...and it just seems it is all right for other cultures to

address males and other issues. But Detroit did it in the late '80's, early '90's, and we were called everything from "crazy" to "uneducated" about what was good for us and our children. And then here comes NCLB, toward the end of the race, so-to-speak, and now they are declaring that what we were doing was technically right, but we don't get the credit for it.

R: Yeah, Black folks have never gotten credit. That's the purpose of African Centered Education, to establish a heritage...a cultural heritage just knowing who you are and where you came from, I mean your ancestry, being proud of who you are. Part of the problem with the kids here in Detroit, is that they don't know who they are. They have no heritage. They don't know who their grandparents were or where they came from or what they did. Unless you have some link to the past, you will have no link to the future, you will live in the here and now. Some of that's being viewed by our rap artists who are making a ton of money, but it is like putting your hand in a glass of water and removing it and there will come a time...as if they were never there. Because they have not established wealth or heritage of who they are and where they are going. I saw it hit me Friday. I took my son to my Godmother's birthday. Erma Henderson turned 90, and I had my grandson with me; he is six years old but likes sports. It was at Cobo Hall, and I took him to look at the Wall of Fame. So I said, "This is Joe Louis; he was your great, great, great grandmother's paperboy. Do you understand that?" He said, " Oh yeah, I got it. I mean I read about him." We talked about some of the other athletes that he knew. But he knew more White athletes than Black ones. Like Lorenzo Wright and some of the others out there. I had to tell him that Lorenzo Wright, my track coach. You do linkages and that's the whole purpose of family reunions. The only vestige that we have left of that

whole African Centered Education Movement is in the movement of family reunions. You still see that, and it's encouraging, but that's all that's left. And then you can only go back so far, because you can't get "African" from a family reunion. You can only go back to maybe, in my generation, a great, great grandparent who was a slave. So from that standpoint, I think that we are trying to integrate into the culture, but still have a form of our separate identity. But the identity isn't always positive like it was maybe in the '90's or the '80's when there was a revival of African Centered Education.

I: What do you see for Detroit's future in terms of education? What would you forecast for Detroit Public Schools' future?

R: Well, I think that the public schools, unfortunately, are in rapid decline. I say "unfortunately" because five generations of my family attended the Detroit Public Schools, from my great-grandmother to my grandson. It has...to do with the environment, with the fact that there are no jobs here. This becomes the new Mississippi and new Georgia. There are families now who are saying that their children are better off out of here, just as my grandmother said that my father would be better off leaving a place called Milledgeville, Georgia and coming to Detroit as a beacon of hope. Detroit is no longer seen as a beacon of hope and that's very, very unfortunate. Because of the economic environment that we find ourselves in people are leaving. Jobs are not here. The crime rate continues to hold its own. That's the problem that I see with the Detroit Public Schools. It is not the Detroit Public Schools, it is a period of history, and it is a period of time. The charter school is given the chance and at some point there is going to be a break away and we are going to have two systems of education. I'm not sure which one is going to prevail. But you've got two species out there. And one is going to

dominate. Over the next year or two Detroit will lose its first-class status as the only first-class school district. It will look in its organization very much like Highland Park. Which has been this island inside of Detroit, but it was always a super island. I mean the money was here. And there was much more money here than there was in Detroit, but now, you look around and you can see what has happened in Highland Park. Detroit never had the wealth that was available here. I mean each school here had a swimming pool, still has one. There were underground passages so the children never had to come in contact with the traffic. You could go under the streets and cross the street. You had a tax base that was almost unbelievable. So you had all of the amenities of the school district with a lot of money, that's no longer here. We are all struggling because of the economy. And so what faces Detroit is that the decline and the fall of an urban school district will continue. Not necessarily of its own making. If you believe that, then you believe the newspapers, which says, that Black people can't control anything. I don't subscribe to that, but I think there are certain environmental conditions that are at war [which] you never read about in the newspaper.

We have defied our own cultural heritage. We could have used that cultural heritage; I believe, to improve our educational face and our achievement levels, a sense of pride. But if I'm not anything and your daddy was nothing and your granddaddy you don't even know his name, then how do you identify, how are you going to move forward? So you continue to have the haves and the have-nots, even among Black people. Those who can get out will do well, as they did in the Old South...Now their grandchildren don't know anything about a job at Chryslers or Ford or General Motors.

They'll never retire and have a pension or healthcare. So the paradigm is going to shift dramatically for my children's generation and my grandchildren's generation.

Mr. Kwame Kenyatta

Every movement or revolution requires unique individuals. These individuals are those who are able to step outside the current temporal context and conceptualize the unique moment in time and place in ways that inform and provide guidance. Having paid close attention to the stellar community service and politically minded career of Kwame Kenyatta, former member of the Detroit School Board, I have, over the years, always held the opinion that he was an informed "Brotha" with a genuine concern for the improvement of life for Black people. My interview with him in July of 2007 only solidified my opinion. During this interview with the now Detroit City Councilman, Mr. Kenyatta crystallized what I feel to be the true philosophy, purpose and spirit of the African Centered Educational Movement. While not a member of the Male Academy Task Force, Kenyatta holds a unique opinion about Detroit citizens, and educators in their endeavor to bring ACE to Detroit Public Schools. As well, his view helps to explain why both Black and White people responded negatively to the ACE initiative in Detroit.

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I: What were the actual events, concerns or problems that caused the Male Academy Task Force to be formed? Describe the atmosphere in both the City and the School District.

R: One of the things we do is we have these phenomena that change history and in some cases, here in Detroit, we never document it. So, this is good to have you sit down and document this in your dissertation. I think the forerunner to this were the male conferences that Dr. Clifford Watson basically spearheaded. I know I attended one at Brooks Middle School back in the early '90's. I believe it was before I was even on the

Board of Education, Hakai Madhubuti and I believe, Safisha Madhubuti, and a number of other prominent men around the country were invited, as well as locals, to discuss the condition and the future plight of Black males, particularly in the educational system. Jawanza Kunjufu had already written *Conspiracy to Destroy Black Boys*, and I believe Dr. Watson and other educators were seeing some of the same trends here in the City of Detroit. And basically what he was trying to do is pull together some of the best practices of solving some of the issues and problems that people were facing with young Black males, not only in the school environment, but also in the home and community environment. It was Black women, quite frankly, who said, "Hey we need some help. We need some support in trying to raise these young Black males. The fathers are not home. In many cases they are either locked up or they are somewhere else. They have other alternative lifestyles and they are not actually engaged in raising these children." So, there was some examination of that, looking at the prison environment, looking at the overall justice system and how Black males are entangled in that system. And then we begin to talk about, well how do we reverse that? If the Black male is not in the home, he is not in the church and in some cases, not even in the school; how do we find these young men. Most of all, we don't find them in church. We find them in one or two places, either in the streets or in the schools because they are mandated to be in school and when they are not there, they are in the street. So, how do we deal with them at our front door, as educators? And from those conferences, the call for the Task Force was set u And then a call for the male academies was put forth. Now, this was not a new call. Nor is it a new phenomenon. Everyone knows that in African society, you have, if not necessarily "male academies," you have rights of passage training programs where at a

certain age, young boys and young females are taken aside by the older men or women within the community and they are given the tools of how to become a man or woman. And that has been absent in our community. So the school was being tagged here as one of the vehicles by which to institute that type of upbringing and that type of philosophy in education. So, I think that was a major part of the climate that existed then and in some cases, it exists now. When we look at who is addressing the problem of young Black males in our communities and in our schools, unfortunately the same problems exist.

I: Were there any types of ideological or philosophical differences among the members that presented problems for the group in achieving its goals of improving education for Black children? Were there any philosophical or ideological differences that the Task Force, as a whole, had to get over in order to push to the eventual implementation of the African Centered schools?

R: Well, clearly you had, I think, several different philosophical approaches. One was strictly educational. Another one was, in fact, you know, a political or ideological approach to it from either the Black Nationalist or Pan-Africanist perspective, but in many cases, they were the same. Because you had educators like Dr. Watson who was educated at the same time, came out of that same environment, but was respected because he had his credentials, he understood what it takes to do professional training in order to get measurable results from what you put into the classrooms of this young person. Not just theory, as we set some Black figures up in a classroom and this is going to be the outcome of that, but more so that if we take this child in his holistic perspective and surrounding and kind of isolate that to some extent in terms of what we put in, then what we get out we'll be able to measure and what we get out will make a substantial

difference in his life and in the community as it relates to that. So, I think we got over that. I think that we followed the direction of the educators who were in the lead on this because they were involved in the school system.

I: How were the different components of the movement conceptualized, i.e., all male and single sex? Were there any considerations given to other paradigms to address these issues?

R: Well, now I think we had come to an overall conclusion. See, there are two things here. One, of course, African Centered Education; male and female academies came out of that. But then there is also an overall African Centered Education that addresses both of them, as well as some of the overall problems that exist within society itself. A number of people will say, "Well all of that started before Detroit." And, of course, a lot of things started before that time. And yes, some of this did start in Portland [Oregon]. You have the Portland Essays, you have people doing some things in Milwaukee, and you had the Curriculum of Inclusion I think there in New York. You had what was called Afro Centered Infusion coming out of Atlanta. What happened is that through Dr. Kay Lovelace's work and the African Child Placed in Crisis Conference, we took in consideration all of those approaches, all of those theories, and in many cases, we began to implement them where others were not able to. For instance, in Philadelphia, Molefi Asante who is considered the father of Afrocentricity, but yet in the Philadelphia School System, there was no African Centered Education. At Temple University there was no African Centered Education [in the Teacher Education area]. So we took some of his theory, as well as some from others, and through the resolution that was offered here in the Detroit Public School System, we actually then began to codify [the theories and

issues]. We began to implement those theories that other folks just talked about. Detroit became one of the first places that began to implement that [ACE]; it became a part of the curriculum in terms of choosing the books, how classrooms were set up, how the male and female academies came about. Even if they were not all male or all female, there were still means and ways [whereby] we were able to implement that educational forum. So there were other approaches, other paradigms that were discussed, but we found that this was the best paradigm in order to get the best results for the problems that we are facing and that still face the African American community today.

I: Research reports from that period highlight major differences of opinions, for instance, from the CIBI organization, about the relevance of African Centered Education in a public school environment.

R: Well, there are two levels. In my guide for implementing the African Centered Education Movement, I wrote about African Centered Education in an independent environment, or a "liberated zone," as well as African Centered Education in a "contested zone." The contested zone is inside the public school system. You can't do everything that you want to do, so you are contesting for the hearts, minds and souls of those students, whereas in a liberated zone, the students are there because their parents want them to be there. The teachers are there because they want to be there and you are freer to implement this type of curriculum, whereas in the public school system, you almost got to trick them into it, force them into it and design them into it, so it is the contested zone. And you can only go so far in that. However, and because of that, those in the liberated zones said, "Well, hey, you are going to get a watered down version and we are opposed to it." But those in the contested zones said that if we are serious about educating the

majority of African children, then we have to go where they are. And we have to contest the system that is trying to mis-educate them and give them as much of what we think is going to educate them as we can. And we have to be able to function inside of that, if you are revolutionary, then you have to be about change. And you can't just be in your comfort zone; you have to be uncomfortable in order to bring about a level of permanent comfort. And so, that has been the struggle between those who say they were outside the system versus those who said they work inside the system, to free the people inside. Even when it came to charter schools, those in CIBI said that public African Centered charter schools were unacceptable because they were not independent African Centered schools. And, of course, the real folks were really trying to educate our children, realizing that people were not paying for private education any more because of charters. They can get it free. If we are going to stay alive and continue to promote this level of education, then you are going to have to make that transition.

I: When the original African Centered Education concept was introduced; were there any challenges about the relevance or effectiveness of African Centered Education?

R: Well, it came in actually together. Because when you look at the male academies, they were African Centered male academies and African Centered female academies. They weren't just "male academies." Because if they were just male academies then what was there to distinguish them from any other male academy that existed in other states, even though we didn't have them here? So we understood that if we were going to have these male academies, that the pedagogy had to be different. The design, the paradigm had to be different as well. And so it was African Centered from the very beginning and that's what they were called, African Centered Male Academies. And we had an African

Centered Male Academy Coalition at each of those schools. The parent bodies from each of those schools also formed the African Centered Male-Female Academy Association.

I: Were the politics surrounding the African Centered Education Movement in Detroit germane to its original purpose? Was the Movement about politics or the grass roots civil rights initiatives that attempted to address the major issues of the African American community?

R: I'm going to have to disagree with those who feel that politics were not an important aspect of this Movement. Dr. Carter G. Woodson speaks of this in his book, *The Mis-Education of the Negro.* And what he talks about is that those who try to depoliticize education do the worst job in helping people understand the purpose of education in the first place. See, education at its core is political. The educational institution is set up to preserve, protect and promote the political, economic and social system that created it. So you don't have an educational system that is set up devoid of the political institution that created it in the first place. For instance, this is a capitalist society basically founded on the principles of White supremacy. So, the educational system that we have had problems with all of this time is based on preserving and protecting and promoting capitalism under White supremacy. And so, therefore, that's why you have discrimination in the school system, because it wasn't set up for anybody who was not part of that. It wasn't set up for People of Color. But it was set up to preserve, protect and promote White supremacy and the economic system of capitalism. And the social and political system, whether you call it democracy or not, relates to what was best for those who founded the system. So when we began to talk about African Centered Education to educate children, we were

basically talking about depoliticizing them from the educational system that has them more or less preserving and protecting somebody else's interest versus their own. That is why folks got scared because they did see it as being political and they thought that the best way to say that this is too political, was by conflating race with politics, but in reality, it was no more political than the system that it was victim of. It is political and the folks who set up this system understand the politics of it. Everything about education is political in terms of how many textbooks you get in the classroom, in terms of how many children are in the classroom, in terms of how many chairs are in the classroom, in terms of how much the teacher is going to get paid, the benefits--all of that is political. So how do you depoliticize it? Carter G. Woodson spoke to it. Also in the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo's Freire's book, it talks about the politics of education and how when they began to talk about education devoid of politics, that's when it is most political. And I believe Amos Wilson also in one of his books talks about politics in education. So I think that is a discussion we truly need to have and understand because when we try to run from that, we get caught up in the web that what we are seeking is to politicize this thing. No. We are seeking to depoliticize it from its Eurocentric perspective.

I: Why do you feel support for African Centered Education in Detroit Public Schools declined in the mid '90's? What do you believe were the reasons for this decline? And provide some of your insight as to what we need to do.

R : It is hard to sustain a movement when it is individually driven and not organizationally driven. Dr. Watson died; I think that had a great impact. He was a great figure; he got this thing rolling in Detroit. And some of those people who came behind him have not carried the ball in those institutions, including inside Malcolm X Academy,

Paul Robeson Academy and Marcus Garvey Academy. Acknowledging the limits of the human condition and individuals, we have to go beyond individuals. That's why it can't be an individual movement; you have to have a movement of people and an organization so that when the individual moves on, the next person moves into position. It is like, the "spook who sat by the door." He said what happens if the head is chopped off. He said you train two steps ahead of yourself so that the operational person becomes the next person in charge. And then the next person in charge becomes the next person in charge and you move from there. Who was trained to replace Dr. Watson? Not who was next according to the system, but who was trained to replace him? You see what I'm saying? I was no longer on the Board of Education. So there was no support at that level. Dahia was no longer the head of African Centered Education. They eliminated the position. And so without those individuals in place and without an organization in place that drove that, the system was back in charge. The system was back in control of itself and whether the people understood it, or knew it, or not, you had a resolution that was there only on the books. And not until you got some people who are in place, who said we recommit ourselves [can there be a resurgence of ACE]. Even those who said they recommit themselves don't know what they recommitted themselves to. They haven't even read the resolution. And if they recommit themselves, they have to put the organization in place with the people in place in order to get it done. And I'm not sure if that has been done. Now you have a new Superintendent. Is she committed to African Centered Education? Everything I have seen and heard is no. And if she is not committed to it that means she is not going to put resources into it or people in charge of it and, therefore, it is not going to go anywhere again except in individual classrooms. There are classrooms in the City

where it is being taught greatly, but that's not systematic. We have got to be systematic, and that becomes the problem. In the absence of serious revolution, revolutionary struggle, what we get is isolated scrimmages here and there. You got an isolated scrimmage going on here at the Council level. Isolated scrimmages going on at School Board level, isolated scrimmages going on inside of the School System itself. And so without this movement in place and without it being attached to something, then what you have is a minimum effect that Dr. Kay Lovelace talked about, because the community is not driving it. Nobody is standing up at the meeting saying, " I want African Centered Education. I want my child to come out looking seven generations ahead of himself, knowing seven, eight different languages, knowing how to operate within the world. That is not happening and because that demand is not there, it is not being met.

Dr. Eddie Green

Meeting the needs of children has always been the central focus of the African Centered Education Movement. The dismal failure of both the school system and the local society proved to be the primary barriers to meeting the educational needs of Black children in Detroit. Various explanatory theories have been put forth about how and why things deteriorated at specific periods in the history of Detroit and about the role Black people played in the corrective measures that were taken. Historical records are often embellished with theories and notions about particular groups or individuals that negate narratives crucial for providing counter information and alternative perspectives.

On July 8, 2007 I interviewed Dr. Eddie Green, currently Director of the Upward Bound Program for Cranbrook Kingswood in Birmingham, Michigan. He was the Superintendent of Detroit Public Schools from 1997 through 1999. Having served as an Area Superintendent, Dr. Green provides one of the counter narratives on Detroit that is all but absent from the many analyses of DPS and its role in providing education for Black children. While many are familiar with the more current history of DPS, beginning in 1999 with the State takeover of the District, the truth about Detroit before the takeover is seldom discussed. However, it was this educational environment that supported African Centered schools during the ACE Movement's most successful period.

During the 1998 – 1999 school year, Detroit Public Schools were financially solvent with multi-million dollar rainy day funds and a balanced budget. Despite the turbulent times of the late 1980's and early 1990's, academic achievement had improved, and test scores were on the rise by comparison to both State and National norms. Dr.

Green offers a significant viewpoint about political, private and financial interests that did not have the interests of Detroit's children at heart.

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R: Prior to the takeover I think we made it clear that we were not a failing district as we were told by the State Department [of Education]. We proved it by comparing our success with the success of others in the State of Michigan. And clearly by our scores and by the money we had, we were not a failing district. It was very clear to me that there is no way you could characterize Detroit Public Schools as a failing school district. And that is well documented.

I: What was the State's reaction when Detroit passed a $1.5 billion bond initiative, I believe, in 1994? What was the status of that bond initiative during the years you were Superintendent?

R: There was also proof that schools were being worked on by Facilities. Schools were being worked on because what we were doing under Dr. Snead [Former Superintendent of Detroit Public Schools 1993-1996], when we passed the bond initiative, while I was Area Superintendent, we had each school and each school community prepare a list of needs for each one of the schools in the area. And each school did have something wrong with it that needed repairing. That money was to have been used to make those repairs in each school. That is not how the money was ultimately spent, but that's what was planned at the time, to pay for the things that each school and its community had found to be in disrepair and needed some work. There were windows that needed replacement; there were just a lot of things wrong with each one of the buildings that were in use. And within each area, I mean schools were full and being used.

I: Given that Detroit was not a failing district at the time of the State takeover, what was the response from City and State officials to the situation in Detroit?

R: The officials seemed to have had their marching orders that the District was to be taken over. And nothing you produce to prove that it didn't need to be [taken over] mattered. Nothing we produced mattered.

I: So it seems that there was a plan already in motion.

R: In motion for the District to be taken over. New Detroit was the organization used to move it.

I: Do you recall any of what was cited and the facts that were present? What did New Detroit cite as the problem with the District?

R: New Detroit had historically been doing a report on the District. Their reports should be well documented too in some places. And the reports were never positive, there was something wrong with everything and their data was not always the same as the School District's. I don't know where they got it from, but it did not always mesh. Their data seemed to have a belief system behind them. They could use public relations to make people believe that this was the true statement about the school system. But I don't think the people in the community ever really wanted the take over. But it happened and I don't believe there was ever a reason to do it, except the politics...that wanted it done. I could see the things that were declining in the City that ultimately did get replaced by the School System or the funds from the School System ultimately did replace them, like the sale of the DPS school central building on Warren and Woodward to Wayne State University. A building that was owned and paid for was sold, which has never made a whole lot of sense to me and would not be something that I would have authorized as the

Superintendent. But maybe that's one of the reasons why I'm not there. The other thing is the movement [Detroit Public Schools central offices] to the Fisher Building; a lot of lawyers and doctors had moved out of the Fisher Building and left the City. That space needed to be rented, and so DPS central offices moved there. You could see the fallout. The things that it did, the General Motors Building leaving and going downtown, but that was a massive structure on Grand Boulevard, the school system is in there too. [DPS occupied offices in the Fisher Building, New Center, and Albert Kahn buildings as a result of the move from Warren and Woodward]

I: Could you please give your recollection--and you've already said that you weren't directly involved--but could you give your recollection of the events within the District around the African Centered Education Movement during your years as Superintendent?. Were you familiar with many of the initiatives at that point? I believe African Centered schools had been in place some five or six years at that point. Were there any incidents and/or situations that you dealt with as Superintendent pertaining to ACE in the schools?

R: The African Centered schools was also something that's well documented through Board presentations, very effective presentations by principals of the schools, Marcus Garvey, Paul Robeson, Malcolm X, really good presentations before the Board of Education. I believe that these presentations had really great support from the Board. who really believed that these were good initiatives for a school district like ours. But it didn't have the support of the unions or the ACLU. Those organizations were not supportive of that kind of thing [ACE]. But the information certainly is good and has now proven to be a thing to do. It was done here at Cranbrook. There has always been a boys' middle school and a girls' middle school, and I think the thought of that did not

come from here, but it was a good thing for African American children who needed that kind of leadership and that kind of foundation at that time in their lives. But with government funding and Title I and Title IX--all of the different regulations and requirements for the funding came into play, and the Board's current plans just couldn't be allowed.

I: So, would you say that there was also a pre-existent plan, similar to actions taken by individuals in the takeover of the District? That no matter how well African Centered schools did, they wouldn't be recognized or they wouldn't be given their just due for effectiveness within DPS?

R: Well that's correct. Yes, I would say, I really would say that. That's not what those organizations [ACLU, unions] wanted for the Detroit Public Schools.

I: Were you aware of any opposition [to ACE] within the District? You spoke about the Board of Education being supportive of it.

R: I really felt that the Board was supportive as the principals of those schools presented the information to them. But every time there was a presentation, there was fallout from the ACLU.

I: I think the National Organization of Women were also staunch opponents.

R: They probably were.

R: If I remember correctly, when the schools did form, there were still girls involved. So they did form, but not according to the original plan. There may have been a higher number of boys, but there were girls involved.

I: Could you give me your professional opinion about how the current perception of Detroit Public Schools has come to be what it is? Are there any particular entities, be

they political, media, community that you would identify as being most responsible for the negative perception of the Detroit Public Schools?

R: Well, I really believe that the dissolution of the areas was a grave mistake. ["Areas" divided DPS into sections or Areas A-F in which where administrators and central staff were assigned to handle specific concerns for those school in that immediate community] Because the areas were well tuned into the needs of the different communities as they existed in the Detroit Public Schools. They seemed to have had the wherewithal to create a sense of community for the District. And I think it lost that when they were dissolved. That's really how the bond initiative was passed. Because the areas were able to make the different communities understand why the bond was needed for the schools. And because they were so effective in doing it, I believe that that's another reason why they had to be dissolved. They came to be dissolved after the takeover. It was sort of a mandate of the Reform Board; that was one of the things they wanted changed. They did not want the areas involved. They wanted the superintendent to have complete control of the District.

I: Right, thus the creation of the position that ultimately Dr. Burnley wound up in.

R: Exactly and not with these areas which I believe created a foundation of support by building a sense of community. I believe that a school system, any school system, is a microcosm of its community. It cannot be any better than its community, and without the areas it lost that sense of community. You could build anything with a strong sense of community. But I don't think we have been operating from a strong sense of community.

I: For the sake of accuracy about the history of Detroit Public Schools, after the takeover, what was your position? What eventually happened? Did you leave Detroit Public Schools or was there a dismissal of any sort?

R: No, I wasn't dismissed. I retired.

I: Okay, you retired. I wanted to get that accurate because there are some different accounts about how people left and/or transitioned out of the District and so I wanted to make sure that I put that correctly.

R: Well, who would have dismissed the Superintendent? We had the Reform Board, but they didn't dismiss me. They brought in Adamany, and I retired. I didn't work with him at all. I retired before he came. So I don't know what accounts that may have been given, but no, no one spoke to me about leaving the District. I simply retired on my own after thirty-four years.

I: Thirty-four years in the District. Okay. Do you recall the number of students during or just before you left Detroit? What was the accurate student population account? Did we still have over 200,000 students at that particular time?

R: There were about 273,000 kids, approximately, and we were providing equal access to all of the buildings. We had designs planned for every building in the school system. Every building needed something that was being used and we had a plan for working on every building and its use. And that plan was in motion by Facilities. That plan was in motion to spend that money, and I took the press, the media, on a tour myself to show them that work was being done, because every day there was something in the paper about no work being done. I took them to the different sites where work was being done. And if they wanted to be truthful, they could then write about it. I didn't see anything. Everybody was cooperating with dismantling the School System.

I: Dismantling--that seemed to be the overall plan for the District. Is there any other information you would like to give in terms of the history of the Detroit Public Schools,

not only during this period, but your perceptions of where the District has come from and where it is now?

R: What I regret most is that the cornerstones were never fully realized in the whole development of making the learner a whole person. And there again, lies the problem the community was not utilized in developing a child into whole person. And that's when it would take the village. If people really wanted to make the learner whole, I don't believe that still is being done. But I think that it can be done. The culture has changed, this whole culture of disrespect that's written about in *Ebony* magazine that does exist. That's very real. I'm even noticing it in this program here; we are having to do a lot of things to kids and this grant that we are working with is basically for Detroit Public Schools. These are Detroit Public School children here at Cranbrook. Seventy-five percent of them are Detroit and Pontiac kids. [75% of the 2006-2007 Upward Bound Program and Cranbrook Kingswood were students from the Detroit and Pontiac areas] And I see it every day. They are born into this culture of disrespect and don't know any better, don't know anything about the history of who we are, as these [African Centered] schools would have taught them. The schools you are talking about, Malcolm X, Paul Robeson, Marcus Garvey, those schools would have taught them who they are. They would have known who they were prior to coming here or anywhere else in the world. They would definitely know who they are. But there was a reason for them not knowing, and all of this, I think, was part of a bigger plan than we are talking about.

I: You've already touched a little bit on what my next question was going to be in terms of the whole child concept. As I said you were credited for bringing that concept into alignment with perspectives within the Detroit Public Schools. Did that start during your

time as Deputy Superintendent for Educational Services, or was that something that became an initiative during your Superintendency?

R: I started thinking about it while I was Deputy Superintendent for Educational Services, but I brought it to light as the cornerstone for all schools when I became Superintendent. It was one of four different cornerstones that we were addressing. Actually there were five different cornerstones that we were addressing because sometimes I failed to include site-based management. But that was one of them.

I: Okay.

R: Site based management, exit skills that the union fought to the point of disillusion, you know. And now today the State Department [of Education] is talking about introducing exit skills for all schools. But we thought of that a long time ago. And the records you've seen can show we had developed exit skills, and we had begun to implement those exit skills in schools. But the cornerstone that I think was most meaningful was the resource coordinating teams, which would have been directed to making the learner whole. See, I believe that in a city filled with abandoned buildings and so many places where youngsters come to school afraid to be there. It is dark in the mornings when they get to school. And we need to provide some degree of protection for them. These kids are scared to death. But they are taught to be stronger than they need to be at that age. They are just young kids. They are taught to be stronger, and to show any signs of fear would be a weakness. And if they show any sign of weakness, they could easily be preyed upon. You don't know how they feel when they get to school. I gave the example one time about being new to the City, and living where I was, I had to drive on three different expressways to get there. And by the time I got to Southeastern High School, way on the

East Side, I was kind of out of breath. And to have a first hour class, I don't think I was ready for a first hour class. I needed a breather before I got up to teach. I sort of equated that to a child walking to school and passing five abandoned buildings and how out of breathe he or she would be. A girl being abducted into one of these buildings, being raped--that could happen. And the fear they would have. I think the learner has to be made whole. You can't just walk into a building and go to algebra and expect perfection, expect the kid to be ready to learn that. There has to be a team of people ready to address those concerns that children have before they could be expected to perform. There are still so many kids in our schools that are in need of some kind of support before they can do algebra. And it is not just the abandoned buildings; I mean so many kids whose mother's boyfriends beat them silly while they [the kids] watched. They watch that happen before leaving home and can't do anything about it. That kind of thing needs to be addressed. A learner cannot learn unless he is a whole person.

I: Were there any specific parts of the whole child concept that were particularly directed at the African American male? At this particular time in history, African American males were statistically catching hell.

R: It [the whole child concept] would impact all children. The whole design of this resource coordinating team was to impact any child and every child. We were putting together the school psychologist in every school, the social worker, the counselors and teachers and parents working together in teams where each would know what the other is doing to embrace a child who had any kind of thing that was on his mind, bothering him.

I: Now was the whole child concept and structure one that pre-existed, or was this something that came about because of--

R: This was one of the cornerstones that were implemented during my administration. I don't know what pre-existed; I guess maybe some schools may have had something similar. I know that psychologists in the District and social workers were housed at one time in the Longfellow Building, all in one place. But they only worked with special education children. I moved them out of the Longfellow Building into individual schools, and my work was going to be that every school had its own psychologist because of the needs of children. And every school could benefit from that, not just the special ed. child.

I: Do any remnants of that structure still exist in Detroit Public Schools?

R: Well I certainly hope so, and I would applaud any principal who carried that concept on. I also believed that we should have site based management, that the principal should be the person in charge of that building. He should manage his own money, and if you are managing your own money, you don't have to wait for somebody to give you something to do what you know you must do and what you know your kids need. And if you have the right people in every building, then you can trust that the job gets done.

Reflections

Interviews presented here are intended to contribute to the broadening of the contextualization of the role Black people in the United States played in the development of their educational lineage. They are intended to counter the image of Black people being indoctrinated into history as victims or causalities of ignorance or incompetence, in contrast to Blacks being agents of their educational providence. I contend that there is no other historical account with a greater need for conceptual, and contextual correctness than the history of Black people in the United States. It is my informed opinion that part of the problem in Black people receiving their "democratic" just rewards, is the continued distortion of their historical experiences. These interviews at best counter those distortions, and at the very least chronicle the lived experience of Black people who played significant roles during major educational and socio-economic changes in Detroit. The need for historical correctness is twofold, on the one hand it ends the silence that exist within the academy on contemporary origins of divergent educational ideologies presenting challenges to the dominant hegemonies concerning Black people. On the other hand by correcting distortions, it presents a positive historical record to be analyzed and possibly have an impact on the education future generations of Black children.

Both Kenyatta and Lovelace-Taylor reveal the initial frustrations and challenges felt by Blacks in confronting the educational disparities between Black and White children during this period. They are completely honest in acknowledging that the challenge to Black children's education came from both sides of the spectrum. Applying Kenyatta's paradigm of "liberated" and "contested" zones speaks not only the African Centered Educational Movement, but also to the historical and contemporary experiences

of Black people since their introduction into the experiment of American democracy. Confinement within the many zones known as the American social order has been a primary hindrance the development of Black people both national and local. Juxtaposing the zones paradigm onto the ACE movement in Detroit Public Schools, the use of African Centered Education, moved the district into a contested zone by attempting to break away from the traditional application of educational pedagogy in a public school district. Contestation of this action was an expected reaction to the violation of hegemony. These interviews place those reactions in perspective when contrasting actual events and public perceptions of what DPS was trying to accomplish.

These interviews identify the frustrations associated with socio-economic decay coupled with academic failure that preceded the contestation period. Mr. Kenyatta's description of the zones perfectly outlines the point that Detroit Public Schools as it had historically existed until this point would never have been in a position to liberate itself from the problems it faced. A catalyst was needed for Detroit to redefine itself to meet its challenges, recognizing the fact that Detroit Public Schools was where the masses of students needing intervention were enrolled as well as public entity charged with educating those students. The ability of certain social, racial, and political groups to will political and economic influenced restricted movement between zones. Therefore progress and or movement between zones has historically been determined by the success of these groups. While this type of social conflict is not unique to Detroit, the outcomes from these conflicts and the impact on the city are better defined due to Detroit's distinct racial composition.

What makes Detroit contestation of traditional educational hegemony relevant, is that even with the limited application of ACE it proved to have significant effects in educational achievement of Black children than did the full application of traditional education methods. This impact on education was completely ignored in the fight to maintain the status quo. While the system itself could not be liberated, it could in fact liberate its students to break the cycle of failure and incompetence that had become commonplace. It was the prospect of liberated minded Black students entering the educational institutions of America that contrasted with what had become the expected or normalized role for African Americans in the United States and therefore had to be prevented.

Fighting against the change in socially accepted hegemony proved much easier for certain White dominated groups, than confronting the realities of how traditional education had failed Black children for decades. Organizations such as NOW and AFLCIO would situate themselves on the front lines of the fight to maintain status quo. Dr. Cain's interview suggest that the political motives on the part of the Michigan's governor and other politicians were a vain attempt to identify the problems of the African American children in exchange for support from Black voters. His interview supports historical facts that suggest that the well being and social advancement of Black people is very rarely at the heart of any political, or judicial initiatives in the United States. By necessity, the interest (social, political, economic) of the dominant group i.e. Whites have always had to coincide with the interest of Black people.

The interview with Dr. Eddie Green describes how despite false and misleading perceptions, student achievement was taking place and progress was being made in

Detroit Public Schools. Dr. Carter gave testimony to the ingenuity and creativity that was present, and the constant competition between politics and progress. Dr. Lovelace properly places responsibility for children where it belonged and that was with the district and the citizens of Detroit. The one question Dr. Lovelace poses that still resounds today is what's next? In her own words: "I can take care of that myself. I don't need to bury the N word and all that kind of stuff. I need to find out what's going to happen to the education of our children?"

CHAPTER SEVEN
CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

> "Philosophers have long conceded, that every man has two educators: 'that which is given to him, and the other that which he gives himself. Of the two kinds the latter is by far the more desirable. Indeed all that is most worthy in man he must work out and conquer for himself. It is that which constitutes our real and best nourishment. What we are merely taught seldom nourishes the mind like that which we teach ourselves" (Woodson, 1934).

Carter G. Woodson speaks to the essence of this research, for far too long the education of Black people in the United States has been one given too them rather than created for and by themselves. Throughout their history in the United States, Blacks have consistently, sustained their belief in the value of education and maintained their quest to develop a system of delivery that would impact and improve the quality of life for future generations. The African Centered School Movement within Detroit Public Schools was the continuation of a long struggle to challenge educational hegemony and introduce new ideological perceptions on the substance and quality of education for those who were never intended to benefit from it.

From the vantage point of the Black American Experience, this study sought to investigate and analyze the history of African Centered Education (ACE) in the Detroit Public Schools (DPS). The goal of the study was to deconstruct the material conditions and social and educational factors that influenced school and community officials in Detroit to seek out ACE as an alternative educational paradigm for Detroit's children and youth. The implementation of ACE can be explained as a counter response to years of

educational neglect by a system that had been largely imposed on Black youth and other children of color in Detroit. In addition to establishing the historical record of ACE, the study provided an analysis of that record and its meaning not only for Black people in Detroit but also, by implication, for Blacks throughout the Nation. In Detroit and Black communities throughout the U.S., educational advancement is simultaneously linked to the journey of Black individuals for equality and opportunity and the struggle of the group for self-determination.

Combining historical artifacts and documents with the narrative voices of struggle for ACE in Detroit, this study contextualized the successes and failures of this reform movement. The study presented Black and White liberal and conservative discourses, which reflect the impact of race, class and politics in the struggle to educate Detroit's Black children. It was a struggle that began with the arrival of significant numbers of Blacks to Detroit in search of work. Unexpected was the reaction of the automotive industry, which utilized Black labor to satisfy its economic interest, resulting in the creation of a middle class way of life for Black migrants and successive generations (Darden, Hill, Thomas, Thomas, 1987). Covert were Whites in the actions taken to address their dissatisfaction with this massive wave of Black migration. Unable to manipulate situations through local politics, Whites imposed their interest through restrictive hiring practices in the work place and restrictive Land Covenants designed to control where Blacks lived, to keep them circumscribed within certain borders separate from the White population. In so doing, the Detroit Public Schools would also remain racially segregated.

The development of DPS has been stunted by racist and segregationist ideologies. Racist were the actions taken by Whites to control the District through voting patterns and through support of decentralization in order to maintain segregation. White supremacist ideology gave Whites a sense of entitlement to Detroit's educational resources, and when they could no longer dominate, they abandoned the schools and the City. And when desegregationist policies threatened to neutralize the effect of "White flight," they sought refuge in the judicial system (i.e., *Milliken v. Bradley).*

Through structural racism whites have gone, and continue to go, to great time and expense to maintain control of Black people. The history of the Detroit Public School System is but a small piece of a much larger national agenda. The educational crisis in Detroit is not unlike that of other large urban school districts that experience a decrease in educational and fiscal resources simultaneously with an increase in racially motivated economic and political White interests, which prevent that school district from accomplishing its primary educational objective (Walters, 2003). The actions of Whites in the history of the Detroit Public School System were purposeful and deliberately designed to maintain a segregationist racist legacy aimed at the continued promotion of White supremacy. In most cases the actions of Blacks (successful or not) were a direct counter response to attempts by Whites to destroy Black progress and prevent Blacks from setting their own social, political—and educational--agenda. Perhaps Thomas Jefferson was correct when he theorized about the future of Africans (Blacks) in this country, he expressed that they should be free, but he was certain that the two races, equally free in the realms of rights, economics, class status and education, cannot live together in the same government (Marable, 2002).

Following Dr. Manning Marable's paradigm in his analysis of "How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America," I contend that the ideology of capitalism and White supremacy have underdeveloped the education of Blacks in the United States. According to Marable, "underdevelopment is not the absence of development; it is the inevitable product of an oppressed population's integration into the world market economy and political system." (2000, p.7). The message of the American Educational System is strong and clear. Education designed to uplift and encourage children to participate and become productive members of American society was never meant to include Black children. The educational underdevelopment of Blacks has resulted in a system structured to exclude on the basis of race and class by denial of knowledge and access to the larger society. There exists an inextricable relationship between education and citizenship within a democratic society. Being a citizen and educated or a non-citizen and uneducated has become a tradition in American society and is at the very heart of America's economy and national politics.

Blacks have never been full benefactors within the AES because that System exists not to develop, but to underdevelop Black children. Both State and Federal government agencies legislate educational programs and policies that disadvantage Black children. For example, on the Federal level, there is the No Child Left Behind Act. The object of education is to equip students with the skills necessary to succeed in the twenty first century, including proficiency in oral and written communications, collaboration and teamwork, citizenship and ethics, and technological literacy. Unfortunately, NCLB's academic accountability tool is simply too narrow to measure the mastery, skills and learning styles of Black children. NCBL equates achievement as scoring above a

proficient score on a single standardized test, with no real regulations on the definition of achievement and its possible manifestations in relation to the differences in learning styles between Black, Brown and White children.

In the State of Michigan, there is the Proposal A, Public School Funding Reform, which bases the level of per pupil funding on the taxable value of property within specific geographical locations. Such school funding programs focus on material conditions and other socioeconomic factors where Blacks are already disenfranchised. These programs can only be seen as a legalized continuation of practices aimed at maintaining a hegemonic segregated and economic order that perpetually continues the educational underdevelopment of Blacks. Although race and social class are not identified as requirements for participation in American life, they have always been prevailing social indicators. Based on a review of the last three hundred years of American history, the patterns of racial and class subordination strongly suggest that racism and classism have a permanent place in American society (Dixson, Rousseau, 2006).

Whiteness As Property

In understanding this construct one must examine the contradiction between the privileges of Whites and the subordination of Blacks established by the institution of slavery, which created the precedent for viewing Blacks as objects of property. From the removal of Indians (and later Japanese Americans) from the land, to military conquest of the Mexicans (Takaki, 1993), to the construction of Africans as property, the ability to define, possess, and own property has been a central feature of power in America. But more pernicious and long lasting than the victimization of people of color is the

construction of Whiteness as the ultimate property: "Possession: the act necessary to lay the basis for rights in property was defined to include only cultural practices of Whites. This definition laid the foundation for the idea that Whiteness, that which Whites alone possess, is valuable and is property" (Harris, 1993, p.1721).

The grand narrative of U. S. history is replete with the tensions and struggles over property in its various forms. I do not suggest that other nations have not fought over and defined themselves by property and land ownership. However, the contradiction of a reified symbolic individual juxtaposed to the reality of "real estate" means the emphasis on the centrality of property can be disguised. Thus when we talk about the individuals, individual rights, and civil rights it should be noted that social benefits historically have accrued to property owners (Laidson-Billings, Tate, 1999).

No right or privilege held by Whites in the United States has held greater value than the right to education. Recurring discussions about property tax relief indicate that more affluent communities (which have higher property values, hence higher tax assessments to use in funding their schools) resent paying for a public school system whose clientele is largely non-white and poor. This structurally racist system asserts that, those with the better property are entitled to better schools and control over them (Harris, 1993). This scenario plays out in the disparities between the per-pupil funding rate of Detroit and its rich suburbs. Although State funding for schools is equal throughout Michigan, communities are permitted to tax their residents to increase the per-pupil funding for their students. Thus in Detroit, the per-pupil funding rate is currently at $7, 167.00, in comparison to that of Birmingham, a wealthy Detroit suburb, with a per-pupil funding rate of nearly $16,000 (DBEP, 2007). Historically the amounts of funding spent

on students by the surrounding wealthy suburbs have always more than doubled that of Detroit. It should be noted, however, that Detroit's poorer suburbs, many of them White, also have significantly lower per pupil funding rates.

This property right of Whiteness also includes school curriculum, which represents a form of "intellectual property." The quality of the curriculum and the quantity of curricular programs vary according to the property values of the school. Using this paradigm, Detroit was not viewed by State officials as being valuable enough to assert independence or participate in practices usually reserved for Whites (i.e. the passing of a 1.5 billion dollar bond for infrastructure improvements, application of alternate pedagogical practices to improve the education of Black students)—hence the 1999 takeover of the District by the State. In keeping with the theory of Whiteness as property it is important to delineate the "Property Functions of Whiteness." The Right of Disposition: Because property rights are described as fully alienable, that is, transferable, it may be difficult to see how Whiteness can be construed as property. However, Whiteness, when conferred on certain student performances is alienable. That is, when students are rewarded only for conformity to perceived "White norms" and/or sanctioned for cultural practices (e.g., dress, speech patterns, unauthorized conceptions of knowledge); White property is being rendered alienable. Rights to Use and Enjoyment: Legally Whites can use and enjoy the privileges of Whiteness (Dixson, Rousseau, 2006). Whiteness allows for specific social, cultural, and economic privileges. Whiteness is both performative and pleasurable. In the school setting, Whiteness allows for the extensive use of school property. The material difference between Detroit and Birmingham suggests that there are educational advantages that Birmingham is able to provide and

Detroit is not. The benefits of sports programs, planetariums and music programs are all exclusive with the rights of use and enjoyment. Rights of Reputation and Status Property: The concept of reputation is regularly demonstrated in legal cases of libel and slander. To damage someone's reputation is to damage some aspect of his or her personal property. In the case of schooling, to identify a school or program as non-white in any way diminishes its reputation or status. The term "urban" has come to mean "Black" in certain well-understood contexts. Urban schools lack the status and reputation of suburban (White) schools, and when urban students move or are bussed to suburban schools, these schools lose their reputation (Dixson, Rousseau, 2006). The Absolute Right to Exclude. The ways in which all these rights intersect with education is germane to this research, and the process of White exclusion previously discussed additional elements to the absolute right to exclusion by Whites exist. In education, the absolute right to exclude has been demonstrated historically by denying Blacks access to education altogether. The AES, hailed as one of the greatest fruits of America's "democratic" society has maintained a system structured deliberately, and specifically to maximize the suppression of Black education (Bell, 2007).

WHITENESS, PROPERTY AND THE AFRICAN CENTERED EDUCATION MOVEMENT

The Male Academy Task Force and their consideration of African Centered Education was challenged at a very deep societal level to make explicit the qualities of the District that would be promoted with the use of an African Centered curriculum and the ways that curriculum would represent student achievement. To do this Detroit educators would have to avoid politically contested zones, which, given the history of Detroit, was impossible. The first of these zones was placing the essential nature of

Black cultural experiences and heritage in a context that separated it from mainstream American culture. Traditional educational environments were predicated on the "melting pot" theory of society, which assigned all cultures the same amount of significance (Walters, 2003). While this theory is justified within American fundamentalism, to implement African Centeredness as a district and community model would require that the distinct differences in the experiences of Black people be paramount. Recognizing that the fate of Black children was indiscriminately connected within the total fabric of the dominant educational system, African Centeredness demanded Detroit declare itself a crisis zone.

The second contested public area would be to present the educational crisis of Black children in mutually exclusive categories. Detroit Public Schools had to be set apart if the proposed solutions were to be effective in addressing the issues. The District had to make drastic changes in the educational service it provided its students, or see those students annihilated on a number of statistical scales. It was the position taken by Detroit in these two highly contested zones that opened Detroit up to criticism for promoting African Centered Education as a solution to the problems of Black children. This "essentialization" by DPS on behalf of Black students lies at the heart of the controversy surrounding the African Centered Education Movement.

No amount of maneuvering or politicizing would have avoided protest in making the education of Black children a priority. The District was forced to make the decision to change the legacy of educational disenfranchisement and inequity that at this particular point in history had taken place for over a century. Detroit was forced into a liberation mode of educational advocacy for the very survival of Black children, Black males in

particular. Given the racial nature of Detroit and American society in general, it was quite natural that the proposed liberation of Black children from the traditional American educational system would be a contested issue on a national scale. ACE in Detroit challenged the institution of White educational hegemony and the White supremacist social order.

The objections of the National Organization of Women (NOW) and the American Civil Liberties Unions (ACLU) were typical reactions reflecting White hegemony. Hindsight renders the arguments made by NOW weak and insignificant with their comparison of Title IX legislation, designed to address inequities between boys and girls in sports programs, to that of the near-genocide of Black males taking place in African American communities. For the position to be taken by the ACLU that African Centered Male Academies violated the Civil Rights of and discriminated against (Black) girls, without considering the very real statistical data on the educational achievement level, life expectancy and incarceration rates of Black males was asinine and racially insensitive. Without this proposed intervention for saving these Black males from all but certain peril, who would these same Black girls marry and have children by later on in life? How were Black communities to survive with the majority of their male population either incarcerated or deceased? Why did the civil liberties of Black people suddenly become important to the ACLU at this juncture when they seldom had been of concern to the organization prior to the ACE Movement? I submit that civil liberties and potential gender discrimination had nothing to do with the issues being raised about the proposed African Centered academies. What occurred in Detroit was a violation of White property rights.

In keeping with the ideals of American fundamentalism, Whites in Detroit established the norms in education, generally deeming any institution or program not for the exclusive benefit of Whites as inferior. The African Centered Education Movement in Detroit challenged these norms by proposing educational advantages for Blacks that theoretically and ideologically excluded any and all "rights," property or otherwise, of Whites. While Whites raised the majority of the objections to the African Centered Education Movement locally and nationally, a small number of Blacks also identified with the White perspective (Hartigan, 2001). Due to decades of societal conditioning and complacent presumptions of advancements in civil rights and race relations in the United States, there are Blacks who identify with White interest. Carter G. Woodson speaks to this phenomenon in *The Mis-Education of the Negro*:

> History shows then as a result of these unusual forces in the education of the Negro he easily learns to follow the line of least resistance rather than battle against odds for what real history has shown to be the right course. A mind that remains in the present atmosphere never undergoes sufficient development to experience what is commonly known as thinking. No Negro thus submerged in the ghetto, then, will have a clear conception of the present status of the race or sufficient foresight to plan for the future; and he drifts so far towards compromise that he loses moral courage. The education of the Negro then becomes a perfect device for control from without. Those who purposely promote it have every reason to rejoice, and Negroes themselves exultingly champion the cause of the oppressor.

The paradigm of African Centered Education in Detroit occupied space outside the socially constructed realm of acceptability. Blacks were seen as neither capable nor qualified to decide what was in the best interests of Black children. The objections in Detroit were no different from objections to similar programs across the country.

Why was African Centered Education seen as a major educational reform in Detroit Public Schools? There are many reasons besides the insufficiency of the traditional educational system. African Centered reform was needed to examine the contestable issues of school and education that needed to be resolved to determine what improvement would mean for the Black child. In the absence of a framework that critically interrogated hidden but harmful instructional and curricular practices, those practices were certain to continue to harm Black students. The nexus of these issues would be captured by Detroit educators continuing to ask the question, "How has the traditional pedagogy perpetuated the underachievement of Black students?"

African Centered pedagogy was needed to analyze the standardized testing movement that coincided with the advent of the African Centered Education Movement. With the fervor over closing the achievement gap, district officials paid little attention to the ways in which high stakes testing undercut the accomplishments of the District. Detroit has had many efficient school management models in place, but year after year these models were abandoned during times of standardized testing, and teachers were all but forced into a "teach to the test" style of educating. Any educational system not consistently adhered to is destined to fail. African Centered reform would essentially have to provide pedagogy inclusive of standards and norms required for standardized tests, maintaining the academic integrity of the curriculum model.

African Centered reform was needed to ensure that large-scale District initiatives would take into consideration the best interests of Black students. Historically District officials failed to critically examine the ideologies and cultural values of Black students in relation to those aspects of the traditional system that worked against the interests of its students. DPS could not merely adopt an initiative created for children in Michigan's upper peninsula and then apply the same initiative to children in Detroit at the suggestion of state officials or legislature. Factors beyond the fiscal and pseudo educational should be taken into account when considering the education of Black children. Black educations devoid of acknowledging the importance of cultural and economic realities are no more than qualifiers of the historic hegemonic order of disenfranchisement in American education. Despite the possible value that the ecological or holistic initiatives have had on efforts to improve the quality of education elsewhere, it was imperative that Detroit Public Schools remained focused on a system of education rather than a system of schooling. This distinction between "schooling" and "education" meant turning away from the influence of the automobile industry, which for years greatly influenced educational policy in order to satisfy its need for workers.

African Centered Education in Detroit was designed to bridge the chasms between the needs of Black children and their performance in school. It only seemed logical to link the heritage of cultural and learning practices in the Black Experience with the immediate school experience of Black students to promote their development as well as achievement. If Detroit educators were to take the ethical and moral purposes of education seriously, they also had to take a closer look at the assumptions, as well as practices and policies, that were inimical to Black achievement. The task of educating

Black children was especially difficult in the context of "traditional" American cultural assumptions because the oppression and degradation of Blacks is so embedded in the social fabric of American life, culture, and ideology (Walters, 2003).

This research describing the underdevelopment of Black children within the Detroit Public Schools emanated from a necessity to correct historical accounts of African Centered Education as well add to the discourse on the overall evolution of the concept of education held by Black people in the United States. I have attempted to delve "into the past (of DPS) only because otherwise it would be impossible to understand how the present came into being and what the trends are for the near future" (Marable, 2000, 255). This research was meant to address the blind spots in the assessment of the economic, political, and educational conditions of Black people which are often times conflated with democratic rhetoric motivated by race, while completely ignoring the structural system of oppression promoted by capitalism. If there is to be any resounding message garnered by this research, it would be the argument that Black educational, political, and social development is possible only if there is a radical break with those traditional systems supported by capitalism and the interest of the dominant White society.

The dominant White society prefers education as a solution to the issue of racial amelioration to other measures because it is relatively conflict free, it represents a long-term process and it fits into the self-development model of "bootstrap-ism" (Walters. 2003). It also comports with the view that impediments to socioeconomic progress lie within persons affected rather than in structural racism. Indeed, some Whites prefer education as an amelioration strategy because it is the slowest and most precarious route

of Black progress and because it admits the fewest to mainstream privileges. For others, it supports the notion that cultural "qualification" is a legitimate standard of admission into majority society (Walters, 2003, 220-221).

This research was a critical assessment of the failure of not only a city but of a nation to provide and support the basic elements of its society to its Black citizenry, failure to perform the affirmative constitutional duty of furnishing an equal education to all public school children (Walters, 2003). This assessment underscores the difficulty and indeed the impossibility of maintaining the spirit and intent of justice for oppressed Blacks while at the same time permitting the hegemonic rule of the dominant White Society. This research highlights the efforts of the All Male Academy Task Force that unabashedly rejected traditional educational methods. This research sought to identify and interrogate the lived educational reality of Black people in Detroit through and examination of the African Centered Educational Movement. In addition to highlighting Blacks asserting their agency in a dire education situation, a strong challenge to traditional educational pedagogy that demanded a response from the dominant society was issued. The dominant society responded by utilizing its far-reaching influences in the institutions of law, politics, and economic to deter the notion or intent of eliminating any theory or ideology counter to its (traditional education) instituted and established objectives. African Centered education was such a theory that while untested represented such a threat to the "educational hegemonic order" and was vigorously contested.

The educational history of Black people in the United States is replete with all the nuances of racism, disenfranchisement and discrimination. It was the intent of this research to call attention to the continued racist hegemony inherent in the educational

institutions of America. To identify and qualify the lived reality of Blacks throughout the nation whose primary development as people, identity within culture, and rights as American citizens have been manipulated and exploited, in pursuit of the fruits of "democracy" that Black people have yet experienced and enjoy. When asked for his definition of "equal," Thurgood Marshall answered, "Equal means getting the same thing, at the same time and in the same place" (Dixson, Rousseau, 2006).

The Hypocrisy of the American Educational System, (AES) lies in sharp contrast to the hypocrisy of American Slavery . Within the American narrative, the AES has consistently held to the principles and philosophies upon which America was established. If the words "equality," "equity" and "fairness" are used to characterize the AES, it would be only to describe the Apartheid-like conditions, discrimination and racially motivated caste system imposed on Blacks throughout history. Along with America's indigenous people, Blacks have been, and continue to be, ruthlessly and callously disenfranchised when it comes to educational resources and opportunities. If ever there existed a group of people with numerous reasons to distrust and maintain utter distain for the educational conditions imposed on its youth, it is Black America. In order for the fight for educational liberation to be realized for the Black child there must be an adherence to ideology, ethics, and principle, the three combined create an historical as well as contemporized space for which to place, and maintain Black intellect. The words of Fredrick Douglas contexulize such a space and motivate such a struggle until that struggle is won.

> "Go search where you will, roam through all the monarchies and despotisms of the Old World, travel through South America, search out every

abuse and when you have found the last, lay your facts by the side of the everyday practices of this nation, and you will say with me that, for revolting barbarity and shameless hypocrisy, America reigns without a rival. "

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