“FIGHT THE POWER”: AN EXPLORATION OF THE BLACK STUDENT ACTIVIST SCHOLAR

By

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation explored the lived experiences of eight Black Student Activist Scholars on the campus of a Predominantly White Institution (PWI). Through the use of Critical Race Theory, and Sociopolitical Development, it was discovered that Black students understand their activist and civic engagement to be that of a 'duty of knowledge' wherein students expressed the importance of raising social awareness amongst their peers, colleagues, and the larger campus community. Furthermore, their lived experiences as scholar activists expanded their worldview of committing to social justice from a humanistic approach. Additionally, this dissertation is descriptive as well as prescriptive, as it highlights implications for Black Studies.

To my ancestors, thank you.

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"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father in Heaven."

Matthew 5:16

I never thought this little Black boy would be able to put 'doctor' in front of his name. This academic journey has been one that has taken me from the humble beginnings on Wellesley Drive, to the vast and gorgeous Table Mountain in South Africa and everywhere in between. It has been a rewarding and arduous process, but I'm here! And none of this would be possible without the gifts and love of The Creator. I am because You are. **Thank you.**

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In the spirit of many gone,

Dominick N. Quinney, Dom, Rambo, Boss, Uncle Dominick, Boo Bear, Skholar, d., @blakademic, Mr. Quinney, Quinney

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction – "Blackness Roils the Academy"

Now, history was not my favorite subject
I used to flip through the pages and get upset
Seein' little of black and too much of the other
(They tried to brainwash you)
Picture that, a jungle brother
Read this, read that, answer question 3
But when I got to 3, it had nothin' to do with me
Somethin' was wrong, and I knew it all along
Now tell me (please) what's goin' on

-Jungle Brothers, "What's Going On"

The quest for student voice and engagement in their educational experience has been an ongoing struggle particularly for Black students for much of the Black experience in America (Anderson, 1988; Watkins, 2001). Throughout much of the twentieth century, African American students have been navigating spaces in higher education, negotiating their identities through race, scholarship, and representation. While Blacks have been occupying spaces of higher education since the nineteenth century with the creation of institutions specifically for Black students, the increase in Black student representation in higher education became more evident in the mid-twentieth century with the introductions of the Civil Rights Act of 1965 and laws and measures surrounding Affirmative Action (Fleming, 1985). The Civil Rights Act, specifically Title VI (Department of Justice), which encouraged the desegregation of public schools and Title 34, which took approaches, "with respect to admission or other treatment of individuals as students, patients, or clients of the institution or the opportunity to participate in the provision of services or other benefits to such individuals, shall be applicable to the entire institution" (Nash, 1971), ushered in the

opportunity for African American students to gain more access to higher education. With the passing of these initiatives, Black students begin making a stronger and indelible mark on Predominately White Institutions en masse through increased enrollment, as well as programs and initiatives developed to increase Black student presence on college campuses. Although Title 34 ushered in a new era of governmental policies that "progressively" opened doors of opportunity and mobility for underrepresented communities de jure, there still remained subtle, de facto undertones of history's past, including individuals' perceptions, and preconceived notions of others. Still, African American students navigated these educational spaces despite the factors of societal and institutional isolation and segregation.

Concurrently, The United States was undergoing social changes in the landscape of racial relations and interactions. During this time, the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Era were in full swing, bringing attention to equal representation and interactions with all American citizens, and racial pride amongst Black people. Black college students on campuses across the nation were raising the same issues to their peers and the larger college community. Student groups like the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, Council of Racial Equality, and Black student unions and alliances began to establish themselves on campus, which created spaces for Black students to have a voice in regards to social issues and free expression. Students sat in, marched, protested, and forced their way into the center of discussion in manners that called attention to the plight that faced many Black students of that time. Additionally, key events including the assassinations of Malcolm X and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., "intensified the sense of responsibility among African American college students that

they needed to become leaders and wage battles to widen opportunities for Black youth" (Biondi, 2012, p. 40). With Black leadership dying on the national level, Black students began taking collective action to lay hold of the work leaders left behind. It was during this time that Black student activists were pushing for more representation in higher education, including more Black professors, classes with a focus in African American life and history, and the demand for Black Studies Departments. These were the focal point of many Black student activist uprisings on college campuses (Rojas, 2007; Guiffrida, 2003; Glasker, 2009).

Since the rise and mainstay of African American college students on campuses of Predominately White Institutions, activism and scholarship have been critical components of the Black Student Activist Scholar experience. Activism and the fight for agency continued well into the 1980's and 1990's, with students carrying on the traditions and legacies of generations of Black activists from the decades preceding. Altbach, Lomotey, and Rivers (2002) suggest activism in the 1980's was characterized by the increase of global outreach and with special attention to such events as many universities' divestment from South Africa because of the institutional order of apartheid. Activism in the 1990's was brought about by "…the rallying cry of marginalized groups who decided it was time to 'bring the margin to the center'. Ethnic studies programs and departments began to make new strides (although not nearly enough) in scholarly contributions" (p. 37). These activists laid the foundation for Black Student Activist Scholars of the new millennium to build upon.

Now, almost fifty years after laws legally eliminated public colleges and universities from rejecting and segregation by race, the progeny of the early-era Black

Student Activists – Black Student Activist Scholars - are utilizing spaces on college campuses and universities in the twenty-first century. Much of what Black students were in the fight for then have ushered their way into policies and practices that affect Black students directly in this current era of higher educational practices. Tense campus racial climate, low retention and graduation rates, and continual isolation and underrepresentation continue to have an impact on Black students. Furthermore, many of these changes that are supposed to promote diversity on campuses have remained in a capacity of opacity that negatively affect the Black college student experience (Shaun, Lori, & Ontario, 2009; Martin, 2011).

Additionally, Black students of the current generation are going to school in an era that is in the process of reversing the Affirmative Action initiatives of the 1960's and 70's – initiatives that offered opportunity and an equal playing field for previous generations. While some of the tactics of activism have changed, Black Student Activist Scholars are using newer methods and approaches conducive to the times and needs of the twenty-first century student. Facebook groups and statuses, twitter posts, and online social media now work in tandem with the traditional measures of resistance and protest to convey a message that allows the Black Student Activist Scholar's platform to spread on a global scale and at a faster rate. In both cases, both historically and contemporarily, the work and efforts of the Black Student Activist Scholar continue to go unnoticed and otherwise lost in the configuration of the image of higher education. In an effort to disrupt and challenge this trend, this dissertation serves as a narrative to highlight the ongoing struggles of Black Student Activist Scholars, particularly in the twenty-first century. These lived experiences have the opportunity to offer insight on avenues and

approaches to address many of the issues Black students face on predominantly white college campuses today.

Definition of Black Student Activist Scholar

While there have been studies and investigations on Black students and their experiences with activism, I seek to expand the scope and view Black student activism as it relates to their academic engagement. In this dissertation, I employ the term 'Black Student Activist Scholar'. Much of the research informs us of the experiences of black student activists. I contend that a Black Student Activist Scholar is a Black student with a steadfast commitment to addressing issues of the marginalized, and bringing their issues to a focal point of discussion through activism, and under the auspice of social justice. By bringing these conversations to the center, the Black Student Activist Scholar's lived experiences have the opportunity to create conversations that otherwise go unaddressed, which might include topics surrounding race, racism, class, gender, sexual identity, and social justice. Additionally, these students raise these issues in the classroom, in extra-curricular activities, and in their social lives. I maintain that by incorporating the word "Scholar", there is an idea that students incorporate their activism and community engagement into their academic practices and utilize them for academic engagement. This includes discussions, learning materials, and drawing on their own experiences and understandings of social consciousness and addressing social justice. Moreover, a Black Student Activist Scholar is committed to creating effective change through not only civic engagement and activism, but also through their academic engagement expressed through the construction of new knowledge, as well as being engaged with their peers, cultural organizations, and social and material conditions of Black people. Overall, Black

Student Activist Scholars engage in a concerted movement to propagate this knowledge to various communities, including the campus, the outlying community, and larger macro-communities.

Historically, African American students on the campuses of Predominately White Institutions have for some time had to endure a number of factors including transitioning from home to a majority white campus, ignorance of Black life and culture from the broader campus community, monocultural teaching, lack of academic preparedness, an understanding of new cultures, institutional racism, along with the notion of being a student in pursuit of graduation (Allen, 1992; hooks, 1992; Easley, 1993). In addition to these experiences, African American students continue to endure a number of social inequalities that may negatively affect their educational experience, including individual racism and discrimination. Not since the 1990's has research sought to understand the experiences and narratives of Black undergraduate student activists and their experiences on a Predominately White Institution (PWI). The turn of the new millennium has brought about change in how activism is defined and enacted in the twenty-first century, specifically by Black Student Activist Scholars. This twenty-first century activism is viewed as challenging the post-positivist notions of thinking, and notions of anti-social reproduction. Additionally, the lives, narratives, and experiences of Black Student Activist Scholars have yet to be examined through the lens of Critical Race Theory and Sociopolitical Development. Critical Consciousness is "the process whereby people attain insightful awareness of the socio-economic, political and cultural circumstances that affect their lives as well as their potential capacity to transform that social reality" (Prilleltensky, 1990, p. 311). Additionally, Sociopolitical Development is "the

acquisition of skills needed to and support liberatory behavior", which in this case will be activism (Griffith, 2002, p. 6). I intend to uncover these experiences and understand the Black Student Activist Scholar. From these investigations, I uncovered the extent to which Black Student Activist Scholars interpret twenty-first century activism using the lenses of Sociopolitical Development and Critical Consciousness. This study is a qualitative approach that includes interviews, observations and a focus group based on the experiences created by Black Student Activist Scholars (BSAS) involved within the study. By critically analyzing the data gleaning in these areas, I garnered an understanding of some of the experiences of the Black Student Activist Scholar in this new era.

Statement of Purpose

This investigation is the exploration of the participants within a Black student organization that has been in existence for over forty years and has an established history that incorporates ideals of activism and scholarship into their mission and purpose. Moreover, this study examined how Black Student Activist Scholars make sense of being agents of social change on a college campus as well as the immediate community. This study is based on the premise that it is important and necessary to understand the life and contribution the Black Student Activist Scholar has within the academy. Their lived experiences and production of knowledge are often overlooked, yet they are an integral component of the college learning experience for not only BSAS, but for faculty, and the larger student community. Moreover, the interactions and organizations Black students create and maintain are of great value to college campuses and the academic environment.

Conceptual and Analytical Framework for Research Study

This study investigates my assertion that Sociopolitical Development is the conceptual lens used to understand the experiences Black Student Activist Scholar's educational experience. As such, Diemer, Hsieh, and Pan (2008) offer a conceptual framework that is useful in understanding the experience of the Black Student Activist Scholar through the lens of Sociopolitical Development. These include:

> Motivation to transform sociopolitical inequity' and "self definition". The motivation component encompasses the following domains: (a) motivation to reduce social and economic inequality, (b) motivation to help others in one's community, (c) participation in community and social action groups, and (d) frequency of community participation. The self-definition component of the conceptual model encompasses the following domains: (a) self-concept and (b) locus of control. (p. 319)

Using these components, I will explore Black Student Activist Scholars through the conceptual framework of Sociopolitical Development and the analytical framework of Critical Race Theory to garner an understanding of their lived experiences, but also to explore the use of their identity as Black Student Activist Scholars as a mechanism for classroom engagement. Critical Race Theory is a framework that explains the social construction of race and racism in the functioning and process of American society (Bell, 1995; Delgado, 1999)

Research Questions

The research questions for this study are designed to gain a clear understanding of Black Student Activist Scholar's perception of Sociopolitical Development and Critical

Consciousness and how each of these concepts are nuanced in the classroom experience. Moreover, the questions seek to make meaning of the lived experiences of Black students at a major Midwestern research university, specifically in terms of racial identity and activist development. The research questions are as follows:

1. How do Black Student Activist Scholars (BSAS) describe their racial and activist identities at a Predominantly White Institution in 2012?
2. What can be learned from an exploration of the lived experiences of Black Student Activist Scholars respecting their sociopolitical and racial identity development and its impact on their academic engagement?

These questions will also explore areas of agency, empowerment, and academic engagement as demonstrated by students within the study.

Conclusion

The rest of the dissertation is as follows: In Chapter Two, "Roots Before Branches – Setting the Foundation", I will provide an in-depth analysis of the scholarship as it relates to Sociopolitical Development, Critical Consciousness, and Critical Race Theory; and a discussion of Black students on major campuses in the United States. In Chapter Three, "Call to Duty: Black Ops", I will be discussing the methodological and conceptual approaches that will guide the dissertation. The approaches include the discussion of qualitative methodology and the techniques used to gather data, including Critical Race Methodology, participant observations, one-on-one interviews, and focus groups. For the purpose of this research, Critical Race Methodology is defined as an offshoot of Critical Race Theory. In this study, it serves as a way to privilege the lived experiences of students of color. It privileges their lived experience and uncovers issues around race and

racism that continue to play an in American society. Additionally, Critical Race Methodology challenges traditional Western approach to conducting qualitative research. It corporates an interdisciplinary approach to the inquiry of people of color It offers a liberatory stance that challenges the traditional approach to qualitative research as it privileges voices from the "bottom of the well." It is often presented in the form of narratives and storytelling. (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). As a result, Critical Race Methodology is an approach that provides a venue for narratives to emerge directly from the participants.

Furthermore, I lay out the design of the research study, including how the study was conducted, the duration of the study, and a broad scope of the participants. Also, I discuss my identity and the role I play as a researcher, and the benefits and implications of said identities.

The following chapter, "Chapter Four: Behind My Black: Narratives of the Black Student Activist Scholar" will discuss the experiences, identities, and development of Black Student Activist Scholars. After a thorough and critical analysis of the interviews and observations, their experiences and narratives led me to uncover the broader global question, 'What is the Black Student Activist Scholar in the twenty-first century?' Next, in Chapter Five: Black Student Activist Scholars Speak Out, I present the salient themes that emerged from my interactions with the participants. Finally, the dissertation will culminate with the final chapter, "Chapter Six: Sankofa: Reaching Back to Move Forward: Black Historical Literacy, Activism and the Push for Black Studies", wherein I discuss the importance of intergenerational dialogue, suggest a framework of Critical Race Sociopolitical Development, and explore implications for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of the Literature – "Roots Before Branches"

As stated in the previous chapter, the educational experiences of African American students in higher education have been one of ever-changing progress and struggle throughout much of the twentieth century. In order to grasp the discussion of the experience of the Black Student Activist Scholar fully, it is important to lay a solid foundation on the literature that encapsulates the discussion, and bridges the historical frameworks to the twenty-first century.

This literature review is multifaceted and multidisciplinary, drawing from education, history, sociology, community psychology, and Black Studies. While much of the research draws connections to the idea of Black student activism, there is a lack of inquiry regarding how Black student activists factor their Black activist identities and experiences into their educational practices, and whether they use these components as mechanisms for academic resilience. Because of this deficit in the research, the main purpose of this literature review is to draw connections and branch off from these concepts to develop what I conceptualize to be the Black Student Activist Scholar.

The literature presented in this chapter will consist of three major sections: the first, "Laying the Foundation", highlights the conceptual and analytical frameworks that undergirds this study, namely Sociopolitical Development and Critical Race Theory. Both CRT and Sociopolitical Development will be central to the exploration of how race, racism, and activism affect and influence the worldview of the Black Student Activist Scholar. Part Two – "Knowledge of Self", is a review of the major concepts that will guide the research that will explore the racial identity of the Black Student Activist

Scholar. The last section consists of literature related to the Black student activist experience, specifically highlighting the Black student activist impact on the development of Black Studies, in addition to activism in South Africa. Additionally, the literature presented in this chapter seeks to draw connections that aid in understanding the conception of a Black Student Activist Scholar.

Conceptual Framework – Sociopolitical Development

The discussion of Sociopolitical Development branches from understandings of the concept of Critical Consciousness. Critical Consciousness first emerged in Paulo Freire's (1993) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, in which he suggests the oppressed engage in this crucial skill if they are to be truly liberated from oppressive measures. Freire situates the various forms of oppression that people encounter based on their identity. These 'limit-situations' as Freire posits, are not impassable boundaries, but rather impediments towards one's liberation. Critical Consciousness then begins when one recognizes these oppressions. Additionally, once an individual is aware of this, "they begin to direct their increasingly critical actions toward achieving the untested feasibility implicit in that perception" (p. 83). This process is not instantaneous, must include the active transformation of all involved, and is a component of understanding how people perceive things in order to create a liberating educational experience. Furthermore, Freire suggests this "banking" practice of teaching is dehumanizing and dispiriting, especially to oppressed communities. As a result, Freire conceptualizes the term "Conscientizacao." This "Conscientizacao," or Critical Consciousness, Freire argues:

> …people will begin to perceive why mythical remnants of the old society survive in the new. And they will then be able to free themselves more rapidly of these

specters, which by hindering the edification of a new society have always constituted a serious problem for every revolution. (p. 159)

Freire extends his discussion of Critical Consciousness in his text, *Education for Critical Consciousness* (2008), in which he further examines the practice as a mechanism for liberation. Moreover, Freire maintains that this idea of critical thought, "represents the *development* of the awakening of critical awareness. It will not appear as a natural byproduct of even major economic changes, but must grow out of a critical educational effort based on favorable historical conditions" (author's emphasis, p. 15). As Freire suggests, this process is learned over time, and is a process of growth for an individual. Critical Consciousness is an important tool as it relates to the Black Student Activist Scholar in that Black students are able to disrupt notions of oppression placed on them by others, which leaves them powerless and voiceless. The discovery of one's critical consciousness the person becomes an active agent in changing their environment.

Martin-Baro (1994) argues that Critical Consciousness "supposes that persons change in the process of changing their relations with the surrounding environment and, above all, with other people" (p. 41). It is an ongoing process that allows individuals to place themselves, and their identity in the larger context of effectively transforming their society, and in the process, gain new knowledge.

As Hopper (1999) suggests, Critical Consciousness is a process of:

…learning to think critically about accepted ways of thinking and feeling, discerning the hidden interests in underlying assumptions and framing notions (whether these be class-, gender-, race/ethnicity-, or sect based). It means learning to see, in the mundane particulars of ordinary lives, how history works,

how received ways of thinking and feeling serve to perpetuate existing structures of inequality. (p. 210)

As the passage suggests, Critical Consciousness is a process that individuals will take in learning about themselves and the community that influences their outlook. This includes critical thinking and going beyond the surface and critically understanding that which is presented in addition to what is not presented. As hooks (2009) suggests, this critical thinking, "involves first discovering the who, what, when, where, and how of things – finding the answers to those eternal questions of the inquisitive child – and then utilizing that knowledge in a manner that enables you to determine what matters most" (p. 9) These discussions of critical consciousness lack the voice and experiences of Black Student Activist Scholars, and their experiences in higher education.

Watts, Diemer, and Voight (in press) posit Critical Consciousness consists of three elements: critical reflection, political efficacy, and critical action. The authors contend that critical reflection is "a social analysis and moral rejection of societal inequalities, such as social, economic, racial/ethnic, and gender iniquities that constrain human well-being and human agency" (p. 6). For the purposes of this research, I examine primarily the factor of race, which tends to be one of the predominant factors of inequality faced by people of color within higher education settings. The second element, political efficacy, is "the perceived capacity to effect social and political change by individual and/or collective activism" (p. 6). This includes individuals having the knowledge that they can contribute to change in society. Lastly, critical action is "individual or collective action taken to change aspects of society, such as institutional policies and practices which are perceived to be unjust. This is a broad view of activism

that includes participation in activities such as voting, community organizing, and peaceful practices" (p. 6). Through this exploration of the Black Student Activist Scholar, I intend to investigate whether students use these and other capacities of activism in their lives, specifically as a mode of academic engagement.

With gaining an understanding of Critical Consciousness, action must also take place, most often in the form of activism. Shawn Ginwright (2010) argues, "critical consciousness and action promote self-determination and compel individuals and collectives to claim power and control over sometimes daunting situations" (p. 17). By employing Critical Consciousness to daily practice, Black Student Activist Scholars have controlled positionality of their lived experiences rather than a constructed experience imposed on them, and use them to interact and utilize transformative practices to improve the conditions of students of color on the campus of a Predominately White Institution.

Through this work, I advanced the discussion of Critical Consciousness into an understanding that it is the ability to think beyond the surface of oppressive social conditions, and actively creating effective means of transforming said conditions in a process, that is liberating for both the individual and the larger community. More specifically for the purposes of this research, Critical Consciousness has the power and ability to give Black college students the necessary tools and agency to deconstruct negative images presented in society, and empower them to be powerhouse leaders in society. For this to happen, Black Student Activist Scholars need to be introduced to the concept of critical thinking.

Sociopolitical Development

The term 'Sociopolitical Development' was named and developed by scholars Roderick Watts and colleagues in the field of Community Psychology. According to Watts, Williams, and Jagers (2003), Sociopolitical Development, "emphasizes an understanding of the cultural and political forces that shape one's status in society" (p. 185). This includes racial, political, and economic factors that influence one's interactions with the larger society. Additionally, the scholars suggest Sociopolitical Development is "a process of growth in a person's knowledge, analytical skills, emotional faculties, and capacity for action in political and social systems" (p. 185). It should also be noted that the terms 'sociopolitical' and 'psychopolitical' can be interchanged and used to mean the same concept (Watts & Flanigan, 2007). This concept allows Black college students to learn about themselves as individuals, also to explore their identities in the context of larger, often marginalized communities, and to discover ways to go about actively engaging and questioning these identities to the majority.

Sociopolitical Development seeks to bring issues of social justice, equality, and resistance to the center of discussion. Essentially, it is the reflection of one's understanding of this phenomenon and how they affect an individual and the collective group. As such, "One of our goals is to move oppression, liberation, and human rights from the margins to the center of the field" (Watts & Flanigan, 2007, p. 185). So often is the case that American society avoids difficult dialogues regarding these topics that it becomes a norm. These discussions are often left on the periphery of America's conscious, especially in the discussion of Black college students. Highlighting these discussions would force the larger society to admit that these problems exist, a concept

that would shade America's image. Sociopolitical Development seeks to rectify this situation and make it a main point of consideration.

Watts and Guessous (2006) define Sociopolitical Development as "the evolving, critical understanding of the political, economic, cultural, and other systemic forces that shape society and one's status within it, and the associated process of growth in relevant knowledge, analytical skills, and emotional faculties" (p. 60). Additionally, they view Sociopolitical Development as a combination of liberation and developmental psychology. Watts and Guessous maintain that Sociopolitical Development is connected to social justice activism, with an eye toward cultivating it more effectively and accelerating its inclusion in mainstream psychological theory. (p. 60).

Additionally, Fox, Mediratta, Ruglis, Stoudt, Shah, and Fine (2010) present the idea of Critical Engagement, a similar concept to Sociopolitical Development as "the intellectual, political, emotional, and bodily space shared by three overlapping areas of social justice work with students: student leadership, student organizing, and participatory action research" (p. 623). Essentially, Black Student Activist Scholars involved in Sociopolitical Development are involved in some form of activist leadership, and in those capacities, the groups they are involved with may have a component of social justice.

Lewis-Charp, Yu, and Soukamneuth (2006) conceptualize their research around the importance of having and understanding knowledge of self. This understanding of identity is a critical component to the understanding of Sociopolitical Development. Moreover, they maintain, "critical self-awareness not only helps an individual identify the seeds of her own problems, but also sheds light on dominant discourses that

contribute to her marginalization and oppression of others" (p. 23). This knowledge of self can come in a number of forms including race, sexuality, gender, a combination of these, and many more. For the purposes of this research, I will be using race as the factor of identity when collaborating with the Black student leaders. As discussed in other areas of this dissertation, the centricity of race is used as a segue into other facets of oppression most Black people in America encounter in their everyday lives. Sociopolitical development is a learned process, and may be triggered by identity development, personal experiences, a role model or familial influence, or collaborating with other Black Student Activist Scholars in an aspect of social change.

Another important factor within Sociopolitical Development is that of empowerment. Zimmerman and Rappaport (1988) contend empowerment is "a combination of self-acceptance and self-confidence, social and political understanding, and the ability to play an assertive role in controlling resources and decisions in one's community" (p. 730). Empowerment can be viewed as an important factor in political involvement and social activism. Racial pride, leadership, and activism are all avenues by which Black Student Activist Scholars utilize facets of empowerment. Brookins (1999) extends our understanding of empowerment to contextualize this component within the Black experience. This analysis includes race consciousness and self-actualization through racial and cultural experiences. Additionally, Brookins suggests that situating empowerment through historical and cultural experiences has advantages in that it has a knowledge base through the Black American experience.

Activism is critical component associated with Sociopolitical Development. I argue that activism is individual striving toward a goal of effective improvement for a particular

cause in society. Moreover, Harding (1990) argues activism is the practice that an individual works to "become free not simply *from* something, but *for* something" (p. 166) [author emphasis]. Miera Levinson (2010) suggests that activism is a form of good citizenship. She suggests that good citizens:

> vote, protest, boycott, run for office, join political parties, join civic organizations, commits acts of civil disobedience, circulate email petitions, write influential political blogs, 'tweet', or text message about political events being kept under a news blackout, and attend neighborhood council meetings. (p. 333)

Furthermore, as Levinson's definition suggests, the image of activism has changed since the images of activism in the past. Historically, Black student activist movements included marches, protests, and the challenging of structures of inequality. Now, in the age of technology, activists are using computers and other forms of technology to spread their message on a global scale in a short amount of time. Black Student Activist Scholars have the ability to spread their message and agenda across the globe through technology and social media. By exploring traditional and historical methods of activism, coupled with twenty-first century strategies of organizing and campaigning, will be useful in examining the role of Sociopolitical Development and Critical Consciousness in African American undergraduate student leaders.

Watts, Williams and Jagers (2003) present Sociopolitical Development as having five stages, beginning with an unawareness of political and societal injustices, to one of critical consciousness, and the knowledge set to create and evoke change. The first stage is the **acritical stage**, which entails "a lack of awareness of social inequity, or a belief that it is a just inequity that reflects the abilities and motivations of the groups in

question" (p. 188). The second stage is the **adaptive stage**, in which, "asymmetry may be acknowledged, but the system maintaining it is seen as immutable. Predatory, antisocial or accommodation strategies are employed to maintain a positive sense of self and to acquire social and material rewards" (p. 188). In other words, there is an acknowledgement that there are inequalities, but the individual may feel as though there are no measures for making societal change. Additionally, an individual may feel the need to conform to the larger society for social advancement. **Precritical** is the third stage, characterized by a state in which "complacency gives way to awareness of and concerns about asymmetry and inequality. The value of adaptation is questioned" (p. 188). Individuals begin to think about and question inequalities that are occurring in society, and whether or not conforming is something that may be necessary in society. The fourth stage is the **Critical** stage, which is "a desire to learn more about asymmetry, injustice, oppression, and liberation. Through this process, some will conclude that the asymmetry is unjust and social change efforts are warranted" (p. 188). The last stage is the **Liberation** stage, in which "the experience and awareness of oppression is salient. Liberation behavior (involvement in social action and community development) is tangible and frequent. Adaptive behaviors are eschewed" (p. 188). This final stage includes knowledge of one's various identities, the role one plays in society, and developing measures to address social inequalities. Furthermore, individuals in the liberation stage reject conforming to the larger society.

Both Critical Consciousness and Sociopolitical Development allows for Black Student Activist Scholars to examine and analyze systematic forms of oppression, and develop the necessary forms of action that actively address and transform such systems.

This essentially builds a practice of liberating not only self, but also others. Ginwright posits, "this pursuit of justice and freedom, in this sense, yields both internal capacity to resist domination as well as builds social capital and a greater external capacity to create better community conditions" (p. 18). Moreover, both concepts, "cultivate resistance against beliefs attitudes, and practices that can erode a Black child's self-confidence and impair her positive identity development" (Ward, 2000, p. 51). This rapid growing field offers the possibility to discuss critical studies in other areas of education. Any degree of social forms of oppression would prove to be counter-productive in the lives of marginalized students in higher education, specifically Black Student Activist Scholars. These concepts place a strong focus on creating change, and the skillsets necessary to make those changes.

Analytical Framework - Critical Race Theory

Because race is the central focus in the exploration of the Black Student Activist Scholar, I utilized Critical Race Theory (CRT) as an analytical lens by which to view the experiences in the lives of the students in the study. CRT attempts to examine the role race and racism play in American society in addition to identifying ways to change multiple forms of oppression under the auspice of social justice (Bell, 1995; Crenshaw, 1995; Tate, 1997) This ontological approach was useful in this study as it provided an analytical lens by which to examine, question, and analyze how race, racism, dominant ideologies, and other facets of marginalization and oppression have shaped the lived experiences of Black college students on the campus of a Predominately White Institution. Ladson-Billings suggests CRT is helpful in "unmasking and exposing racism in its various permutations within education" (p. 12). As such, CRT is

interdisciplinary in nature, and includes perspectives from history, education, sociology, and Black Studies. CRT began to make its appearance in academia upon the closing stages of the Civil Rights Movement. During this period of the mid-twentieth century, marginalized communities celebrated subjective progress of equality and equity in social mobility. Specifically, during this time, African American communities were able to use their strong sense of community and develop resistance strategies to "overcome" the oppression that had beset them since the arrival to the American coast of African peoples who were treated as chattel and stripped of their rights and identities. The post-Civil Rights Movement marked a time where Blacks seemed to make progress in mobility, and became etched in the sculpting of American society.

Legal scholars developed Critical Race Theory, which has foundations in Critical Legal Studies (Unger, 1983; Hutchinson, 1989). Broadly, CRT undergirds our understanding that racism is an avenue by which American society allocates power and privilege. Social strata are set within the realm of race, delineating resources and access. Moreover, this framework attempts to revise America's history, replacing old, domineering constructions of history. Within CRT, scholars have comprised six major components that comprise our understanding of race, racism, and the roles it plays in the construction of American society. The components include:

A. **Ordinariness of racism**: Scholars within CRT argue race is endemic to American society. Additionally, this is a common experience of people of color, specifically in the United States. The social construction and maintenance of race continues to shape interactions and the distribution of

services and resources. CRT illuminates the multiple ways in which racism maintains its existence. (Bell 1980; Delgado and Stefancic, 2001)

B. **Whiteness as property**: How members of the dominant group exert power and privilege, which includes the configuration of knowledge and how it is distributed and to whom. Whiteness as property also includes the ability to maintain social status and reputation as well as the ability to exclude non-dominant communities. (Harris, 1993; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995)

C. **Intersectionality**: No one person or group has a unitary, single identity. There are overlapping identities that are negotiated on a daily basis. Through intersectionality, both social positions and systems shape the multiple identities, and the lived experiences of people. Additionally, social location often times determines social identity. (Bowleg, 2008; Collins, 1995; Crenshaw, 1991; McCall 2005;)

D. **Unique Voice of Color/Knowledge of Experience**: Various communities of color, due to their experiences with discrimination and oppression, have the ability to communicate concepts and ideas that whites may not have knowledge about to their white counterparts. This unique voice of color is often expressed through counterstorytelling, which assists in how institutions of higher education work effectively towards the creation of a more diverse college community. (Carter, 2008; Delgado, 1989; Dunbar, 2008; Hiraldo, 2010)

E. **Colorblind Ideology**: Colorblindness is the allowance of racist measures and policies, further maintaining social inequalities. Additionally, colorblind ideology is unsuccessful in the acknowledgement of race and racism, and its impacts on people of color (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). The lack of diversity in academic curriculum maintains social structures of knowledge, and maintains dominant power structures of what is considered 'valued' knowledge (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Valdes, McCristal Culp, and Harris (2002) maintain that the beliefs that colorblindness, that racism is merely based on the individual, and that racism can be addressed without calling attention to other forms of marginalization perpetually silence students of color, and other historically disenfranchised communities. Additionally, this allows for covert acts of racism to occur, maintaining status quo of inequality.

F. **Commitment to social justice:** This tenet is the logic that the theory and practice of CRT seek to create equity and access, and the acknowledgement of human life in the continuance of equality for all people. (Davis, McEwen, Rendon, & Howard-Hamilton, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1998;).

Critical Race Theory in Higher Education

Critical Race Theory is central to the understanding of Black student educational experience. Race and racism continue to play a role of educational experiences and schooling practices, in addition to the intersections of other forms of marginalization, including sexism and classism. My research utilizes the scholarship that encapsulates the

discussion of race and racism as it relates to Critical Race Theory, specifically with the tenets that illuminate the ordinariness of racism, intersectionality, and the unique voice of color. Critical Race Theory further affirms Black students having a voice and has the knowledge base to make necessary transformations in their communities. Additionally, this framework highlights the importance of discussing how race and racism continues to produce inequalities in higher education. Racism is embedded in the higher education environment by the ways in which learning and knowledge is valued and constructed based on White, westernized ideologies that perpetuate systems of asymmetry. Additionally, CRT is a necessary component of analysis specifically within higher education as it seeks to address the role of race, racism, and social disparities that exist within the academy. Taylor (1999) maintains, "the central tenets of CRT have yet to be extended into analysis of higher education, and their potential to inform strategies for reform has yet to be fully explored" (p. 182). As such, this study of Black Student Activist Scholars on the campus of a Predominately White Institution analyzes the ways in which the system of higher education has ways by which Black students are continually and institutionally disenfranchised. CRT serves in the capacity of raising the consciousness around creating more diverse, inclusive educational settings. As an example, CRT has the ability to address disparities that exist within the academy, including persistence, retention, and graduation rates of students of color. Further, this analytical framework serves as a way by which to contour discussions surrounding campus diversity and inclusion.

Within American society, for African Americans, the consciousness of race bifurcates into discussions of the image of blackness within the larger society and within

the Black community. Critical Race Theory is the frame of reference by which to explore the realities and current situations for Black students in higher education.

Identity Development

Identity is a multifaceted, complex concept that is different for every individual. Identity can be shaped by sex, gender, race, religious affiliation, age, and class stature or a composition of multiple identities, which often can be in conflict with one another. Beverly Tatum discusses the notions of identity wherein she states, "The parts of our identity that do capture our attention are those that other people notice, and that reflect back to us" (p. 11). For the purposes of this study, the common thread that I used is the identity of race, and more specifically, Black students. Oyserman, Gant, and Ager (1995) posit, "In the case of African American youth, identity negotiation involves the dual task of assembling a positive sense of self while discrediting negative identities attributed to African American males and females" (p. 1217). My research expanded the conversation of racial identity development, Sociopolitical Development and Critical Consciousness work in concert with one another to draw on the experiences of the Black Student Activist Scholar.

W.E.B. DuBois was one of the first scholars to highlight and address the notion of being both Black and American. This 'double consciousness' DuBois refers to in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1994) serves as a foundational insight to the introduction of Black Critical Consciousness. DuBois writes:

> It is a particular sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused attempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness – an

> American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (p. 2)

DuBois discusses the struggle Blacks endure as a marginalized people in the United States. This includes negotiating one's identity in terms of how one views themselves internally, while at the same time undergo the experience of how the larger dominant society view one's identity. This double consciousness is what prevents one's true identity to develop, however a merging of the two identities may be what assists in a positive identity development. DuBois (1994) continues:

> The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife – this longing to attain self-consciousness manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America…He would not bleach his Negro soul. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed on and spit upon by this fellow, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face. (p. 2-3)

As DuBois suggests, this merging of both identities is one that will allow Blacks to have a critical insight as a racialized being in American society. This includes learning and celebrating one's Blackness through history and culture, while at the same time conceptualizing the current experiences of Blacks in America. This very experience takes place on college campuses throughout the nation, wherein Black students contend to make an identity for themselves, while the campus and the larger community impose labels that often times negate or diminish one's self-identity completely (Allen, 1992).

On a larger diasporic level, Frantz Fanon discusses the identity of Blackness through the lens of the colonizer and the oppressed. In *Black Skin, White Masks* (2008), Fanon urges Blacks to liberate themselves, but to take heed not to use the mindset of the colonizer in the process. Fanon argues that a true liberation of Black people occurs when one's self-perspective is viewed through an unscathed indigenous lens. Much like DuBois, Fanon (1967) suggests:

> Overnight the Negro has been given two frames of reference within which he has to place himself…[H]is customs and the sources on which they are based, were wiped out because they were in conflict with a civilization that he did not know and that imposed itself on them. (p. 110)

Fanon's overall goal was to offer a liberation of self through what he viewed as a dismantling of racial neurosis. Both DuBois and Fanon's work serve as critical frameworks toward an overall movement towards Black liberation. Additionally, both works are tools that aid in Black student movements that address tools of empowerment, in addition to ways of resisting psychological and social oppression. Lastly, these serve as foundational texts in addressing the identity component in Sociopolitical Development.

I utilized the Cross Racial Identity Scale (Cross & Vandiver, 2001) to discuss the Black identity development of the Black Student Activist Scholars. Within this scale, Cross and Fhagen-Smith explain the process of becoming black. This includes four stages: Pre-encounter, encounter, immersion-emersion, and internalization. The **pre-encounter** stage includes a low race salience and assimilation, while the **encounter** stage is characterized by a low salience of Black identity. The **immersion-emersion** stage

shows a change in racial perception. This includes a strong anti-white and intense Black identity. The next stage, **internalization**, is signaled by a strong affiliation to Black identity. Additionally, Cross & Fhagen-Smith maintain that a positive Black identity is developed as a result of positive socialization experiences among the family and community. Crawford & Smith (2005), and Robinson & Biran (2006) conducted studies of students in higher education using the Cross Racial Identity Scale that noted strong mentoring and positive Black influences were critical components of the Black student college experience, and aided in academic achievement.

As it relates to education, Carter (2008) introduces the concept of a Critical Race Consciousness as a factor for academic success for African American students. Critical Race Consciousness is defined as, "a critical understanding of the asymmetrical power relationships that exist between Black and Whites in America" (p. 14). In this concept, race and racism are central to the understanding of academic success. Additionally:

> When students possess a critical race consciousness, they demonstrate an awareness and understanding of race as a potential barrier to their schooling and life success…They also understand the historical and current impact that racism has in perpetuating social inequality in America, particularly for members of the African American racial group. (p. 14)

Through Critical Race Consciousness, Black Student Activist Scholars have the ability to view how systematic forms of oppression shape and guide their participation in academic settings through their lived experiences and knowledge of race and racism, in addition to the historical, cultural, and epistemological views of Black Americans. As such, I argue

that with this consciousness, couched with activist components, are what contour the Black Student Activist Scholar's experience in higher education.

Historical Overview of Black College Student Experience

In the process of exploring the contemporary facets of the Black Student Activist Scholar, it is important to offer a historiographical investigation of experiences of Black students' higher educational experience. This discussion will illuminate persistent and repeated themes throughout the research. Additionally, I will highlight how Black students incorporated activism into their struggles in pursuit of higher education, particularly as a means for creating a space within institutions that neglected to acknowledge the presence of Black students. To counteract this, Black students developed Black student unions, academic support services, and other facets of communal support for cultural and academic resiliency.

Rogers (2012) suggests Black students performed under a normalized mask of whiteness in their experiences on a campus of a Predominately White Institution. This included Eurocentric standards of whiteness in education, cultural norms, and downplaying any notions of non-whiteness. Additionally, this included the curriculum, teaching, and messages taught to Black students throughout much of the twentieth century. This normalized mask of whiteness was made the standard, which then gave it racial superiority. Rogers (2012) suggests, "many believed that people of African descent were innately inferior to that slavery/colonialism made them inferior. Academics accentuated cultural assimilation along with Black civic grooming for lifelong swimming in the white American mainstream" (p. 15). While some believed accommodating to white standards of education were acceptable forms of social mobility, others stressed the

importance of having knowledge of self and learning one's history as a foundation to education. Woodson (1933) argues that in order to change the mindset of oppression that Blacks faced socially, and educationally, "we must find out exactly what his background is, what he is today, what his possibilities are, and how to begin with him as he is and make him a better individual of the kind that he is" (p. 151).

In spite of obstacles placed before Blacks in their endeavors to attain education since their forced arrival in the Americas in the 17th century, Anderson (1988) posits that Blacks that experienced slavery, and generations that followed, "persisted in their crusade to develop systems of education compatible with their resistance to racial and class subordination" (p. 3). While most White colleges and universities outwardly pushed Blacks from attending and earning a degree. Feagin, Vera, & Imani (1996) report that between 1826 and 1890, only 30 Blacks graduated from Predominately White Institutions. At the turn of the 20th century, about 700 African Americans had earned a degree.

Watkins (1993) suggests that Blacks center on education as a means to transcend oppression and subjugation that negatively influenced their lives. As a result, education was, and to some extent, is a means to address cultural, social, economic and political facets of disenfranchisement in the Black experience. Williamson (1999) suggests, "The 1930s and 1940s exhibited a continuing pattern of almost complete segregation of the races in the realm of higher education. Whereas African Americans attempted to gain entrance into PWCUs, their efforts came to little avail" (p. 94).

While Brown v. Board of Education opened doors for educational opportunities especially for Black students in early, elementary, and secondary schools, it also gave the

opportunity for more Blacks to enter pursue higher education (Williamson, 1999). Additionally, Plaut (1954) accounts that by 1954, only 4,000 Black students were entering Predominately White Institutions. As the data suggests, growth was occurring, but perhaps slower than ideal to promote progress.

The passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Higher Education Act of 1965 gave way to a burgeoning of Blacks in higher education. Peterson et al. (1978) note that between 1964 and 1970, Black student college enrollment doubled at historically white institutions. Additionally, over half of Black college students were enrolled at Predominately White Institutions (Ballard, 1973; Peterson, et. al 1978). While there was growth in Black student enrollment rates at Predominately White Institutions, the social stigmas of isolation, oppression, and segregation continued to plague the experience of Black college students. As a result of this, Black students responded in a number of ways. Leighton (1954) suggests that Black students responded in primarily three ways: Cooperation, withdrawal, and aggressiveness as mechanisms for navigating white spaces, particularly college campuses. Additionally, Willie and Cunnigen (1981) suggest, "the three circumstances described required different adaptations for effective participation in the university community by Blacks. Each adaptation was situationally appropriate" (p. 193). Tinto (1993) believed that Black students encounter unique challenges to becoming integrating and working on predominately white campuses. He argues that social interactions for Black students are often based on membership in formal organizations. The data presented within Tinto's study suggests that exploring the lives of Black Student Activist Scholars within a cultural organization is the best approach to engage with understanding their lives and experiences.

To combat the isolation and to foster a space of empowerment and collective identity, Black identity-centered organizations were created – Black Student Unions, Africana Alliance, Afro-American Unity Alliance – as a haven for Black students with the intent of fostering their activist identities, as well as empowering their blackness on campuses where blackness was not acknowledged. Edwards (1970) notes that the creation of Black student organizations were "…geared to provide Black students with a solid, legitimate power base from which they can bring about needed changes in the colleges and universities involved" (p. 61). Among common themes, Exum (1985) posits many of these organizations were "exclusively Black in membership, monolithic in appearance, highly self-conscious, and motivated by sociopolitical concerns" (p. 42). Additionally, Exum highlights six uses of Black student unions on predominately white campuses:

1. Met social and academic needs not being addressed through the traditional avenues of postsecondary education,
2. Offered a space for the exploration of identities,
3. Fostered a collective Black student system of beliefs,
4. Empowered Black students with a sense of ability,
5. Facilitated action on issues relevant to Black students,
6. Developed a foundation for Black students to propel in other facets of political action.

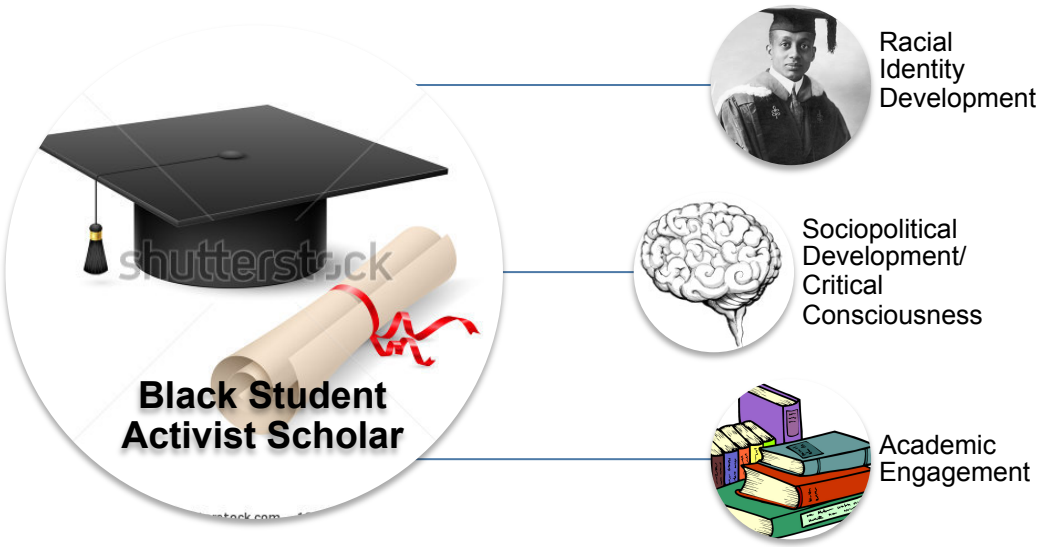
Furthermore, Williamson (1999) notes that "most were formed for the explicit purpose of creating solidarity and unity among Black students and other people of African ancestry, expressing positive aspects of Black culture, and forcing significant change in the university or college campuses on which they were located" (p. 96). As such, Willie

and McCord (1972) suggest that Black student unions were an integral component for Black student support emotionally and psychologically, as they discussed relevant issues to the Black community. Williamson (1999) also suggests that the students within these organizations "spoke directly to the need to alleviate the alienation experienced by Black students at PWCUs [Predominantly White Colleges and Universities], provide them with alternative social outlets, and make their postsecondary education more relevant to their situation as Blacks in the United States" (p. 97). As the research suggests, utilizing members of a Black student organization on the campus of a Predominately White Institution was useful in my investigation of the experiences of Black Student Activist Scholars. In subsequent chapters, I discuss my entrance into working and exploring the lives of Black Student Activist Scholars and their understanding of their identities to their academic engagement.

Carving a space in their college experiences with the development of Black student unions brought about a shift in how Black students were defining success on a predominately-white campus. Walker (1976) posits the shifting in how students' perception of their world and Black identity was a "preservation of Black identity, preference for practical or culturally relevant education, orientation toward collective Black goals of social advancement, [and] social change objectives" (p. 206). Williamson (1999) suggests the change in consciousness "resonated in the redefinition of the successful Black student as one who excelled in academics and also had clear career goals but who also fully participated in the Black student movement…" (p. 102). This participation included having an active hand with on campus activism, but working as an activist in the overall Black experience throughout the world.

As times progressed, Tripp's (1995) longitudinal study of Black college students suggests African American had a stronger affirmation of Black identity and culture. Additionally, the study suggested Black students could be seen as "social liberals who favor racial integration" (p. 12).

Figure 1. Black Student Activist Scholar Diagram



As discussed in the previous chapter, a Black Student Activist Scholar works to bring issues of the marginalized from the peripherals to the center of discussions that encapsulate academic discussion and community engagement, and additionally work to implement change under the auspice of social justice. Through the utilization of Racial Identity Development, Sociopolitical Development and academic engagement, I argue that a Black Student Activist Scholar employ their lived experiences as a Black person individually and collectively in tandem with their experiences as an activist all channeled through their academic engagement which together creates a Black Student Activist Scholar.

The Takeover for Black Studies

The development of Black Studies in the academy serves as an exemplification of the work of Black Student Activists in the twentieth century. The Black Power era ushered in a new wave of Black consciousness and political thought for African Americans in the mid-twentieth century. This era brought about a resurgence of Black pride and dignity that had been negated for some time throughout American history. For some, previous methods of nonviolent direct action did not create the change some thought was necessary to have the same human rights as White America (Joseph, 2003; Joseph, 2007). This change was made quite visible with the development of Black Studies Departments on college campuses across the nation. In particular, Black students wanted something that was inclusive of their culture history and learning experience – a learning experience for Blacks, created by Blacks. Through their sociopolitical development, Black students actively sought to create a space for learning that valued their history, identity, and epistemology that had been silenced for so long in higher education. These Black students of the sixties sparked the impetus for what became the formal institutionalization of Black Studies.

The first formal institutionalization of Black Studies was on the campus of San Francisco State College. While 1968 marked the formal institutionalization of Black Studies in the academy, the process towards the installation had an arduous history. On this campus in particular, Black students, "radicalized and began to view the college itself as a deeply flawed and racist institution" (Rojas, 2007, p. 51). In the years leading to the institutionalization, Black students were active participants in the Experimental College, which allowed students to "teach their own courses on current events and nontraditional

topics with relatively little supervision" (Rojas, 2007, p. 59). According to Rojas (2007), Black students, "created their own curriculum within the Experimental College…In 1967 eleven courses on Black history, politics, and culture were offered, and by 1968, the Black studies curriculum covered history, social sciences, and the humanities" (p. 62). While this was a substantial advancement in the academy, Black students wanted something more concrete. In 1968, Black students reached the precipice of not being fairly represented in academics, faculty, and social organizations. What ensued was the Third World Strike where both Black and non-Black students created a list of demands for the university president. One of these demands included the installation of "Department of Black Studies, which will grant a Bachelor's Degree in Black Studies; that the Black Studies Department, the chairman, faculty and staff have the sole power to hire faculty and control and determine the destiny of its department" (Rojas, 2007, p. 69). After being faced with bureaucracy, and other institutional challenges, Black Studies was introduced as a department in 1968. This ushered in Black students across the nation to push for the development of Black Studies on their campuses and universities.

On the national scale, Black students on college campuses and universities during this timeframe "were seasoned veterans of political struggles in the Black community" (Nelson, 2000, p. 80). They were more politically charged and insistent in their pursuits of equity and equality. Organizations like the Black Student Unions and Alliances were advocating for the development of Black Studies programs along with the concurrent struggle for equal rights in the larger American society. Moreover, "[t]he few Black students present on university campuses in the middle 1960's became, through sacrifice, painfully aware of the political character of universities and the importance of the

disruption factor in making them respond to their basic needs" (Nelson, 2000, p. 80). The development of Black Studies was rooted in a thrust for social change and activism, two components that are major tenets of the field of study today.

Through the amalgamation of Black students pursuing higher education and the push for global change, it became apparent that" [p]olitical demands for Black Studies resulted in the establishment of over several hundred programs at American colleges and universities over a five year period" (Nelson, 2000, p. 84). Following the creation of the Black Studies program at San Francisco State, students at Cornell University in New York demanded the development of Black Studies. Furthermore, at Ohio State University, Black students "boycotted classes, and began to block entrances into university buildings after university officials rejected their demands for substantial funding and broad administrative authority for Black Studies" (p. 84). For Black Students, action was necessary, and this action needed to make an impact. As St. Clair Drake (1979) suggests, "The Black studies movement was becoming institutionalized in the sense that it had moved from the conflict phase into adjustment to the existing educational system, with some of its values being accepted by that system" (p. 15).

As Black Studies gained momentum in the academy, the field began to flourish in academic opportunities and development. In the forty-five years since its formal installment into the academy, Black Studies is continuously developing and establishing presence and scholarship within the ivory tower. As Colin Palmer suggests, "Black Studies cannot lose sight of its founding promise to transform other areas of intellectual inquiry by posing new and trenchant questions about the structure of American society and providing new paradigms and answers" (p. 18). Black Studies has the opportunity to

roil the academic community, and offer solutions and scholarship that are both informative and transformative particularly for traditionally and historically marginalized communities worldwide.

Because of the scholarly activism of Black students in the late 1960's, the academy brought in effective change that raised the consciousness of Black college students, and the larger academic community. Black students were aware of the larger issues that were taking place in the larger community, and addressed their concerns though direct action that resulted in the development of Black Studies. Their activism and commitment to the Black liberation movement laid the foundation for Black Student Activist Scholars in the twenty-first century.

Conclusion

Much of the research written on Black student activists couches the discussion in a historical facet. I argue that while it is important to highlight the experiences of Black students in a historical context, it is also important to draw connections to contemporary Black student activist movements. Additionally, discussions concerning Black student activism have neglected to address how these experiences relate to the Black student experience – not only socially, but also within the educational context. This includes discussions of how their activist experiences might shape their academic engagement. Through understanding Black students' activist experiences, there is an opportunity to gain insight on how overall educational practices and campus environments can be adjusted to better suit the lives and experiences of Black students particularly on the campuses of Predominately White Institutions. In the following chapter, I highlight the methods utilized to explore the lived experiences of the Black Student Activist Scholar.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology and Methods: "Call to Duty: Black Ops"

The concept of scholarly activism has piqued my interest since the beginning of my graduate school career. The notion of studying the topic developed during the senior year of my undergraduate experience. I was elected President of a Black student activist organization devoted to community building and consciousness-raising among Black students on my campus. Our organizational platform included efforts to garner an understanding of historical moments and movements relevant to Black community and consciousness in higher education settings. As a group, we sought to understand the philosophy and practice of active resistance, heighten the consciousness of members of the group, and educate the community on campus. While I will elaborate on the scope of my participation and leadership in this organization in the research positionality section of this chapter, I introduce this experience here to highlight the importance of scholarly activism in my research and service. My participation in a Black student activist group and similar organizations shaped who I am today as an activist and a scholar in/of Black Studies. Reflecting on my own development, I argue that it is important to explore the experience and narratives of the Black student activist scholar in order to understand how this identity influences their academic engagement, racial relationships, and personal narratives. The discussion that follows reviews the methods and procedures that were used to explore the experiences and the development of their racial and activist identities of Black Student Activist Scholars. The chapter outline is as follows: Research Design, Analysis, Limitations to the Study, and my positionality as a researcher.

This dissertation itself is activism. The intention is for the lived experiences of the Black Student Activist Scholars to work in concert with those included in the dominant narratives. As such, it is not simply a matter of presenting the issues of the Black Student Activist Scholar for the simple facet of research. This research brings the voices of Black Student Activist Scholars from the margins to the center of discussion as a way to "look from the outside in and from the inside out" (hooks, 1984, p. 149). Through my interactions, observations, and discussions with participants, I was able to learn about my own exploration of Black consciousness, and what it means to have scholarship that is informed by activism and the Black liberation movement.

Qualitative Methodology and Research Design

To explore how Black student activist scholars make meaning of their racial and activist identities, I utilized a qualitative methodological approach to assist in gathering information. Qualitative research is "a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices have the potential to "transform the world" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 4). In this dissertation, I interpret Denzin and Lincoln's project of world transformation to mean helping others (specifically Black student activist scholars) to become aware of their social location, and to develop strategies for embracing or improving that social location. Collaboratively, the work of affirming and improving social conditions bears the potential to transform individual lives, communities, and the world. Additionally, qualitative research is an approach used to make sense of personal stories and the ways in which they intersect (Glesne 2011). Marilyn Lichtman (2010) offers a clear and sound definition of qualitative research in which she argues, "qualitative research is a general

term. It is a way of knowing in which a researcher gathers, organizes, and interprets information obtained from humans using his or her eyes and ears as filters" (p.5). I used the philosophy and practices of qualitative methodology to explore the lived experiences of the eight Black Student Activist Scholars. Through interviews and observations, I was provided access into their lives, meaning making practices, and understandings of and experiences with academic engagement, racial relationships and personal narratives. These methods allowed the themes describing the meaning attributed to racial and activist identities to emerge.

Qualitative Methodology and Research Design

To explore how Black student activist scholars make meaning of their racial and activist identities, I utilized a qualitative methodological approach to assist in gathering information. Qualitative research is "a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices have the potential to "transform the world" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 4). In this dissertation, I interpret Denzin and Lincoln's project of world transformation to mean helping others (specifically Black student activist scholars) to become aware of their social location, and to develop strategies for embracing or improving that social location. Collaboratively, the work of affirming and improving social conditions bears the potential to transform individual lives, communities, and the world. Additionally, qualitative research is an approach used to make sense of personal stories and the ways in which they intersect (Glesne 2011). Marilyn Lichtman (2010) offers a clear and sound definition of qualitative research in which she argues, "qualitative research is a general term. It is a way of knowing in which a researcher gathers, organizes, and interprets

information obtained from humans using his or her eyes and ears as filters" (p.5). I used the philosophy and practices of qualitative methodology to explore the lived experiences of the eight Black Student Activist Scholars. Through interviews and observations, I was provided access into their lives, meaning making practices, and understandings of and experiences with academic engagement, racial relationships and personal narratives. These methods allowed the themes describing the meaning attributed to racial and activist identities to emerge.

Context and Participants

Qualitative methodology and CRM emphasize the importance of exploring lived experience in real-world contexts where participants interact with one another in everyday situations. Producing thick descriptions involved careful attention to the BSAS' experiences as well as the context in which those experiences occur. I purposely selected 8 student activists based on the following criteria:

A Midwestern Predominately White Research University was chosen as a research site for a number of reasons. First, the number of documented racial incidences that were made public grew dramatically during the 2011-2012 academic year. The racial incidents sparked an awakening of students' activist for the twenty-first century. As race is a central focus in the construction of this study, this institution served as an ideal location to understand how various institutions and identities come to understand race within this environment. Second, the institution has a history of Black student activism that expands the history of the institution. For the purposes of this dissertation, I examined students involved with the Black Student Liberators, an undergraduate student organization founded in the late 1960s. The organization was founded on the mission of scholarly

activism and racial uplift. Third, the location of the institution makes gathering of the research convenient for the researcher. The campus is located near a major city with various connections to other institutions and community organizations. Fourth, I am familiar with the culture of and students at the institution, since I have advised the Black Student Liberators and was once an undergraduate student leader at the university and within the organization. I will provide a more detailed history of the university and the Black Student Liberators in Chapter Four: "Behind My Black…": Narratives of the Black Student Activist Scholar.

Participant selection

Participants were students who self-identified as Black, were involved with the Black Student Liberators, and whose activism mainly took place on the campus of a major Midwestern university. Specific focus and interest were afforded to executive board members of the organization (President, Vice President, Academic Retention Director, etc.), though active members who did not hold positions in the organization were also interviewed. Executive board members were of particular interest because board members are nominated and elected by their peers, suggesting that students who serve in these roles are recognized by their peers as individuals who channel their energy toward addressing issues of inequity and marginalization within the Black student community. In total, this included four women and four men – ranging from college juniors to seniors, with various academic disciplines represented. Being able to incorporate eight different perspectives allowed for a richer, more descriptive and prescriptive understanding of the Black student activist scholar Jones, Torres and Armino (2006).

Interviews

For this research I used both structured and unstructured individual and a focus group interview, in addition to observations. Interviews were an hour long to ninety minutes in length, with a secondary interview for each participant, if a follow-up was necessary for clarification. The interview protocol is included as Appendix A. The individual interviews proved "ideal for interviewing participants who are not hesitant to speak….and who can share ideas comfortably' (Creswell, 2011, p. 218). While I asked guiding questions taken from the interview protocol, the participant had the opportunity to answer or modify questions that illustrated their experiences, and allow for their voices. Rubin and Rubin (2005) posit that interviews should be a "conversational partnership" that allows for rapport to be established, which is an essential component of in-depth interviews. To maintain this conversational partnership, only in moments of confusion, or when topics were off subject did I redirect the participant back to the interview protocol. All individual interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Following the completion of the individual interviews, I conducted a focus group interviews to facilitate a collective conversation about the experiences of Black students activist scholars at MSU. The participants in the individual interviews served as the group of participants comprising the focus group. This focus group interview allowed for multiple perspectives of students with possible similar views to engage in dialogue with one another. Creswell (2011) posits that focus groups "are advantageous when the interaction among interviewees will likely yield the best information and when interviewees are hesitant to provide information" (p. 218). While focus groups were taking place, I took notes and interacted with participants at a minimum to ensure a rich,

uninterrupted discussion. There was one focus group with all of the participants in the study, which lasted two hours. The focus group interview was also audio recorded and transcribed. At the end of each interview I took additional notes of everything I witnessed, and used these notes as a guide in the research process. I followed up with participants as necessary for purposes of clarity, and to answer questions that I may have after the interview.

Students took an active role in the interviews, which allowed for the reduction of intimidation. As a result of the open-ended questions, the students openly divulged their lived experiences with me. Additionally, the interviews were constructed in a fashion so that the interviewee's voice is their authentic voice (Crosby 1996). Further, questions used in the interviews were constructed based on concepts related to the research, but also relate to the participant's lived experience, and making a conscious effort to avoid leading questions. Moreover, the participants in the interviews should be "knowledgeable about what is important in their world. When they understand correctly what is that you want to learn, these interviews can teach you with minimum guidance on your part" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 128).

I collected personal narratives that helped me to understand the lived experiences as BSAS on this campus. Furthermore, narratives (personal stories, testimonies, etc.) were a viable component to this research, allowing for me as a researcher to probe further into questioning for the research. The interviews were aimed at understanding life experiences, which include familial influences, academic choices, and the expansion of their activism, which the participants would consider to be important information as it pertains to their current experiences of a Black Student Activist Scholar. In addition,

questions asked in the interviews were situated to gain an understanding of Black Student Activist Scholar's knowledge and experience of race, racism, activism, and life experiences as they relate to the experience of being a Black student on the campus of a Predominately White Institution.

These interview approaches allowed for an honest, original view of the lives of Black student activist scholars from their perspective. Their voices guided my research and permit me to share their stories in a way that adds to the current the literature on Black student activist scholars. As a researcher it was important not to interrupt, but to ensure participants remain on task. It was my hope to uncover Black student activists scholar's experiences and views by listening, leaving my assumptions and society's prejudices out of the conversation. Furthermore, throughout the duration of the research I critically examined my activist identity in the process, and reflected on my overall intent, and the message I expected to spread to various audiences. My use of open-ended questions in both the individual and focus group interviews allowed participants the opportunity to freely express their experiences to understand their development to become Black student activist. This approach allowed me to collect thick, rich descriptions of the lives of the Black Student Activist Scholars. Interviews were enhanced and verified by the observation of classroom dialogues, and reflection on produced works that factored into their activism and identity.

Participant Observations

The content of interviews was enhanced by extensive observations of Black student activist scholars. Prolonged observations in the field are another way to help "understand the experiences of people of color along the educational pipeline"

(Solorzano & Yosso 2002, p. 36). These observations took place in both public and private meetings, as both were important to data collection. Creswell and Miller (2000) argue researchers build rapport so that participants are comfortable and trust can be built with one another.

In addition to developing more familiarity with the context of BSAS identity development more broadly, I also observed each of the primary participants in natural settings as much as possible. I attended public forums for the group, executive board meetings and any programs the organization implemented throughout the time allotted for data collection. The observations allowed me to be equipped with information about how students use their public and private spaces to develop and enact their identity as a Black Student Activist Scholar. During each of the observations, I took notes during and immediately following to ensure full, detailed reflections were developed to support the guidelines and goals of the research. This process is referred to as a "constant comparative" analysis wherein the researcher collects information, analyzes, and if necessary, refocuses and re-positions observations toward illuminating the phenomenon of interest (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This concept was important in the research process as it assisted with making sense of meaning – to discover what people are doing in their everyday lives and how it may relate to the conceptual frameworks and research questions.

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Table 1. Categories derived from an Analysis of the Interview Transcripts (Watts, Williams, & Jagers, in press)

Experience Venues Upbringing: • Home and Family members • Religious Experiences • Primary and Secondary schooling Hood and Community organizations	The important early interaction of people and settings that were important in an activist's early life
Organizations • Change Organizations • Human services • Business & Economic Development • Religious organizations • Institutions of higher education and their organizations • None: Independent	Settings that provided roles and opportunities for young activists to participate in activism and refine their evolving worldview
The Self • Personality • Thinking and artistic activity (e.g. rap) • Emotions • Motivations (e.g. drive and need for achievement, need for power) • Spirituality • Spirituality calling • Identity (race, ethnicity, gender, GLBT, etc.)	Personal attributes and characteristics important in sociopolitical development
Influences • Significant others -Mentoring -Peers The famous -Hip Hop -Thinkers, activists, and their organizations -Media	People and others influences on sociopolitical development
Events • Events participated in personally • Travel (outside home city) • Novel Settings • Public events	"Transient, specific, short-term happenings, vividly described and meaningful to the participant" (p. 14), not directly related to his or her role.

Table 1 (cont'd)

Roles • Leadership • Organizing • Arts • Intellectual (e.g. writing activities) • Culture (African American cultural activity)	Jobs and other positions in organizations and their distinct sets of responsibilities and activities; organizations must be coded also
Education and occupation: concerns and decision making	
Sociopolitical Awareness and insight • Insight ideology and action integration Emerging ideology • Ideology and sociopolitical worldview Critical reasoning and analysis	

This chart assisted in visualizing the Black Student Activist Scholar's sociopolitical development. An additional feature of the data analysis process included member checking (Merriam 1998). Member checking is an analytical tool that involves participants in the development and confirmation of codes and themes. The process "consists of taking data and interpretations back to the participants in the study so that they can confirm the credibility of the information and narrative account" (p. 127). For this dissertation, I presented the transcriptions of the interviews to the research participants, scheduled further interviews for purposes of developing clarity with themes and descriptions of accounts. As suggested by Creswell and Miller (2000), I incorporated the voices of my participants into the final narrative, thus adding credibility to the final study.

Upon gathering and analyzing the data, triangulation was used to further authenticate what the research participants discussed throughout the research (Creswell & Miller 2000). Triangulation is defined as "a validity procedure where researchers search

for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study" (p. 126). Merriam (1998) posits triangulation data is "using multiple investigators, multiple sources of data, or multiple methods to confirm emerging findings" (p. 204). Additionally, Creswell (2011) proposes that triangulation "ensures that the study will be accurate because the information draws on multiple sources of information, individuals, or processes. In this way, it encourages the researcher to develop a report that is both accurate and credible" (p. 259). One way to assure the triangulation of the data is to "provide corroborating evidence collected through multiple methods, such as observations, interviews, and documents to locate major and minor themes" (p. 127). To achieve triangulation, I used the individual interviews, focus group interview, extensive observations, member checking and the Watts, Williams and Jagers themes chart to inform the narrative account provided in Chapter Four: "Behind My Black…" Narratives of the Black Student Activist Scholar. Further, I used a cross-case analysis to uncover similarities and differences between participants in the study, and to "eliminate overlapping areas" (Creswell & Miller 2000, p. 127). This allowed for salient themes to become evident in the research. Through these processes, I found correspondence in enactment of the Black student activist scholar identities of my participants, and convergence in their representation of themselves in the interviews and the roles they served within their organization. These correspondences and convergences allowed for the salient themes to emerge and be confirmed. Following the completion of interviews, observations, and transcriptions of the data, I represented the data in the dissertation in narrative form, which provides a venue for my participants' voices to be heard. I chose this approach because I was able to tell their stories from their

perspectives.

Limitations to the Study

There are several potential limitations to this study. Further investigation of this topic would employ a larger scope of Black student identities, and expanding the project to various Black student organizations on multiple college campuses. This has the potential to explore varied nuances of Black student activist identities, which would have allowed for various social, educational, and leadership experiences from multiple experiences. For the purposes of this study, student's involvement came primarily from the same region in the country and attended the same university. Locational diversity would have permitted more nuances in the Black student activist scholar experience. While the primary aim of this dissertation was to explore the lives and experiences of Black student activist scholars on the campus of a major Midwest university, it might be of benefit for future studies to explore other college campuses and environments, including Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), community colleges, and colleges in other regions across the country. Future studies should also employ Black student leaders from many different backgrounds across the African Diaspora. Furthermore, news reports, articles, and other documents have the potential to be biased in their portrayal of incidents and how things might have actually taken place. Additionally, these documents may not tell of the personal stories, ideas, and goals of individuals who are participating within the study. The following chapter provides an analysis of the narratives of the Black student activist scholars. This research is about the lived experiences of 8 BSAS on a predominantly white campus. It does not presume that their stories reflect the experiences of BSAS across other campuses. Furthermore, it is not

determinative of all Black Student Activist Scholars in all contexts, it raises discussions that are rarely addressed in academic research.

Positionality – My role as a researcher

It is important to take into consideration the role of my personal identity in the development and outcome of my research. Achebe (2005) suggests, "it is important to acknowledge that one's 'positionality and location' may affect, for better or worse, a researcher's approach to carrying out research and interpretation/evaluation of evidence" (p. 2). In negotiating my positions both inside and outside of the research, I worked to determine both my insider and outsider status. I am a relative insider because of my cultural identity, as well as my experience being a leader in the organization from which participants in this research were selected. I am also a relative outsider because of my age and level of education attained. My identity as an undergraduate alumnus of a Predominately White Institution and former leader of a Black student activist organization offered a much closer insight and more firsthand view of the Black undergraduate activist experience. I am the child of parents who were activists in their own right, who participated in community events that addressed injustices, and who sought to create a more just life and experience for my sibling and me. Additionally, reflecting back on my experiences, I can remember the excitement I had when entering college and learning about a group of students who shared some of the same experiences as a Black student on a white campus. Finding this comfort zone amidst a hectic academic schedule was just the safe place I needed. These and other experiences were beneficial as I connected with participants in the research. As Dunbar (2008) argues, "there exists other intangibles/nuances that are best transmitted and understood when

shared experiences, epistemologies, and the relationship to both are evident between the observer and the observed…" (p. 90). The experiences I have had as a Black student leader activist coupled with the knowledge acquired during this study of Black students sharing their current experiences in leadership positions allowed to have the research flourish and allow for the students' experiences to be highlighted. As previously mentioned, my identity plays a significant role in the research process. Scholar Marc Lamont Hill (2009) suggests:

> …the decisions that we make about how we want to represent ourselves and our research participants, both in the field and behind the desk, have powerful personal, social, and methodological implications that cannot be adequately responded to through traditional methodological considerations of validity, internal generalizability, or thick description (p. 147).

This offers a privilege that allows for a culture-specific analysis in the interpretation of information gathered. Ladson Billings (2000) argues, "Thus CRT asks the qualitative researcher to operate in a self-revelatory mode, to acknowledge the double (or multiple) consciousness in which she is operating" (p. 272). I make use of Critical Race Theory in my research because who I am is *inextricably* related to the commitment I have to Black activism, young people, education, and social justice. As such this allows me to become vulnerable to any criticisms that may be directed at my personal beliefs and identities, and challenge me to introspect my involvement not only within the research, but in the larger pictures of my own understanding of the roles race, racism, scholarship and social justice are interconnected.

As a relative insider, however, there may be some instances that my identity and experiences could affect the research. As an insider there is the possibility to naturally overlook things that may be significant to the development of the overall research project. This includes factors related to the structure and process of the members of the organization that I researched. In this attempt to collaborate with students and understanding their experiences, I was able to do what Gloria Ladson-Billings suggests by "redefine the roles of researcher and 'informant' and 'avoid some of the pitfalls of researcher bias and distortion of cultural phenomena'" (2009, p. 180). The Black student activists that I worked with are viewed as strong collaborators to the research process; without their assistance, there would be no drive in the study. As a researcher, it was important to have a collaborative process when gathering information from the Black student activist scholars, lessening the reins on the control of information, and letting the Black student activist scholars inform *me* of things as they happen. This meant carefully listening and letting them tell me their story. This also included being available as a resource, and open to collaborators asking questions of me much like the interview process I engaged with them. Moreover, this means talking freely about my experiences and myself and allowing collaborators to get to know about me. Moreover, I was able to make effective but respectful use of the aspects of my identity that allow me to function as an insider. I am able to get in contact and obtain other information from people who are or were actively involved with the organization who might have been unknown to purely outsider researchers.

Conclusion

In the next chapter, I introduce the Black student activist scholars and the development of racial and activist identities and personal narratives. Their experiential knowledge, collected through individual and focus group interviews as well as observation, serve the purpose to examine theory and concepts, and contextualize them within the broader human experience. Additionally, the stories presented in this dissertation allow for the engagement in dialogue about Black students and their experiences in higher education through challenging, reflecting, and relating with the participants. Their insights informed me about their development as activists and the shaping of their multiple identities and their motives and impetus civic and campus activism. In what follows, I will discuss my findings of the narratives of the Black Student Activist Scholar.

CHAPTER FOUR

> *While the scholar who is a Negro must devote to an objective, dispassionate search for truth like any other scholar, he would seem to me be confronted with the additional responsibility of making known to the world of scholarship, any great mind that was lodged by accident of birth in a black body [sic]. This special or additional responsibility I gladly accept, and the results of the assumptions of this duty, you will read in the following pages.* [1]

"Behind My Black…": Narrative of the Black Student Activist Scholar

Introduction. This chapter presents the stories that emerged from my interviews and focus group with Black student activist scholars. The Black student experience, particularly in American context offers a unique and needed perspective on historical, contemporary, and future discussions from a scholarly approach that provide a perspective of race, class, and other intersecting identities of experience. The lived experiences of Black students in higher education have often been lost in the discussion as it relates to the development of education in America. As discussed in previous chapters, Critical Race Theory works to incorporate the counterstories and voice of Black student activist scholars. The term 'voice' in this research is the assertion of knowledge and lived experience as is deemed a relevant source of knowledge. Voice in this sense is by no means monolithic, but rather a collective of experiences that are varied in their overall approaches, but show common experiences that are often left out of the dominant discourse. This counter storytelling approach "can open new windows into the reality of those at the margins of society by showing the possibilities beyond the ones they live and demonstrating that they are not alone in their position" (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001, p.

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[1] Dr. Charles Leander Hill, 1955

[2] Although it was later revealed through police investigation that the incident was about a love relationship gone wrong, the discussions surrounding the event raised awareness about how the campus viewed racism and race relations. Numerous opinion articles, blog

471). I intend to demonstrate how this approach is both emancipatory for not only the participants, but as a way to effectively change the scope of academic research.

This chapter provides a venue by which Black student activist scholars share their lived experiences as it relates to their racial and activist identities. Additionally, this research employs the use of the personal narrative as a valid source of knowledge. One of the most crucial aspects of this form of research is to challenge and question the dominant ideologies that are presented about Black student experiences in white spaces, one of which being the academy. This research serves as a challenge to notions of dominant ideologies through the presentation of counter narratives. Furthermore, this is highlights the participants in a research study that assists me in an attempt to garner an understanding of the Black student activists lived experiences.

My Counterstory

Before beginning this project, it was important for me to understand my own sociopolitical development to segue into exploring the lived experiences of Black Student Activist Scholars at a Predominantly White Institution. I began to look back on personal experiences that led to my interest in this research endeavor. My entrance into this research approach began well before my interest in inquiring about the lived experiences of the Black student activist scholar. It began in my own home with how my parents demonstrated the importance of giving back to the community through service, or raising awareness about civic engagement, and the power and significance of voting and being politically involved, specifically in the Black community. This influence continued well into my adult years, when my father became a civil servant, who worked on behalf of the very community that shaped and positively impacted his life.

As a freshman on the campus of a predominately white institution, I sought inclusion and support in an environment that would foster my development as a student. In this discovery, I attended a Black Student Liberators meeting. This organization was created as a result of Black students sensed that their voices were inconsequential by the larger campus community in the middle of the Black Power era, and most notably during a time when America was involved in a social transformation of injustices, and a shifting of perceptions.

Walking into the meeting, I was greeted by a group of Black students that were discussing issues that took place on campus as it related to being a Black student – graduation rates and racial bias incidents. The room was quiet as the leadership of the organization informed students of a string of racial incidents and how the organization was preparing to respond to those incidents. A mannequin head was stabbed, burned, and left in plain view of an apartment complex, and the discussion about the elimination of Affirmative Action were just some of the agenda items presented at the meeting[2]. Upon learning of these events, I was made aware of the permanence of racism that affected the campus community, and Black people as a collective. At the end of the meeting, the President introduced himself to me, and ensured me that this organization was a resource to use to get to my (at the time) ultimate goal of graduation. I participated with the

[2] Although it was later revealed through police investigation that the incident was about a love relationship gone wrong, the discussions surrounding the event raised awareness about how the campus viewed racism and race relations. Numerous opinion articles, blog posts, and campus forums were held about the incident, as the event was reminiscent of racially charged incidents that affected Black people throughout American history. Additionally, the elimination of Affirmative Action was at the forefront of most race-based discussions at this time, as there was a nation-wide movement from some individuals to remove the initiative as a method for determining decisions in higher education resources.

organization for the duration of my undergraduate career, eventually leading to the leadership position of President. During my participation, I was able to further my understanding of being a Black man and how my identity plays a role in the larger interactions with campus, other Black students, and the world I encountered off campus. At the same time, I began to develop a strong activist identity, addressing various racial injustices I experienced as a Black student in addition to speaking on collective injustices Blacks were experiencing worldwide.

My Black Student Activist Scholar identity was being shaped in ways that allowed me to question and grapple with my position in the world and ways my involvement can shape social change. The more I took Black Studies coursework and added the specialization to my major, I was influenced to make changes for the betterment of my community, particularly on campus. Additionally, I felt that it was important to strengthen and create a strong Black collective that sought to improve the social and material conditions of Black people on a global scale. Upon earning my baccalaureate degree, I entered into the field of Black Studies with the commitment of not only investigating the nuanced subjectivities of Black lives, cultures and experiences, but also a commitment to scholarly activism and continued outreach to the Black community. This included maintaining close ties with Black undergraduate students involved with the Black Student Liberators, and being a resource to leaders that are doing the very thing I did some years back. In being a resource, I was able to maintain a strong rapport with students and a visibility that allowed students to be approachable to me as I was with them. In maintaining this relationship, my passion developed for understanding the lives and experiences of Black student activists, how they come to understand this role and how they seek to transform

their world while navigating their space on a Predominately White Campus. Essentially, this entrance into my participation with this research is eight years in the making.

Setting the scene…

Founded in mid-19th century, the institution at the center of the study is a top-tier research institution located near a major Midwestern capital city. The university is a pioneer land-grant institution that was established under the Morrill Act of 1862[3]. For the purposes of this study, it is important to first examine the institution in numbers. The most recent enrollment numbers the 2012-13 academic year totals 48,906 students, including undergraduate and graduate studies. Of this, 3,037 students are African American, which totals 6.21% of the total population. As of 2012, dynamic persistence rates for African American students in their first year totaled 86.7%. Additionally, for African Americans, only 56.2% graduate from the institution within six years as compared to the rate of 76.8% for White students. These numbers continue to show disparities that African American college students face, and that the achievement gap beginning in early education continues to have lasting effects in higher education. I believe it is vital to grasp these demographics in order to understand the context by which Black students are utilizing their activism. Furthermore, in order to humanize the realities of the statistics presented, I utilize storytelling as a way to illuminate their experiences from the margin, and place their voices at the center of the discussion.

[3] Under Title 7 of the United States Code, the Morrill Act of 1862 was designed to without excluding other scientific and classical studies and including military tactic, to teach such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanic arts, in such manner as the legislatures of the States may respectively prescribe, in order to promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions in life.

To gather participants for this study, I utilized students active with the Black Student Liberators, an organization founded in the late 1960s in a time of social unrest in American society. At this time, Black students were entering college at high rates due to such programs as the Detroit Project[4], an initiative aimed at changing the demographics of the campus through government initiatives like affirmative action. However, as Black students began to arrive on campus in larger numbers, programs and services were not developed that addressed the academic, social, and cultural adjustments they would encounter. Persistent statistics around the achievement gap, the encounter of culture shock, and racism that was ever so blatant throughout American society. As a result, the Black Student Liberators was created. This organization, developed in the basement of a Black faculty member, created a space on campus for Black students to convene, and share in common experiences on the college campus. Since its inception, through the organizations activism, has responded to campus racism and injustices in a number of ways, most notably through protests, rallies, and sit-ins.

Black Student Liberators, in its current setting, continues to address many of the same injustices that the founders of the organization discussed over forty years ago at the organization's inception. Campus adjustment, graduation, retention, and racism continue

[4] In the fall of 1967, 70 high-risk students were admitted to the institution from inner-city high schools in what was called the Detroit Project. Of the 66 students in this group who were black, 27 returned in 1968, a year in which the institution admitted 357 black freshmen in a total campus enrollment of 1,007. There was a tendency on campus to identify all black freshmen as high academic risks, but only 25 of the 357 students were actually admitted with records that would not have qualified them for admission. For 1969, the institution has accelerated its drive to attract black students in general and able black students in particular. Some remaining problems include finding black high school graduates, especially those with a B or better academic grade average, the financing of these students, and getting the best prepared black students to attend the school. (Abramson & Schwartz, 1968).

to affect the lives of Black students on this campus, as Black students have experienced historically. To address and combat these issues, the Black Student Liberators held weekly "Conscious Circles" in which not only Black students, and also larger campus community come together to discuss pertinent topics in the Black community on a local, state, national and international levels. Additionally, students annually celebrate Black life and culture artistically, with the Black Power Rally, a tradition for more than 40 years. Here, students not only celebrate Black life, but charge the campus community with ways to get active and create change in the community. This included raising awareness about campus, local, and national policies that affected Black students, and sponsoring weekly study tables, through which they expressed the importance of academic achievement, and increasing persistence and graduation rates among Black students. The school year usually ends on a high note annually with the Black Celebratory, a graduation ceremony that celebrates the accomplishments of Black students. The Black Student Liberator's mission speaks to the tenet of a commitment to social justice. Matsuda (1991) suggests this commitment serves as a response to eliminate all forms of racial, class, and gender oppression, in addition to empowering historically marginalized communities. The Black Student Liberators is a cultural organization that fosters thought and action that empowers Black college students in addition to raising awareness to issues that intersect the varied identities that they bring with them to a white campus.

The Plot

The year 2011 started like any other academic year, with the hustle and bustle of the new semester. However, as the year progressed, turmoil rocked the campus in a way

that brought to the surface many of the discussions of race and racism that were underlying in the peripherals of the campus landscape. At this time, students, faculty, and the larger community were reminded that these issues of racism are still prevalent, regardless of how 'post-racial' things might seem in the twenty-first century. Lynched effigies of Black bodies in classrooms, and signs that read, "No Niggers, please" were documented in addition to nine other racial biased incidents seen throughout campus. As a response, expressions of activism mirrored tactics of that from the Civil Rights and Black Power Eras of the mid-twentieth century. Students were seen on campus with signs quoting revolutionary leaders like Stokely Carmichael (2011), raising awareness that was a "call for Black people in this country to unite, to recognize their heritage, to build a sense of community. It is a call for Black people to define their own goals, to lead their own organizations" and Malcolm X's (1965) powerful statement that reminded the campus "You can't have capitalism without racism" (p. 69). Silent protests and marches across campus and town hall meetings of over 1,000 students were just some of the ways Black students were letting the campus and administration know of their disapproval of and intolerance of racism and biased incidents. From this, Simone, Keea, Troy, Marcus, Audre, Amir, Jamaal, and Camille emerged as Black Student Activist Scholars who, through their Black and student activist identities, their commitment to the Black community, and the intersection at which both worlds meet, sought to create effective change on their campus. I integrate my observations, interviews, and focus group to present their stories.

Table 2. Black Student Activist Scholar Participants

Black Student Activist Scholar Participants			
Name	Age	Year	Major
Simone	21	Senior	Journalism, Black Studies specialization
Keea	20	Junior	Journalism/Sociology, Black Studies specialization
Troy	20	Junior	Journalism/Political Science
Marcus	22	Senior	Political Science
Audre	20	Junior	Early Childhood Education/Urban Education
Amir	21	Senior	Interdisciplinary Studies/History/Education
Jamaal	23	Senior	Interdisciplinary Studies
Camille	23	Alumna	Sociology/Community Relations, Black Studies specialization, Spanish minor

Throughout my observations and interviews, I met the Black Student Activist Scholars in the course of their development of their identity while on campus. As such, these Black Student Activist Scholars are among the 13% of all Blacks nationally receiving a post-secondary degree, in the process of earning bachelor's degrees in hopes of returning to the communities that proudly sent them with optimism to improve their way of life through the rungs of education (Center for American Progress, 2012). As with most Black intellectual activists, this development was not superficial nor was it impromptu or impulsive. Through my observations and interactions, I learned that this is a developmental process of constant grappling and reshaping of identities. This activism

continues to be a process through experiences and constant shaping of worldviews that led each of them to where they are today. Each of the participants shared stories that revealed experiences of racial socialization and influences and external factors that eventually became an integral component of their understandings of activism in the context of their academic endeavors. In addition to the stories each of the participants shared, other themes included having a 'duty of knowledge' and connecting the Black student activist experience to a larger collective struggle of traditionally oppressed communities throughout the world, which are discussed in the following chapter. In each of my observations and interactions with the participants, I learned how race, activism, and identity, influence, and participation in a Black student organization all played a role in the sociopolitical development shape their participation in knowledge revenue and construction on a predominantly white campus. Utilizing the categories derived from the analysis of interview transcripts (Watts, Williams, Jagers, in press), I was able to compile the storied lives of eight Black Student Activist Scholars. Their multifaceted lives give way to consistent tropes that emerged because of their experiences.

The Art of Storytelling

For many, turning 21 is a milestone celebrated with finally being legal, going to bars, and being able to purchase alcoholic beverages. On a college campus, it is a rite of passage for many. Simone welcomed her 21st birthday by attending a protest rally sparked by policies put in place to limit the right to organize as unions in places of employment. "*I'm standing in solidarity with workers in hopes that they receive equal pay and treatment*". Simone served as Vice President of the Black Student Liberators assisting coordinating weekly executive board meetings or general assembly meetings, or

planning the annual Black Power Rally, the annual Black student tradition on campus. Throughout my observations of Simone, she could be seen reading books with strong Black feminist themes in nature. *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*, and Angela Davis' *Women, Race, and Class* were some of the books Simone had in hand and she read them for both pleasure and academic enlightenment. A native of Detroit, Simone grew up with her sister and her parents, who collectively worked together to give back to their community through service projects. A self proclaimed Queer Hip Hop Feminist, Simone often engaged with peers and fellow executive board members in critical dialogues that brought awareness about a number of issues, including feminist representations in hip hop, or discussing African American representation in popular culture.

"A people united can never be defeated!" Keea shouted through a bullhorn during a protest coordinated by the Black Student Liberators to address the campus injustices in regards to racism and how the university administration handled each situation. Keea, a Political Affairs Director with the Black Student Liberators worked as a coordinator to establish a working relationship with the campus student government and the Black Student Liberators. A junior, Keea majors in Journalism with a specialization in African American and African Studies. With participation in union protests strong in her roots, Keea was an ideal participant in the study. Keea described herself as a "rabble rouser", and was often the person to play the 'devils advocate' and bring about other perspectives that could have been overlooked in student meetings or present the situation from another approach. In addition to her position with the Black Student Liberators,

Keea also works closely with The Reach, a student organization geared towards increasing retention rates among African American students.

Troy credits the notable men that came before him in his fraternity as an impetus for his involvement in activism. Many of his fraternity members played a major role in the Civil Rights Movement and set the tone by which he would engage with activism. During my conversations with Troy, he was adamant that he was an activist for his people, but had difficulties in explaining his understandings of race and racism, which he knew still exists and affects him:

> Troy: So I think um, I don't really know how to explain it really, um, just because we're divided don't necessarily mean that we can't be equal. It's just something that we've been battlin' with, especially minorities and I just don't want to point fingers at white people, but of course they were the only race known historically to oppress other groups. Other minority groups have been workin' together. Um, I don't even know how to explain race, but I think it's a complicated subject on top of that. Because, bein' white is not necessarily bein' European. It has so many implications behind it and sometimes I don't even wanna look at it.

Troy's difficulty in his articulation of race and racism speaks to the first tenet of Critical Race Theory, which suggests that racism is an ordinary facet within American society. Tatum (1997) relates racism of American society to that of smog, wherein, "always, day in and day out, we are breathing it in" (p. 6). As such, Troy's nascence in his discussion of being a racialized individual lends to Lawrence's (1987) discussion of the unconsciousness of racism that, although not overtly articulated, is less likely to be experienced at the conscious level. Through further discussions about race and racism, it

became apparent Troy had awareness about a misalignment in racism. A college junior, Troy majors in Political Science with a minor in Journalism.

From an early age, Marcus was always reminded he was a Black man. Marcus grew up in a small woman-centered family. Early in his education, Marcus attended an African-centered, all-male school in which his identity as a Black man was affirmed and honored through not only curriculum, but through mentoring and images of Black men. This identity as a Black man has had its fair share of racism, so much that Marcus internalizes it and turns to laughter to deal with racism:

> Marcus: Oh yeah, like you can't be a Black man if you've never experienced racism (laughs) Like, I mean, you'll have to revoke your Black Card. (laughs). But I mean I feel like it's sad to say, but it happens y'know like um –it hurts at first – the first time but the second, the third, maybe fourth time, or fifth, comma et cetera, um, it turns to jokes and with your Black friends or other minority friends at that because it's funny that people still think like it's still 1963 y'know so. Or even before, so, I experience racism all the time.

Upon further clarification, Marcus noted his laughs were a result of being tired of the consistence of racism in his life, and that the only way to manage the situation was to simply laugh about how the situations manifested in his life. Marcus signified the absurdity of racism and its prevalence in the twenty-first century. Marcus was the Academic Retention director with the Black Student Alliance, a position with the primary focus of developing programs that promoted academic success in the Black community on campus. A graduating senior in Political Science, Marcus plans to pursue a career in higher education to help other first generation Black college students.

Audre was proudly encouraged to express her activist identity through a number of avenues, one of which being church. In our discussions about her influences, Audre mentioned her involvement in church as a spark that charged her impetus in being a Black activist. Audre shared with me that she could remember her church sending leaflets with updates about issues that were affecting the Black community. Additionally, Audre was racially and culturally affirmed with her experiences in school. She attended at Catholic school on the Southside of Chicago wherein:

> Audre: Um, I mean, even in our Catholic school because it was Black like it was Black students, Black teachers, it was only one white teacher and that was Ms. Soled and she had a Black spirit (laughs). So, like we in the morning – like honestly I still don't even know all the words to the "Star Spangled Banner" but every morning we sung the Black National Anthem and before we went into class, like we um, we'd say the Pledge of Allegiance to the um, the American flag, and right next to that would be another kid standin' with the Black flag and we'd sing 'Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing' and stuff like that. And so every morning there was a um, there was a speech – like a pledge like our school pledge, like, I don't even remember all the words to it, but basically, just like affirmation and stuff like that. Y'know, encouraging yourself in starting the day and it ended "because I am one proud Black individual student" and when the white girls came we had to change that (laughs)…[5]

[5] Further explanation of Audre's reference of Ms. Soled having a "Black spirit" meant that although she is not Black, she could be considered an ally or could relate to some aspects of Black life and culture which made her someone with which students could relate.

A junior majoring in early education with a focus in urban education, Audre was influenced into being an activist after hearing stories of family members activist engagement. With this as part of her history, Audre carried on the tradition of activism to her experiences on campus. Upon graduation, Audre plans to become an early childhood educator in her hometown of Chicago, Illinois.

Amir was first brought to my attention as a Black Student Activist Scholar through his rallying of the campus community surrounding the issues of Trayvon Martin, the case of an unarmed Black teen shot down in Sanford, Florida in 2012. Amir, a senior in Interdisciplinary studies stood on the steps of the campus auditorium, and encouraged the campus to "shake this nation to its core"[6] after such an impactful and devastating tragedy in the Black community. Growing up, Amir was surrounded by knowledge and academic engagement. Amir grew up in Newark, New Jersey with his mother and brother. Though not living with Amir, his father had an active role in his life. Amir's consciousness of his Black identity meant "having to understand that you need to know who are you are, and at the same time be able to not necessarily be another person, but be able to think differently to where you're not only holdin' on to your view or identity, but where you can identify with others…" Though his speeches, Amir sought to influence others to take the lead and create change in their communities.

Jamaal enjoyed being able to employ his activism on the ground level. A graduating senior in Interdisciplinary Studies, Jamaal currently works in the residence halls as a Cultural Aide to spread cultural and racial awareness in a way that allows him to directly interact with students and report up to campus administration. As member-at

[6] March 29th Trayvon Martin rally

-large for the Black Student Liberators, Jamaal worked with executive board members, filling in roles as necessary. While soft-spoken, he is very opinionated and had no qualms about sharing his thoughts on any particular situation. With humble beginnings growing up in a low-income single parent family on the eastside of Detroit, in his words, "basically the 'hood", Jamaal attended a small predominantly Black high school, and had not had much experience with activism. Upon entering college, Jamaal shared this experience about his understanding of the campus:

> Jamaal: As I got the brochures and talked to people who came here, y'know the campus the "diversity" in the sense that there were some minority students who were here on campus, y'know so when I came here I wasn't shocked – I knew what I was getting myself into.

Upon graduation, Jamaal hopes to become an elementary school principal and continue in his role as a Black activist.

When I began this research project, I knew I wanted to include Camille. I was first introduced to Camille at the Black Student Liberators Town Hall Meeting, where she was key organizer and speaker. The town hall was created as a direct response to the President of the university's response to racial incidents on campus. In a campus wide email, the President stated, "It should go without saying that the University supports free speech including the use of words that are offensive to most in our community."[7] Camille, fiery in her speech, directly accused the President of supporting hate speech, and encouraged students to take action by stating, "The fight must go on and since the University is trying to play games we must come at them full force". As a member of the

[7] Campus email correspondence (10.4.11)

Black Student Alliance, Camille served in the position of the Black Studies Liaison. Her duties included informing the undergraduate community about courses and programs the Office of Black Studies offered to students, as well as developing strategies to increase Black student involvement in campus-wide activities. What drew me to Camille was her passion; Camille had no qualms about expressing how she felt about the condition of Black students on campus. Whether it was heading a rally to end educational injustices, or meeting with campus faculty to discuss the racist incidents that were occurring on campus. As a recent alumna, Camille has become a teacher, serving in an urban school district in a major metropolitan city in the south.

"The Sordid Tale of Race" – Race and Black Student Activism

"Bullshit…" "Oppression…" "Systematic…" "Oppressive…" "Discrimination…" and "alive and well" are some of the words and phrases used by participants to describe their understanding of race and specifically how racism plays a role in the formation of their identities. For most of the participants, their entrance into the experiences of activism began upon their arrival of the start of their undergraduate education, but for some, their understandings of their Black identity and awareness of social injustices began well before their educational careers. As Tatum (2000) suggests, the students' racialized identities is the component of their make up that society noticed about them, and concurrently used their Blackness on them in the attempt to negotiate what their Blackness meant in the larger scope of their interactions. This identity, primarily racial with the Black Student Activist Scholars, was a motivating factor for their participation in activism. Some students also reported the intersectionality of overlapping identities that negotiated as part of their activism. Their experiences speak to

one of the principle tenets of Critical Race Theory, which addresses the ordinariness of racism in American society (Bell, 1992; Mills, 1997; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) as well as the intersections of identity that shape the lived experience (Crenshaw, 1991). Since the forced arrival of African people on the American continent and the imposition of land, resources, and lives of Native Indigenous peoples, racism continues to shape much of how society functions in regards to treatment of people of color. As such, racism plays a role in how the Black Student Activist Scholars understand their identity, and how others might perceive them. Further, racism comes in many different facets – systematic, institutional, blatant, and subtle, and has been an integral component of the BSAS experience and throughout their lives.

Cross and Phagen-Smith (2001) would suggest the students to have entered college during the fourth stage of the Cross Nigrescence Model of Adult Identity Conversion in which there is a "habituation, stabilization, and finalization of the new sense of self." (p. 244). Through their encounters with the larger campus and the process of working with Black student organizations, students then began to show the fifth stage of the model wherein "after a person who, after having achieved a strong Black identity at the personal level, joins with others in the community for long-term struggles to solve Black problems and to research, protect, and propagate Black history and Black culture" (p. 244). For many of the participants, this development of Blackness is part of what guided their interests towards becoming an activist. This racial identity development process had a direct impact on the students' sociopolitical development, because it had the students critically examine and develop a consciousness of their Blackness in addition to understand stereotypes and other facets of marginalization and oppression Black

people may encounter in their development as a racialized individual. Additionally, students were made aware of discrimination and objectivity in society, and how these and how these impact the collective of Black Americans. In my discussions, participants discussed their knowledge of Blackness and their pride, proudness of being Black, and an overall commitment to racial conditions.

> Keea: I believe that there's no concrete definition for "Black". Because Black is so diverse in itself, you can experience blackness in many forms. Black in the 'hood is not necessarily Black as an activist or blacks in college. Some define Black in a cultural sense; styles of dress, the way we talk, dance, even through music. Black can also be defined as a social construction, of just not being White. However, black to me is defined in segments of history, present and future. Our blackness in the past was used as a stigma, to separate me from as so-called "superior". Blackness for me is defined by the different experiences that one coming from a particular background exemplifies. I came to this understanding definitely by coming to college. When you become involved and meet different people, two black people are never considered the same. And this can be true for other races as well, but particularly in "black culture," class, education, and opportunities have played key roles in defining the differences within our community.

Additionally, for Marcus, Marcus shared his understanding of the concept of being Black as it related to people as a whole.

> Marcus: The word "Black" is a word that was use to dehumanize those descendants of Africa by calling them the darkest color known to man. The

> color "black" has negative connotations, that its hard to shake off if you are not a white American. In the terms of the meaning of being black, its a sense of empowerment that Africans did not have in their past. A strong possibility that the word Black has so much power rather than, African American because the community does not want to associate with the white America, especially during our quest for liberation and human equality.

For Simone, Black speaks to an experience of inclusivity that she takes pride in her expression of how she narrates her racialized identity as Black. Simone discusses why the identity of African American is problematic, something that is similar to DuBois's concept of double consciousness:

> Simone: I like 'Black' as opposed to 'African American' or something like that because I think – one – Black is a universal term that can relate to people both in all the continents and the diaspora as well as I don't necessarily like African American because it still makes it seem like somehow you aren't really an American like – if you're white you can just be called white 'cause your Americaness is like, innate in that name. But to be called African American is like you're still an outsider of some sort within the very place you're from. And I like my "B" capitalized – most people lower case their 'b' – I like my B capitalized.

Keea describes her understanding of what Blackness means to her culturally, through identity, and through how others, specifically through the lens of the wider, dominant communities. Similarly, Marcus offers a historical trajectory of Blackness, and relates his definition through the White gaze of American society. As such, both Marcus

and Keea speak about both struggle and highlight the complexities and varied nuances of what Blackness means. Additionally, throughout their lives, their interactions and experiences with family and schooling careers shaped their understanding of race and racism in the world. This identity as a racialized individual played a role in the development of their activist identities. Simone's concept of Black highlights the 'veil' of being an outsider in America while at the same time striving to be included through Black identity. As illuminated by DuBois (1994), the Black Student Activist Scholars present how they understood their Black identity in relation to the larger society. Collectively, each of their experiences and epistemologies of Blackness show how diversity of the Black experience. The students shared their understandings of race and racism, and how these experiences were formed. Through this, collective experiences of racism, occurring on and off campus emerged, and students grappled and reacted to situations that might have occurred. For some, the recognizance of race and racism came early on, as was the case for Marcus:

> Marcus**:** when my auntie Tonya, she really gave me a lot of, um, knowledge of Black people and sayin' everything, all the time, 'Marcus you are a Black man, if nothing else you are a Black man.' Even when I was a kid y'know I didn't know what a man was, y'know what I mean, and I remember tellin' her like, y'know like 'Auntie I'm brown skin!' 'No you're Black!' 'No I'm brown skin! Look at my skin!' y'know because y'know I was so literal at the time where I was learnnin' my colors y'know and I look just like the color brown in Crayola, y'know? But um, she was tellin me like 'Marcus, you are a Black man', and as I got older, her teachings got a little more deeper and deeper and um, that's where it

started, when I was a kid. So it didn't start when I was here in school, it started when I was a kid. It started when I was at the crib[8].

In my discussions with Marcus, these 'deeper' discussions he had with his aunt entailed understanding how others, primarily Whites would perceive him, and how to navigate through systems of institutional and covert forms of racism. He was taught by the larger white society that being Black always came at a deficit. Marcus had to disrupt this understanding of how society views a Black man and what this meant in his racial identity development.

For Camille, the prompt to discuss the development of her Black racial identity began as a toddler:

Camille: My mom she always jokes about this but its something that like makes me sad, but she jokes about the fact that when I was like three years old I used to watch Mary Kate and Ashley Olsen on TV and I used to say stuff like "Mom and Dad! I wanna be white!" And like literally on Halloween they made me a white girl for Halloween when I was like 5 years old.

While too young to remember the particulars of how she felt about the experience, in retrospect, Camille reflected on the entirety of the experience:

Camille: And like, they joke and laugh like its funny, but I think it's disgusting! And its like things like seeing how from a young age being white is put on a pedestal. That even in the – like before walking and even before I was in school I

[8] For clarity, I followed up to ask Marcus what he meant by 'crib', whether he meant he had been learning this since birth or otherwise. Marcus informed me he meant that his racial socialization started in his home. According to Dr. Geneva Smitherman (2001), a 'crib' is a home. This term is used commonly in African American Vernacular English (AAVE).

was already comparing myself to white people and almost wishing that I could be white. And its things like that that made me realize like, there is something that is critically wrong in the way we are educated.

Race socialization, as highlighted by both Camille and Marcus is something Black Americans through their upbringing and experiences of what it means to be a Black person and how this affects their worldview (Nunnally, 2010). Concurrently, this socialization affected the Black Student Activist Scholar's sociopolitical development and their entrance into their activist identities. For Camille and Marcus, this grappling and contestation of Blackness is what informed them of their cognizance of their Blackness.

In contrast, Audre wasn't aware of being a racialized being until her arrival to college. Before then, she was a part of a community that looked like and related to her racially and culturally:

Audre: Not to say that I got here [college] and I looked in the mirror and realized 'I'm Black!' (Laughs). Just because um, like at home I was surrounded by people who looked like me. I wasn't a minority in my own community, so like of course I knew I was a minority, but I didn't feel like a minority, and so when I got here, it would be times I would walk into a lecture hall like, dang, its 300 people and only one that looks like me, y'know? And so then I know I shouldn't have felt this way, but it was just something that I'm still struggling with that I can't even fight off, like all the way, but I felt like I had to represent for the whole race, you know what I mean? If I come in the class and I'm the only Black person, I'm sittin' in the front on purpose, y'know? Y'know I'm answering questions – on

purpose you know? And that was a responsibility that honestly like I halfway gave to myself and halfway didn't that I never had before.

Amir, Jamaal and Camille experienced more overt, and aggressive acts of racism in their experiences as a Black student on a predominantly white campus. Amir noted his encounter with racism upon his entrance into college:

> Amir: Um, let's see, well I've experienced it one time freshman year. I was walking back to Hubbard Hall and there was this, I guess you could say this confederate car, it had like a confederate flag on it and everything like that and they rode down the street and they stopped and asked me what was I doing here. Like what am I doing here? So, and that was like the most, um, overt experience. It felt – I was scared, number one. These, y'know, white people are in this car lookin' like rough and might attack me, y'know. But um, after that I analyzed it, I guess this is the world we live in. Y'know, I brushed it off and kept moving.

Jamaal's first encounters with racism happened on campus during an encounter with the police:

> Jamaal: Ironically, I've never experienced racism until I came to school. Until I came here. Um, the first time I could honestly say that I had a racist encounter was with a police officer – pulled me over in my car and asked me was it mine. He didn't ask me anything else he just pulled me over asked me was it my car, I said yes, he looked and he said 'hmmm, well we're gonna see…'. And I'm wondering like 'well, what does that mean?' So he didn't – he didn't run my name or ask for my license, he just went back I guess he ran the plates, came back and asked me how to pronounce my name – 'cause he saw that I was a Black guy

– and my name clearly doesn't sound like any type of a "Black urban name" and that was the first time I experienced racism but then I've had other times where – I was livin' in the dorms and a couple white guys just made racist remarks and said things they shouldn't have said. Bein' Black on this campus is somethin' else.

Camille retold her experience with racism at her residence hall:

Camille: I remember coming out of my dormitory – this happened just last year and a group of white gentlemen that were standing at the bus stop yelled out "nigger bitch" to me. And when I went over to approach them, they all scattered. But it was like, they just didn't say it once, they said it a few times. And then after that they ran – they scattered around. And so like that was the most, I think, the most blatant in my face form of racism that I experienced. So of course there were more subtle ones but that one was the one that sticks out in my mind here in college. One – I was shocked – that like, 'cause you always know it happens but you always think it's not gonna happen to you, and when you were doing something where you're not even in contact with someone and something like that happens and you feel its completely unmerited, its shocking. Two – I was angry and I wasn't just angry because they felt they had the right to say such a thing to me, but I was angry because after they did it, they ran, literally. And to me, that made it worse because I couldn't confront them. And to me, it was like, you're grown men. And it's me by myself. So what would make you feel like you have to run – you can't address the situation. And I think that's what made me angry

> ‘cause I didn’t get the opportunity to let my voice be heard towards them…That’s what pushed me on to keep being an activist.

Though not everyone in the study had blatant forms of racism, Pierce (1969) suggests that microaggressions, “which are designed to reduce, dilute, atomize, and encase the hapless into his ‘place’ (p. 303). These microaggressions affect the environment in which Black students live, work, learn, and function on campus. These microaggressions then affect Black students and may impact their engagement with the larger campus environment. For some students, these acts of racism affected them in that it propelled them to continue in their activist roles.

From the discussions about race and racism, I sought to show the persistence of the described discriminations from the perspectives of students who experience and are affected by its history and continual presence. Being students at a predominantly white institution, they are navigating spaces where, “the ghosts of Jim Crow; the goblin of slavery-like, white, presumed superiority; and ghouls of sexism, racism, and classism…” remain in the discourse and ideologies of academic practice. (Kupenda, 2012, p. 20). These very ‘ghosts’ are the ones who systematically work to create barriers that restrict a conducive learning environment for Black students. Additionally, these experiences bring focus to those who work and navigate against racism and continue in their capacity as Black Student Activist Scholars. As McClendon (2005) suggests, “the institutional impact of racism (systemic racism) does not require conscious intentions or aims but only those institutions and social relations that perpetuate the actual (material) suppression of Black people” (p. 286). For some students, while not directly the victim of overt racism, students still highlighted that the affects were felt in their own lives and experiences and

carried over into their collective activism with regards to Black students and the global Black perspective. Additionally, as Camille suggests, these experiences with racism are part of what motivated them to become activists.

Shared and Consistent features of Black Student Activist Scholars

In their journey to become Black Student Activist Scholars, many of the participants noted an experience or seeing an influential person that gave way to showing the importance of activism and education. These consistent features, including their values, familial influences, and affiliations were features of importance for the participants. Similarly, Cornel West (1987) notes conversion experience with an influential person to cause engage with scholarly activism. For both Keea and Audre, hearing stories and seeing prominent women in their families in activist roles were motivating factors to become an activist.

> Keea: Um, I can say um, my grandmother was a big influence. And I think just growin' up in a more stable environment seeing her and those who weren't in stable environments and then comin' to a university that actually shows those disparities um, at a great level I think that kinda pushed it more. But yeah definitely growin' up and being a part of the whole union strong kinda idea even though its much different now – union based but I think that just havin' that background actually pushed me y'know to continue goin' on. 'Cause like I said I think its more of a lifestyle its not even actually like 'oh I just wanna fight' – no its just the way you live your life is just to better things so that those after you don't have to go through the same things that you went through I think anything pushing you to that general goal is activism.

Audre shared her influence to getting involved:

> Audre: Just hearing stories like about my grandma and how she met Martin Luther King and stuff like that or how my aunt knew Fred Hampton and stuff like that, y'know? And how she would be downtown Chicago and stuff like that and how she would be marching and just I dunno, the more I learn about Black individuals who fought for their rights and stuff like that, it's really inspirational and influential.

For each of the participants, influence, primarily familial, played a role in the beginning stages of their activist identities. From Keea and Audre's grandmothers, to Marcus's woman-centered family, or Simone's parents, who set up a charity to give back to their community, family set a foundation concerning identity socialization and being the impetus by which their interest in activism began. For Jamaal and Camille, influence came through seeing their parents interested in books or being involved in their educational careers sparked their interests in being activists. Collectively, as revealed through focus group discussions, the Black Student Activist Scholars sought out a community on campus that not only embraced their identity, but also allowed for involvement without the sacrifice of their academics. After attending a Conscious Circle, a rally, or attending a town hall meeting, they were influenced to become a member of the organization and possibly influence someone else in the same manner they were inspired. This led them to become involved with the Black Student Liberators, a community of like-minded students dedicated to Black student scholarly activism. The establishment of a Black community that aligned with their values of social change for

the Black community was the impetus for their Black Student Activist Scholar identity to emerge from their experiences.

"The More Things Change, The More Things Stay the Same…" Finding a place among Black Student Activist Scholars

Now, even in the twenty-first century, Black student activism is reminiscent to that of decades before, only a few things have changed. In discussions with the Black Student Activist Scholars, many students referenced Black student activists referred to tactics and measures of Black student activist.

> Keea: I think a difference today as compared to history is that in the past you had this man or this figurehead that you're fighting against. But today, you have to be more of an activist within your own community because you actually push people to wanna be involved. Today, not everyone wants to be an activist – you don't wanna hear that. You have to push that out within the Black community. Not only am I saying we need this and that, but community, we need to rise up and become better and progress and do something too.

Keea highlights the subtlety of racism that impacts Black students on predominantly white campuses. While historically there were notable figures and leaders that were associated with racism, the image has become more ambiguous and more difficult to notice. Additionally, Black student activism seems to be something that is met with complacency among some students. Some of the Black Student Activist Scholars shared their frustration about apathy within the Black community. Through my discussions with participants, Black student activism is rarely practiced given the social environments surrounding the discussion of race and racism. During the focus group, the idea of Black

students subscribing to individuality, simply attending classes, and eventually getting a degree, while the reason for going to college, the Black Student Activist Scholars suggests that it goes beyond being just a student. For the Black Student Activist Scholars, social awareness and responsibility are just as important as earning a degree. Concurrently, the BSAS relied heavily on social media to spread their message not only around campus, but also across the globe.

> Simone**:** I think now as opposed to the 60's and on where it was more overt with racism. Now its like we're in this colorblind post racial more institutional racism setting – activism, is sort of a dirty word now, I think. Like if you were in the Civil Rights Movement era, y'know that was more respected to be the one out there marchin' and being an activist but now, you get looked at like you crazy Black power woman. Y'know you speak out about those things and it seems like its more taboo and I know I've gotten it sometimes where whether I'm talking to my mom or something that like about various issues its like "there she goes with that Angela Davis stuff again", so it seems like its not a label that people want to take 'cause we're in this color blind society. Why are we being an activist – you just keepin' stuff wrong, y'know keeping things that don't want to exist. So it's not as "yay!" as it was in the 60s.

Simone indicated the "yay!" meant things were much more harmonious and Troy also highlights one of the most obvious differences of Black Student Activists of the twentieth century and today through the discussion of technology and social media:

> Troy: Thank goodness for social media too, 'cause it wouldn't have been as big had it not been for social media. Just like Martin Luther King benefitted from TV

> as his social media. A lot of the movement may not have happened as quickly if it wasn't for TV to broadcast. This was being broadcast via social media – it was reaching everybody quickly. It could have been done without social media, but it would have taken it longer. And because it was on TV it forced administration to put it higher on their agenda because I'm sure we'll be fighting for the same message just slower. We just used a different form of media and it got to people through twitter, through Facebook. So I think it got the message out and everyone got fired up at the same time. We would have a meeting and everyone would be there.

Further discussions with participants revealed that while marches, rallies, protests, and other more expressive forms of activism from previous generations are still used among Black Student Activist Scholars of the twenty-first century, activism also changed in its approach. The incorporation of social media allowed for the BSAS activism and platform of their organization to spread globally. This raised the question regarding the larger meaning that Black student activist scholars are still fighting for some of the same struggles decades after student activists of previous generations. In my discussions with Black Student Activist Scholars, there was constant comparison of their work in comparison to Black student activists of the 1960's and 1970's. Most evident in juxtaposition between the two eras of activists were the platforms that were presented. The Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Era served as fertile ground by which Black student activists had the opportunity to merge their activist efforts on college campuses with the larger platform for change that happened throughout the American landscape. As a result, the platform that was presented in the first generation of Black

student activists gave opportunity to connect with generations and people not of the academy, but was congruent in their collective efforts to eliminate social injustices within Black communities of various socioeconomic statuses. As such, intergenerational activism aided in a larger, collective civil rights social movement, and served as a guide for Black student campus activism (Jennings, 2002). Additionally, previous generations of Black student activists fought for Black students to be able to attend institutions and create spaces in higher learning, while Black Student Activist Scholars in the twenty-first century, activism has come in the form of education – a deeper knowledge and understanding of self-identity, to the expansion of knowledge of one's history and collective experience primarily through racial identity. This deeper knowledge meant a deconstruction of Black history and life as presented in the dominant Eurocentric, patriarchal narrative that for so long shaped the image in the minds of Black people. It also meant continuing in the Black student activist tradition of previous generations and fighting to carve a space out in academic spheres for themselves and future generations. Currently, the Black Student Activist Scholars who participated in the Black Student Liberators were able to recognize disparities that existed within their communities, most notably about the lack of educational opportunities that existed within the Black community. For many of the Black student scholar activists, this new knowledge began once they stepped foot on campus.

> Amir I think for me I became more aware of the different um, systems that are in place. 'Cause you know you grow up poor, or other ways, and you don't see that as a problem, but now you come here, you take classes, you see a different world – oh wow, that's a problem, this is a system here, people are marginalized, you

> don't really see it as much when you're in your own community, but when you come here to this big campus with, y'know these white people, you begin to see it more.

Further clarification revealed Amir was not necessarily taught differences, but through his interactions with campus, be it through classroom engagement, living in the residence halls, or simply inhabiting space on campus, he was reminded about being a Black person. Through Amir's reflection about his development of knowledge about inequalities, he was able to sharpen his development as a Black Student Activist Scholar.

Sociopolitical Development and Black Student Scholarly Identity

Again, Sociopolitical Development is the concept that works to understand the connection between an individual and a collective cause, and infusing their own identity, aspects of history, and level of consciousness as it relates to the cause. The Black Student Activist Scholars seemed to frame the disparities the Black community face as part of their activist approaches within the Black Student Alliance. I argue that it is useful to explore the organization as a source for the development of Black Student Activist Scholars' opportunity structures for leadership and activism. Hart and Atkins (2002) maintain an opportunity structure fosters people's involvement in community outreach through the possibilities of leadership and mentoring.

The analysis of the data suggested that familial relationships, consciousness of self, and affiliation with race, culture and social change based student organizations were of great significance in the sociopolitical development of Black Student Activist Scholars. Settings like the Black Student Alliance offer opportunities for Black students to reflect and situate their campus activism with a broader sociopolitical activist context.

Additionally, these data suggest the influences and experiences in addition to race consciousness provide the basis of sociopolitical development. Many of the participants in the study noted learning about racial differences either through observation, or through direct experience. Additionally, seeing other Black activist leaders, including national and historic prominent individuals, older students, and college professors serve as role models because of their influence, activism and community involvement and impact within the Black community. Keea shared how her involvement with the Black Student Alliance raised a consciousness of race on campus with other Black students:

> Keea: I think it [Black Student Liberators] brought people together! We did marches. We had conscious circles. We talked! It gave you an opportunity to support something regardless of other issues, y'know even at the same time we still might have had other conflicts within the Black community, but it gave an opportunity for us to come together for. And that was basically speakin' up, sayin there's something wrong – addressing a problem. And everybody wanted to do that, regardless of if you support any events, if you come out any other time, this is your time. And it was very impactful.

In addition to influences, participation in organizations that focused on social change, and personal experiences with regards to grappling with race and racism were important in the sociopolitical development of the Black Student Activist Scholars. These experiences, both positive and negative, were for some, the impetus for involvement in activist activities. Further, involvement in the Black Student Alliance offered opportunities for students to raise awareness with regards to critical consciousness (Martín-Baro. 1994), and the development of self-consciousness (Freire,

1993). The concepts of raising awareness and critical consciousness have been of particular importance within the Black community (Woodson, 1933). According to Watts and Abdul-Adil's (1994) model of Sociopolitical Development, the participants of the study entered into college at the pre-critical and adaptive stage, wherein an individual begins to have an awareness of inequalities, or may have an awareness of inequalities, but may not necessarily know tactics to address and effectively change injustices. Through their involvement with the Black Student Liberators, taking courses in Black Studies, and other acquirements of new knowledge, students move to the critical stage, where the inclination to learn about race, racism, and other socially constructed forms of oppression and how to address these inequalities. Finally, students transition into the liberation stage in which individuals have a strong commitment to social change and to rid society of forms of oppression and marginalization. The student then is the activist agent within their environment, particularly the college campus. The findings are consistent with concepts of sociopolitical development and critical consciousness, which allowed students to dismantle the complexities of race, oppression and other forms of marginalization through hands-on engagement with activist opportunities that arose through the organization. This engagement was crucial to assist Black student activist scholars to identify divergences within their community and to promote a social justice agenda, and apply their activist experience and knowledge toward their scholarly identities and practices. The following chapter highlights the salient themes that emerged from the data.

CHAPTER FIVE

I treat this like my thesis,
well written topic
Broken down into pieces
I introduce then produce
Words so profuse

-Lauryn Hill, "Final Hour"

Black Student Activist Scholars Speak Out

Introduction. This chapter is composed of the salient themes and is organized into two thematic sections: The Duty of Knowledge, and "Its More Than Just Me Out Here…" These qualitative interviews, through Critical Race Methodology, explored experiences of Black student activist scholars as they share their lived experiences while simultaneously sharing the development of their racial and activist identities. The students were engaged in various social activities that addressed social justice issues on campus, while also being engaged with their academics in ways that allowed for the incorporation of identities stated above. Through the process of analysis, findings were then distilled into the two overarching themes. Each of these themes is detailed in the following sections of this chapter.

My analysis was constructed through framework developed through the lens of Sociopolitical Development that allowed me to trace and describe how Black student activist scholars embark on their activist identities. Further, this concept was coupled with Critical Race Theory, which provided a medium through which to critically analyze the storied lives of Black student activist scholars. These themes were then analyzed independently and through cross case analysis to identify commonalities and differences among interviews. Finally, the emerging themes were compared to the scant literature in

this area of scholarship. This chapter provides a venue through which to present the voices of Black student activist scholars.

Additionally, the purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of Black student activist scholars on the campus of a Predominantly White Institution. The primary research questions were:

- *How do Black Student Activist Scholars (BSAS) describe their racial and activist identities at a Predominantly White Institution in 2012?*
- *What can be learned from an exploration of the lived experiences of Black Student Activist Scholars respecting their Sociopolitical and racial identity development and its impact on their academic engagement?*

The previous chapter served, as with most modes of storytelling, the development of characters, and provided a background to the varied lives of Black Student Activist Scholars and their sociopolitical development. As mentioned earlier, this chapter presents the themes that emerged through my observations, discussions, and focus group with the Black Student Activist Scholars.

"Duty of Knowledge" – Knowledge As a Mechanism for Black Student Activism

How lovely it would be to get up, and go through life without a care in the world. The everyday ritual of daily activities including going to class, completing assignments on time, and going through the normal commonplace schedule of a college student is a typical day for some. For Black Student Activist Scholars, this is not the case. For them, the acquiring of knowledge carries a heavy burden of truth, responsibility, which at times can be a source of empowerment and liberation as well as times of debilitation and exhaustion. One of the most salient themes presented in my interactions with the Black

Student Activist Scholars is that of a 'duty of knowledge'. In being Black student Activist Scholars, students have expressed the importance of knowledge in order to transform the communities with which they interact and identify, primarily Black people. This duty of knowledge is expressed in a number of ways including a duty to other Black students on campus and the larger Black community. Additionally, the Black Student Activist Scholars expressed the duty to educate others outside of their race as a way of correcting misperceptions or to raise awareness about Black life. This duty was also utilized in the ways the BSAS engaged their Black peers in the Black Student Liberators. The knowledge gained in classroom engagement was often utilized in programming developed by the BSAS in the Black Student Liberators. Reciprocally, the experiences BSAS were infused into classroom engagement, from raising discussions about their activist experiences with the Black Student Liberators. Keea shared how she used her lived experience to educate classmates and bring up discussions that may go unnoticed or overlooked in the classroom:

> **Keea**: Y'know, I do find myself bringin' up a lot of controversial issues, especially in class. Um, I just came out of class, majority white, but um, we had a few Black people, and it was just really interesting hearing the white students points of view. And some of them was not even from here! I think they didn't like how I had to tell them about how some of us Black people out here strugglin'. But it's the truth! I had to tell them the truth about Black people from Detroit….I was tellin; my teacher that I really think it should be more conversation intertwined in the classroom 'cause I think that's just a stepping stone of activism

– just actually taking those classes and talking about those things and just letting those conversations be had. People still are open; their minds can change easily.

As Keea highlights, part of her Black Student Scholar Activist experience entails bringing discussions about Black life and experience to the center of classroom discussion ensures her identity is acknowledged and made a relevant point of learning. Furthermore, this knowledge all of the BSAS encompassed is a realization of race consciousness, and the experiential knowledge Black student activist scholars possess through their lived experience, a component of CRT. (Brayboy, 2005; Smith-Maddox & Solorzano, 2002; Sorlozano & Villalpando, 1998). Additionally, Black student activist scholars have a duty to share their experiences as a racialized being with Black students and the larger campus community. Sharing experiential knowledge allows for not only the margin to reach center, but also to work to change perceptions of what a Black student is, in addition to educating others as a form of activism. Here, the utilization of the term knowledge refers to the learning undertaken by Black Student Activist Scholars as a part of a system, which includes classroom learning. Additionally, knowledge also includes the everyday cognition that takes place through activities, reflections, and experiences. As such, through activism and knowledge, students gained a sense of agency that gave their educational experience more meaning.

With the understanding of a duty of knowledge comes a sense of responsibility. Scholar activist Vincent Harding (1986) suggests Black scholars have a debt that must be repaid back to their community. Harding highlights, "I think that part of the responsibility of Black scholars is to help remind themselves and the community that they have constantly moved through darkness to light, constantly moved through pain to

healing" (p. 279). With each of the BSAS, they utilized their knowledge acquired in classrooms to transform their conditions. During my conversations with Amir, he revealed to me the importance of learning about the pain of what Black people endured throughout history, and how this transforms into the 'duty' he has as a Black student activist scholar.

> **Amir**: While I was studyin' for the Black Power Rally – the first one that I spoke – I came across the documents of the '89 sit-in and I studied that and I really got deep into everything that was goin' on. I didn't know that Black students were not able to live on campus. I didn't know Black students had to live extremely far from campus. I didn't know that the city did not rent to Blacks – and it just – it made me understand that now that I am here, we always hear that somebody paid some type of price for us to be here but I don't think we understand. When we hear that we think of the slaves died, or 'Oh Malcolm X died, Martin Luther King died, W.E.B. DuBois' – we hear about these people who – that happened so long ago that we detach ourselves and really don't understand but to experience something in the year of '89 there was a sit in where they held out for days until they had their demands met. To understand I was born that year. I would have honestly thought – I mean 1968 happened – we know what happened in 1968. I would've honestly thought that would have stopped. But to understand that I'm comin' to an institution where that same problem was still goin' on twenty years later makes me realize that I have a duty. I'm not here for no reason. I think a lot of times people don't understand what their purpose is or maybe just they haven't realized it but I think once they do, they have to own it and take hold of it and

that's what I have done. Um, like I said, those events, happenin' on this campus, um, we just have – excuse me, I have to understand that I have a gift of speech.

Through his discovery of the history of Black students, particularly on the campus of which he is a student, Amir became more immersed in wanting to learn and change conditions for Black students through raising awareness, specifically through speaking out on particular situations. Further, Amir continued that through his activism, he had a duty that was passed on to him from those that have gone before him, particularly Black male figures that inspired him and worked to create effective change in their communities.

Amir: After studyin' the teachings of Malcolm X, after studyin' the teachings of David Walker, after studyin' the teachings of – of course Martin Luther King and looking at W.E.B. DuBois, I decided that what I wanna do as well is be a Black figure – a Black male figure who teaches and in order to do that I have to perfect my writing, I have to perfect my verbing skills – my speech. So I've studied Black men and Black women, and just people who speak in general to advocate for everybody. One since I am a student I think its most important to advocate for students first then advocate for race because I am Black on a predominately white campus – our voices are not necessarily heard all the time because we're such a small minority group here on top of other minorities, and a lot of times there aren't people here who look like us who are even listenin' to us and I am one of those people who do listen – and I surround myself around those other people who listen and I try to bridge that gap between those who don't – who won't do and those who will do. I try to put myself – immerse myself in the

middle and that way I can still advocate and be an activist on campus as well –its so many things that have happened on this campus within the years that I've been here that's also influenced me to speak.

The above quotes demonstrate the duty Jamaal experienced through his knowledge as a Black Student Activist Scholar. Jamaal took it upon himself to explore and learn about the historical experiences of Black students on his campus as well as notable Black figures to empower him towards his engagement through public speaking. Jamaal's duty was developed as he learned of the Black student experience. Echoing many similar perspectives, Audre, took classes in Black Studies enhanced her activism while at the same time using the courses to inform her of her culture and identity as a Black woman.

Audre: It [activism] made me take, um classes. I took an African American history class and of course, I would wanna take it…Um, I enjoy African American history. Well, I learned more, especially – you learn about Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks, like, you know, those people. But um, I took Black history and I've heard of Ida B. Wells, but I didn't know exactly what she did, y'know? I found out like, wow, she was tough! I learned stuff that helped me in my activism that you wouldn't necessarily learn unless you inquire, unless you look deeper on your own.

As Audre and the literature suggest, this knowledge of Black history is not made readily available in standard college coursework. Audre sought to break away from the monocultural learning that occurs on college campuses that may affect Black students' engagement with their educational options. For Troy, his experiences as a Black Student

Activist Scholar have a direct impact on his engagement with his educational experiences:

> **Troy**: I think that uh, the experiences with the Black Student Liberators has kinda influenced me to make a stronger investment in my education. Sometimes we need to demand stuff from the government, and demand stuff like fairness for Blacks while we're here in college, too. I think bein' in the group affected me by what classes I take. I took African American Literature because it's my own people! I learned more about the Black community and what it means to other Black experiences I've never seen before anyway. I took what I did with the Black Student Liberators and applied it to some of the stuff we did in class. I brought up stuff we did at the rally, and even talked about it in my papers. I think my identity still does play into what classes I mean I go into.

Lipsitz (2008) posits both scholarship and activism are necessary as both students and educators. Additionally, he argues, "scholars need activism to change the spaces in which we work, to alter power relations in the communities out students come from and to which they return. Activists need the perspectives, connections, and critiques that scholars can apply" (p. 109). The intersections of both scholarly and activist identities are the very roles the Black Student Activist Scholars are developing in their experiences within their organization, engagement with educators and colleagues in the classroom, as well as with the larger Black community. Jamaal shares the duty he acquired in his scholarly and activist roles as a Black student:

> **Jamaal**: When you start being active, you um, you start to want to know the history behind activism, where it has its racism and where that came from, and so

> I started taking more Black courses. I took African American History and I also took one on Black women, so you just begin to want to know more about what this root of race and activism is, and how can I begin to change it? When you become an activist scholar, you have more of a voice…And so in my classes when people do say certain things that don't make sense or might be racist, I challenge that.

Through the convergence of all three identities – being Black, a student scholar, and an activist, the participants of this study are contributors of knowledge production and new perspectives that are often devalued and are not acknowledged in the academy. Their unique voices lend valuable, nuanced experiences that are an important factor in the higher education experience. Marcus shared with me his experiences of incorporating Black voice and identity into his work within his major:

> **Marcus**: Every chance I get, especially with research, I try to do somethin' Black related – I dunno if I get judged for that or whatever, I don't really care, but um, just somethin' to where I can like, keep my Blackness, or just remind me and the world about how great Black people are or the great things that we've done. I have to do it being here in college. Even if I find a problem y'know, I try to find the better – the solution to the situation. I know White people may have a problem with that. I make it known that I'm a Black nationalist, um, and I feel like they don't know, and you can't get mad. People are different.

The particularities of their identities challenge hierarchal, hegemonic structures of knowledge and knowing in the academy, and develop a space for being a racialized student activist in scholarship production, and nuanced ways of thinking. As a tenet of

Critical Race Theory suggests, the Black student activist identity challenges the dominant narrative and ideology further rejecting the claims of colorblindness and objectivity (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Delgado,1999; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). As many of the BSAS expressed during the focus group and individual interviews, their very presence in the Ivory Tower roils our understanding of who owns, produces, and contributes to new knowledge. Additionally, these identities carry beyond the Ivory Tower, and are necessary for social uplift in the Black community.

The knowledge with which Black Student Activist Scholars are equipped in turn becomes the fuel with which to assist and uplift the Black community. Anderson and Kharem (2009) maintain, "…the wealth of educational ideas and activism emerging from Black communities over decades has centered on utilizing education as an instrument for Black resistance: Black solidarity, social improvement, and political power; and most of all, freedom" (p. xi). As BSAS engaged with the duty of learning as a way to transform their life through social mobility, they were also equipping themselves with the knowledge that would be useful in effectively changing their community. Many of the students saw their activist work grow from learning more in the classroom. For Camille, her duty was twofold, using her new knowledge to educate others and incorporate it into her activist work:

> **Camille**: I think my academics and activism working together made me overall more active both in class and the organization. Because the more I learned the more I wanted to change it. When I was high school, when I was in middle school, we didn't learn that kind of stuff. Like sure we watched "Roots" but we never really discussed it. Um, sure we talked about differences but we never

> really discussed it or critically thought about anything. And it was like the more I learned in Black Studies about this country, about our Black people, about those types of things about the issues that people face the more I became knowledgeable about, y'know the prison system and that being considered modern day slavery. The more I learned the more I wanted to fight for that I believed in what was right. And that influenced me heavily to involved in the activist activities that I'm in.

Once Camille graduated, her activist work continued with her becoming a teacher in an urban school. Collectively, the Black Student Activist Scholar's experiences of what they learned in school relate directly to Carter's (2008) concept of critical race consciousness wherein the students are aware of how race plays a role in their educational experiences, as well as how they actively work to change their community through education. Additionally, Camille and Simone shared how their Black student activist identity informed her of her teaching practices when working with Black high school students. Camille's duty, in this sense, was to develop a new generation of Black Student Activist Scholars and enlighten them on the realities Black people experience in American society.

> **Camille**: It [activism] made me realize how important education is. Because before I came to college, not even before college, but before I started taking Black Studies and Sociology classes based on race, I think I was so ignorant that honestly – its amazing that I even knew – like that I had even survived. Because I didn't know anything! And like, because of – like realizing what my passion was and like where my drive came from and how once I started taking Black studies

> classes I was 4.0ing every semester, where in my Freshmen year I was barely holding onto a 3.0. Like that made me realize how important education is and how important it is to be educated in the correct things. And because of that that lead me directly into wanting to start in education but with a younger generation so that they don't have to be the people that look to the left and look to the right and be the one that's gone the next year. And that made me realize like, there's so many, y'know young Black males and females that are not being afforded the same opportunities – not because their not capable, but because they have been put in a system of education that has been literally failing them. And is okay with failing them! And so that directly led me to wanna go into education.

Camille's statement about achieving in her Black Studies courses reveals the importance of culturally relevant teaching, and how through this, students, specifically Black students, achieve when the content incorporates aspects of the student's lived experience into the curriculum. During a discussion with Simone, she shared the sacrifices she made through her development as a Black Student Activist Scholar:

> **Simone**: y'know I think I get a – and I've said this a few times like 'this is why we have to keep doin' what we doin'' because there have been an experience where you see stuff all the time or you hear stuff and y'know whether its like an RA[9] talkin' about 'What is this Black Power thang?' and y'know stuff like that and it keeps reminding you that this is why you have to do what you have to do what you do. Even though you might get really really tired, and irritated and frustrated by when you hear some of that stuff a lot of the things here on this

[9] An RA is a Resident Assistant who works with student residents who live in campus housing.

> campus….Y'know so, taking the opportunity to get those people here. That's why my senior year people are like 'I'm 'bout to relax my senior year' I'm like let me kick it into high gear, lay it all out 'cause who knows when another opportunity – y'know you have this opportunity like this to be able to interact with so many people so many different kind of people with a whole lot of back grounds and this might be some people's last opportunities, y'know. But it can be tiring, too.

As the experience of the Black Student Activist Scholars suggest, the duty of knowledge, as presented from a Critical Race Theory position, students that took courses in Black studies disrupts the tenet of Whiteness as property. Harris (1993) posits rights to disposition, reputation and status, and absolute right to exclude are central to the tenet of Whiteness as property. Further, Patton et al. (2007) maintain that professors are seen as owners of curriculum, and with a small number of faculty members of color, White hegemonic structures dominate institutions of higher education. This constructs an environment of learning that often times negates or ignores the knowledge Black students bring into the classroom. Black Studies and Black student activist scholars challenge the notion of whiteness as property and claim a share of the power and control of learning in higher education. This is also expressed through the concept of Critical Consciousness presented by Paulo Freire (1993) , wherein problem posing and the rejection of the banking of education that students may experience. Without explicitly stating, Jamaal's explanation of his being a Black student on a white campus speaks to the tenet of Whiteness as Property:

Jamaal: By being here in school, in my viewpoint is activism in itself. But not a lot of people know that that's a way of activism. By being here, you're challengin' systems – what's goin' on in class, and how professors tell you stuff, how I talk to people in the class. I sometimes have to call our teachers and students on what they might be sayin'…its not always right…I sometimes school the teacher. Also, Black people don't really go to school – well they not supposed to, they don't get education, don't graduate – by being here, you're challengin' that we have a right to be here and that's a form of activism.

For Marcus, the 'duty' as a Black Student Activist Scholar appeared to be placed on him from his peers through his involvement with the Black Student Liberators. He shared during the focus group about how others view his Black student activist identity:

Marcus: And by them knowin' that I'm in BSL or that I'm a part of all these different Black organizations, I feel like when the civil rights – even though I was no where near alive when it happened, or different type of social movement they [classmates] feel like I'm the go to guy because I am an activist and they know I'm a proud activist and they know I'm down for Blacks no matter the circumstance.

As described in the above quote, Jamaal's physical and intellectual presence serves as a disruption of the educational system in higher education and speaks to the how Black Student Activist Scholars challenge the dominant narratives taught in college classrooms, while at the same time work to make their educational experience one that is relevant to their lived experience, and gives them locus of control of their educational experience. As Jamaal's view suggests, there is an idea through white normativity that Black students are

not supposed to occupy spaces of higher education, and if they are in college, there has been a narrative established that Black students do not graduate. Additionally, Black Student Activist Scholars, through their participation in Black Studies courses and other coursework that bring about dialogues of racialized experience confront the right of exclusion Whiteness often accomplishes in institutions of higher learning. As such, Black Student Activist Scholars gain control of their education, and shaped their learning to what is important to their lived experience, and the knowledge gained from the courses aids in the sociopolitical development of the Black student activist scholar. For Marcus, the 'them' he speaks of includes other Black students, his white peers, in addition to faculty and staff. Through his association with the Black Student Liberators, Marcus is known for being an activist, an identity for which he has much pride. Being on the campus of a Predominantly White Institution, Black Student Activist Scholars learned to think critically about what is presented, and being able to discern subtle and blatant assumptions, and how dominant structures of learning may at times maintain structures of racial inequality (Hopper, 1999). The action of taking Black Studies courses, often times as electives or as a specialization, serves as a deconstruction of White normalized behavior in the academy.

As the Black Student Activist Scholars suggest, their duty is a means of activism. Through their engagement with courses that disrupt what have been made normalized images of Black students at PWIs. Their duty is both utilizing their unique experiences and voices to not only serve as a way to educate others in their classrooms with regard to their lived experience and a as a way to improve the social and material conditions of Black people through their educational engagement. Further, their duty carried over to

their activism. Through the knowledge learned in their coursework, specifically though Black and other critical studies informed the Black Student Activist Scholars about ways to engage their Black peers, the Black Student Liberators, and the larger campus community about some of the collective experiences of Black people, the subjectivities they face, and ways to improve their conditions globally.

"It's more than just me out here…" – Humanizing the Activist Experience

Another salient theme in my discussions with Black Student Activist Scholars is that of social responsibility moving beyond the realms of what occurs on campus. This includes utilizing activist and scholarly duties being utilized to assist the Black community globally, and in working with other marginalized and oppressed communities. Additionally, their activist work carries beyond that of the campus and serves to be the foundation by which Black Student Activist Scholars carry their work out in their post-baccalaureate careers. These data support the notion that student activist scholars can be committed to fighting for and on behalf of issues beyond their racial identity as Black Americans. As Crenshaw (1991) suggests, intersectionality, a tenet of Critical Race Theory, speaks to this very notion that deconstructs the varied identities individuals have. Gender, social class, sexual identity, and other facets of identity may be salient factors in an activist's platform. Additionally, as the students grapple with their identity, they are exploring how their identities are in relation to others in the world. This also demonstrates that the work of an activist scholar transcends racial boundaries and extends to a more humanistic approach to social justice. While collective identity served as the explanation for the Black Student Activist Scholars participated in the Black Student Liberators, this served as a way by which to empower them on a predominantly

white campus. As Harding (1990) suggests, being an activist goes beyond the paradigm of being an activist solely for the Black community. This means bringing other oppressed communities to the center of the discussion and working as a collective to bring about social justice. As a collective of oppressed and marginalized communities, Harding argues:

> Wherever these are found, they are a part of the Afro-American community…So they must help see that the Vietnamese are part of their community, to see that the Central Americans and all of their suffering now at the hands of our government are part of it; to see that the Native Americans in their long oppression are part of it; to see indeed that deluded poor whites, who do not know they are deluded, are a part of it; to see Africans, yes, and to know with all these people who are Black in America are a uniquely part of the larger community of the pained humanity" (p. 279).

For Camille, her role as an educator goes beyond what her activist experiences were on campus. It is about the future of Black youth that has Camille continuing in her Black Student Activist Scholar identity, suggesting a broader commitment to the Blacks struggle and liberation:

> **Camille**: I would say I had to use my activist identity every single day. Because if you don't fight no one else is going to help – no one else in school is going to help them fight. And they don't even know. And like I said I didn't even know until I got to college and started taking those classes and things like that. So its like everyday I use things I took from, like my experiences from activism at MSU and my Black Studies Classes go, and I have applied those to my classroom – for

me to survive even, because there's some days where its so hard where if I didn't know what I was doing or what was right I would not go back.

Additionally, Camille learned through her experiences on campus that activism was directly related to her educational career.

Camille: Because um, teaching is – you hear all the statistics about it, you understand that you can, you can do some shadowing and you see like, 'okay, this is gonna be difficult. There's a lot of challenges but you don't really feel it until you're actually in the classroom with 150 African American students looking at you everyday who have a 44% graduation rate and are on 4th and 5th reading grade levels. And then once you actually get inside a classroom with the students who are going through that is when it becomes real. And that's when I feel like my activism role, like has to step up. Because it's about constantly letting them know like, one – I'm here fighting for you every day, so that we can make your life better. And two – you need to want better. And it's giving them those examples of like where they could be, where they come from, and like, laying the picture to them about Black graduation rates, laying the picture for them about y'know incarceration rates laying the picture to them about all the obstacles that face them. And then letting them know like, it's their choice. Either fight this, this system that has been put in place to hold them back, or it's their choice to play right into it. And everyday it's about fighting to make sure they understand that at the end of the year. Because if you don't fight no one else is going to help – no one else in school is going to help them fight. And they don't even know.

For Jamaal and Audre, their activism extended beyond their immediate Black community. Both students collectivized their Black activist experience in relation to the Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay, Transgender, and Questioning (LGBTQ) communities. In my discussions with both students, they expressed, not in explicit terms, the importance of using activism as a humanistic approach, and collectivized the Black struggle with other oppressed communities:

> **Audre**: I think activism just anything that touches you as a person. I learned that by bein' in BSL. 'Cause I think that being a LGBTQ ally, like I don't identify as any of those, but that's just something that touches my heart. So of course I'll be an ally, of course I'll go march with you all just because I don't feel that its right. I think the adversities that they face are immoral. And so that's why I would be an activist in my own way for them. So, anything that touches you. It's more than just me out here.

Amir learned that in addition to the Black community, there exists other communities that encounter and experience struggle on campus:

> **Amir**: So I think the biggest thing, y'know from bein' on campus is communication. I was ignorant to a lot of things and communities that exist here on campus. I've learned to work with LGBT people as allies. And I still had certain prejudices towards it because I didn't know anybody – so I didn't understand it. But after meeting people and talking to them, - and I don't even wanna say tolerance, 'cause that's not necessarily the right word, 'cause I'm not tolerating what they're doing. I accept what they do, I mean, I don't really care. That's they're life they can live it however they wanna live it. They're human,

and I'm learning how to treat people as a person. I've learned to work and walk with communities not like my own.

Jamaal expanded his scope of Black student activism from working closely with the Black community on campus to include a pan-African scope of collective change shared by Blacks on a global scale:

Jamaal: I mean, what I'm doin' here as a Black student activist is somewhat some of the same struggles Black people have been experiencin' in the world all though history. How I help my brothers and sisters here on this campus helps those brothers and sisters in the world. It's an ongoing Black struggle.

Troy discusses how he used his opportunity as a Black Student Activist Scholar to learn about others and explore the importance of making global connections to other people.

Troy: 'Cause you have people from all over the world here. And if you're not taking advantage about learning about other people and about their hard times and experiences on this earth, then you're missing out on a lot of opportunities! 'Cause you just never know what you might be able to help with – you might just never found that key. And your experiences here should be used looking for the keys to open up doors for yourself and others. I think that's what this school has given to me.

Audre further explained her statement of 'its more than just me out here' by which she expressed a new knowledge of a more humanistic approach to activism. For her, there are more than just Black people in the world, yet with other oppressed groups, there is a collective experience of struggle. Audre's quote suggests the idea that Black Student activist scholars have the ability to unpack various facets of their identity through their

activism, and critically think about how these identities influence not only their activism, but also their connection to other marginalized people. Jamaal learned about another marginalized community while on campus, and engaged with others in a manner that he may not have done before his activist engagement. Through Troy's Black student scholarly activism, he was able to learn about ways to improve social conditions for communities beyond the Black community. Through their engagement with activism, the BSAS consciousness was more than an individual role or task. Their activist experience was cultivated through a balance of engagements that include classroom interactions and roles with the Black Student Liberators. The exploration of other facets of identity suggests the students may view themselves though their intersecting identities. Troy discussed working with other cultural organizations including the Latino student organization. The Black student activist scholars' commitment to human rights and equality work in collaboration with the tenet of Critical Race Theory that addresses a commitment to social justice (Matsuda, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). Through focus groups and member checking, it was made apparent that through their Black student activism, the students were exposed to other forms of oppression, which included gender, class, and sexual orientation. These data support the notion that Black Student Activist Scholars can be dedicated to fighting for more than specific issues related to their racial identity.

When viewed through the discussions surrounding racial identity development, this suggests activism is not unique to the stage of internalization. Black Student Activist Scholars may be involved with activism prior to a commitment to a Black liberation struggle. Once an individual reaches the stage of Internalization, people may be more

likely to get involved with activism and address forms of oppression. As the Black Student Activist Scholars grapple with their identity, they are exploring various factors or influence and how they are experienced by and relate to others in the world. This incorporation of the Black student activist scholar struggle into a larger collective of struggle may also suggest the idea that although students are rooted in their Black identity, may have amalgamated their experience that addresses the theme of colorblindness in CRT. This notion of race neutrality may suggest that some of the Black student activist scholars may be moving toward positionality that aligns their Black student activist identity with other students. This more collective approach to activism, however, will not eliminate the possibility that racism and acts will not continue to occur. While on the surface it may seem like a united, collective front allows for a stronger groups working towards the goal of social change, it allows for the persistence of the normality of whiteness to prevail as a dominant standard throughout American society.

While each of the Black student activist scholars were active leaders in the Black Student Liberators, their work spanned beyond the organization into other services intended to aid Black students on campus. As mentioned earlier, students worked in academic organizations, mentored students in resident halls, and utilized public speaking as conduits by which to expand their activism, further illuminating the expansiveness and multifaceted experiences of Black student activism. In their own ways, Simone, Keea, Tyler, Marcus, Ivory, Amir, Jamaal, and Camille utilized other forms of outreach in addition to their activism. As a result, their activism spanned beyond the scope of the Black Student Liberators, which had a greater impact on the larger Black community at

their institution. Additionally, with the roles and responsibilities of a Black student activist scholar come sacrifice and collective responsibility:

> **Simone**: I would love to be Dean's Listin' it every semester. And like I recognize that had I not been an activist since I been here, it would have been a lot easier to attain that goal. I'm not sayin' it's not possible, there's people that are very active and still getting there. I just wasn't one of those people. So that's one thing that has to balance when you talk about academic success because granted I don't get bad grades, but they could be better if I could step back. I made the trade of 'cause for me, there was never a doubt in my mind I was going to graduate. But I would not feel comfortable with myself walkin' across the stage if I didn't do anything to help somebody else walk across. That was a tradeoff for me. I'm okay if I don't 4.0 or 3.5 every class if I know in my heart I did somethin' in my time here to help somebody else be able to reach that point.

Simone discussed her activist and scholarly experiences as ways to not only graduate, but to help another person graduate as well. Similarly, Marcus shared the importance of sacrifice being a Black Student Activist Scholar:

> **Marcus**: I could say I could get a 4.0 so I could just stunt on people witcho' grades. But activism takes time and true commitment. But servin' as an example while you servin' yo community.[10] Um, and sometimes, you have to sacrifice your grades – and I don't wanna sound like I'm not a student when I say this, but sometimes you have to sacrifice your grades for a greater cause. Like, you can't –

[10] According to Marcus, to 'stunt' is to show off or gloat about one's material possessions and successes.

you know school can't always be in the way. That's just how I feel. People might think differently.

Upon further discussion with the BSAS, they revealed that the university has not helped them, be it through cultural programs, academic supportive services, or the adjustment to campus life. As a result, BSAS developed their own support network that included mentoring, academic support, and cultural programming students utilized amidst being on a white campus. Additionally, Keea shared the experience of being an activist, and how this 'job' weighs just as heavy as being a student:

Keea: If you're really a Black Student Activist Scholar, did you take your job as an activist and invest in something or are you making a difference in your community that you also fought for. So I don't necessarily think there is a actual academic success. Its more of a – just a success in general like you're only being successful if you're changing something, if you're making a difference. But if I come here, you don't have to be an activist to graduate!

Collectively, through my interviews and focus group, I discovered the Black Student Activist Scholars focused their activist approaches toward explaining racial inequities in addition to being a source of action. Simone, Marcus and Keea both espouse the importance of sacrifice as a BSAS. While Simone discussed her sacrifice as a means to graduation, Marcus expressed the importance of supporting a social cause before academic engagement. Although he hesitates in his thoughts about putting activism before school, there is an understanding that what he does as an activist has a correlation to his identity as a Black student. For Keea, success comes through the sacrifice of ensuring her community is making progress toward change. Through activism, the Black

Student Activist Scholars educated not only their Black peers, but also the larger MSU community and campus administration. Through Sociopolitical Development, Black student activist scholars identified issues both they and the larger Black campus community encounter throughout their academic career, and sought solutions to address and create effective change that fosters a more just environment. Additionally, the Black Student Activist Scholars were successful, socially and academically integrated, who took part in multiple forms of involvement in campus activities, primarily for the uplifting of the Black campus community. Furthermore, the conditioning effect of the campus demographics was part of the impact that influenced students into their development of their activist identities. Both documented and undocumented incidences of racism, and how the campus perceived their activism and their Black identities played critical roles in the development of how they worked to enact social change through their understanding of being racialized individuals. Through their activism, the Black Student Activist Scholars utilized race as a lens by which to bring awareness to racial inequities primarily on the campus of a Predominantly White Institution. Although their work takes place primarily on campus, their activism surpasses the campus community and works to uplift the larger Black community.

The counter narratives demonstrate how the sense of agency, both individually and collectively works to promote positive social change across the campus community. Moreover, participation with the Black Student Alliance provided the tools and networks necessary to identify issues within the Black community, and varied approaches to how to effectively develop solutions within the Black community, in addition to creating a space to foster the Black student activist scholar's sociopolitical development. The study

revealed that the Black Student Alliance, in addition to engagement with Black Studies courses, and a strong development of activist identities helped the Black student activist scholars connect with one another, their academics, and ultimately, the Black community. With the opportunities presented with the organization, and the environment it created, the Black student activist scholars understood the importance of academic and social responsibility within the Black community.

Conclusion

This study posed a line of questions that sought to gain a more nuanced exploration into the ways in which the development of race and activist identities contributed to Black student activist scholars' college experience. As highlighted earlier, this study presented several overarching research questions. Additionally, this study focused primarily on the Black student activist scholar's perceptions, through the use of their narratives. Several themes, primarily the themes of knowledge production as a mechanism for activism, humanizing the activist experience, and the perceptions of race were generated through the analysis of the students' discussions. As this study has shown, activism and Black identity can be a significant component of a student's educational engagement, career, and overall life goals. From this study I found that Black students who engage in activist organizations and have a strong consciousness of their Black identity provide the thrust and Black student activist scholars utilized into their educational experience, which in turn empowered their learning and sociopolitical development in college. The knowledge, analytic skills, and the engagement for change and insight on self-awareness were important in the racial and activist development of the participants. These findings were consistent with the conceptual framework of

Sociopolitical Development and critical consciousness (Freire, 1993; Martin-Baro, 1994; Watts & Abdul-Adil, 1994), which suggests the development of these aspects were important in their activist development. Coupled with their racial identity development, the Black Student Activist Scholars, through praxis, were empowered to create social change for the Black community both on and off campus.

Additionally, this discussion focused squarely on the lived experiences of the Black student activist scholar using their voice to gain better insight on how they perceive their racialized and activist identities and their place in their educational engagement. Two themes, "The Duty of Knowledge" and "Its More than Just me out here" were generated by the students themselves throughout their narratives. Other themes, based on the literature related to Sociopolitical Development and Critical Race Theory, but were discussed by the students at length in different terms. Since students were asked to share their experiences, their stories are varied, yet carry some commonalities. Collectively, the Black Student Activist Scholars' experiences show an overarching notion of collectivism. Though small in numbers on the campus of a Predominantly White Institution, the students shared the ideas of unity and solidarity. Through their "Duty of Knowledge", among the students, there was a shared epistemology of community that emerged from the participants. The shared experience of being Black students on campus in addition to activists in the Black Student Liberators demonstrated the shared identities each of the students discussed in their interviews. When the Black Student Activist Scholars communicate their experiences then expand the lens of Black activism to include discussions around being an activist for other marginalized communities, experiences around individualism began to emerge. In

both themes, experiences of resistance and struggle were made apparent with each of the discussions with the participants. These participants discussed how they were able to exercise their power, voice, and agency as Black Student Activist Scholars within the higher education structure. Additionally, their identity contributed to their educational and career growth and development. Though not explicitly explained as self-efficacy by the students, the concept was evident through their individual academic engagement and participation within the Black Student Liberators. Through their participation in Black student activism, the participants were able to have agency, which allowed for academic engagement.

CHAPTER SIX

They say we N-I double G-E-R, we are
Much more, still we choose to ignore
The obvious, man this history don't acknowledge us
We were scholars long before colleges
The obvious, we are the slave and the master
What you lookin for? You the question and the answer

-Nas, "N.I.G.G.E.R. (The Slave And The Master)"

Sankofa[11]: Reaching Back to Move Forward: Black Historical Literacy, Activism, and the Push for Black Studies

Introduction. The counterstories presented in this dissertation have documented the experiences of the Black student activist scholar on the campus of a predominantly white university. The study utilized the conceptual framework of sociopolitical development and analyzed through the lens of Critical Race Theory. As a result, Black student activist scholars are focused; they are academically engaged despite what at times can be a racist, hostile environment; they have goals that reach beyond the classroom and campus, and seek to uplift the Black community; they go above and beyond the 'call of duty' of a college student and work to bring awareness and change to injustices faced by Blacks worldwide; many evince sacrifice in order to assist their fellow colleagues. Facing these and other experiences, Black student activist scholars continue to work and navigate in a context of higher education that can be disempowering and limiting to their overall goals and aspirations academically and as activists. This study sought to identify aspects of Sociopolitical and racial identity development that were important towards the

[11] Sankofa, an Andinkra symbol of the Akan people of Ghana is a phrase that means, "It is not taboo to reach into the past to propel towards the future". In other words, it is to be understood that there are lessons to be learned from history and the past.

answering of the research questions. Further, Black student activist scholars in the twenty-first century are experiencing a drastically changing landscape of American society, specifically the myth of meritocracy - the concept that economic equality, and hard work are what is necessary to achieve success. What made this research unique is that I, along with the research participants, conceptualized activism in a different manner than what might be viewed through other scholarly lenses. For example, we learn that activism goes beyond the attendance at a protest or rally. It could also entail entering and disrupting a traditionally white space, and challenging notions of what it means to be a Black student in higher education in the twenty-first century. Through the acquisition of knowledge through daily racialized experiences, or through engagement with courses that highlight race, identity, and social justice, the Black student activist scholars made meaning from their activism and classroom engagement as a responsibility in return for community improvement. Additionally, through their racial and activist identities, the Black Student Activist Scholars expanded their activism to other oppressed communities on their college campus. It also means the creation of an affirming space that values and privileges the lived experiences of Black people, be it through extracurricular organizations, or through the field of Black Studies. Overall, this dissertation found the 'duty of knowledge' and humanistic approaches to their activism were important to their development as Black student activist scholars in the 21st century.

Additionally, one of the most influential changes with regards to the experience of the Black experience in America in the 21st century is that of the election of the United State's first Black President, Barack Hussein Obama. With President Obama, a Black man, leader of the most powerful nation on the planet, to some, race begins to be a

passing phase in the discussions of the identity of American society. This post-racial society, characterized by the belief that problems of race and racism no longer exist, or that race can no longer be deemed an issue in the context of American relations (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Alim & Smitherman, 2012). What this experience does, then, is fail to tell of the totality of the experience of race relations in America, and allows for the continuance of dysfunction and pathology of racism that permeates throughout society. Further, color-blindness becomes for some, a cultural force that encourages the dismissal of racism, which leads to silencing, further leading to the continued silencing of Black student activist scholars. As such, silence mutes the reality of racism, and is utilized as a mechanism for deflecting the core issues of marginalization and inequality. This study illuminated the notion that race continues to be a pressing issue in the lives of Black students, higher education, and the larger system that is America. Additionally, what does it mean that Black student activist scholars continue to fight for the same rights and spaces decades after Black student activists of the twentieth century were in the throes for Black freedom and equality. This study serves as evidence that Black students are impacted by social and structural hindrances to racial equality in the twenty-first century. It goes without saying the struggle continues.

Additionally, the myth of meritocracy, the usage of social media and the new narrative of American individualism continue to challenge Black student activism in the new millennium. As the data suggests, a hybridity of past and present approaches to advocacy are necessary in the mechanisms utilized in Black student scholar activism. Marching, protests, rallies and takeovers matched with Facebook posts, Twitter posts, and blog entries serve as a unification of both conventional and contemporary techniques

to activism, specifically for Black students on the campus of a predominantly White institution.

The findings of this study suggest racial identity development, involvement in cultural organizations, and coursework relating to race or Black Studies play a role in the sociopolitical development of Black Student Activist Scholars. This process is influenced by racial identity development, socialization from family, peer groups, and the larger society, and the experiences of racism before or during their experiences as a Black student on the campus of a predominantly white institution. By their very presence being on a campus of a predominantly white institution, Black student activist scholars, either directly or indirectly, raise the question of race and civic engagement in their daily interactions with the larger community, and with themselves. Black student activist scholars then, challenge the way in which knowledge is constructed in the academy by way of preserving white male supremacy. Further, the Black student activist scholars boldly challenge and illuminate race and racism and how they structure inequality socially and institutionally.

"Sankofa: It is not taboo to reach into your past, to propel you to the future" Black Studies as a Component of Black Student Scholarly Activism

In my focus group with the Black student activist scholars, some highlighted the importance of knowing one's history as a component that contributed to their sociopolitical and racial development. The knowledge gained from learning about one's racial and cultural history merged directly with the discussion of the 'duty of knowledge' that many of the participants discussed in their experiences with activism. Simone, Keea,

and Amir all share similar understandings about the importance of history as a Black student activist scholar:

> **Simone**: Know your history! Know your present! You cannot truly be an activist if you don't know where you have been and where you are. If you don't truly know the problems that affect your community then how will you know what to fight for? Get Knowledge! You don't necessarily have to have read all the Black Studies Books ever created but read something. Go to programs, engage in dialogues. All these things equip you with the tools you need to go out and fight.

For Keea, history plays a role in being a successful Black student activist scholar in addition to the varied contexts of activism:

> **Keea**: For future Black students, I definitely encourage them to define who they are first, and what they stand for. If you can't come to an understanding of what makes you actively involved than you definitely cannot encourage others. Activism too comes in many forms, it is not necessarily walking in a march or protesting, it is going against the grain in any form to be better and make your community better than what it was when you were coming up. Being proactive and not reactive is also key in being successful.

Amir suggested knowing Black history, as well as the acknowledgement that being a student is of importance. Additionally, a strong sense of personal identity is important as an activist:

> **Amir**: To help develop future Black activists, I would tell them to first know their history; more specifically, black history. Also, they will need to be committed to being a STUDENT first. Your education should be your focus, then activism.

> Lastly, it is important to always lead and be active with INTEGRITY! Never compromise on your core beliefs and values no matter how hard the struggle for whatever you are fighting for gets.

As mentioned in the previously, intergenerational collaboration was critical in the Black activist movements of the mid-twentieth century. This situation has proven to be a challenge in more recent years of the twenty-first century, as a rift between older and younger generations of Black Americans develops with regards to the transmission of history. In 2004, during a celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the historic *Brown v. Board* of Education decision, Bill Cosby, educator and actor, ridiculed the Black community in his now famous "Pound Cake Speech" (2004) wherein he chastises the youth of the Black community for what he argues is a lack of morals that should ideally shape future generations of Black America. Additionally, Cosby berated Black youth of today for what he views as neglect for the acknowledgement and contributions of history that has afforded the opportunities based on the struggles and progress of the past. The sentiments of Cosby beg the question of whether Black youth are aware of their history, and how is history being transmitted throughout generations? Additionally, this also depends on who is shaping the history. Kitwana (2002) maintains the lack of dialogue is what maintains a rift between the civil rights generations and the current hip-hop generations of the 21st century. The participants of this study are members of what Asante (2008) labels, the post hip-hop generation, wherein he articulates "a new generation in search of a deeper, more encompassing understanding of themselves in a context outside of the corporate hip-hop monopoly" (p. 7). This disconnect between generations lends itself to the development of historical amnesia, which I argue, for Black

Student Activist Scholars has the potential to be detrimental to their sociopolitical and racial identity development.

This concept of historical amnesia has carried over into mainstream literature, too. Novelist Milan Kundera (1978) notes how the lack of sharing history heralds the distortion and elimination of history from the dominant context of American society. This becomes more impactful in our discussions of Black history, which further aids in the contortion of racial identity, collective responsibility, and cultural foundations for Black students for future generations. This lack of intergenerational dialogue contributes to what Muhammad (2013) notes as historical illiteracy, or the act of no accurate perceptions of historical events that shape current contexts. The lack of historical context for Black Student Activist Scholars can lead to misguided civic engagement. The discussion of historical illiteracy is nothing new. Woodson (1933) argues the importance of history in that upon the arrival of African people to the Americas, our history, identity and culture have been excluded from the 'grand' narratives that shaped society. This issue of historical illiteracy is especially important in our understanding of the development of the Black student activist scholar. As Woodson and other scholars maintain, history, in part, undergirds the development of racial identity, and serves as a tool by which Black student activist scholars are informed about mechanisms of resistance and collectivism for their experiences in the Black Student Liberators and as college students. Black Studies then serves as a conduit by which Black history, Black subjectivities, and epistemologies remain at the forefront of knowledge production in the academy. As such, through Black Studies, intergenerational dialogue within the field, and learning lessons from the past can not only reaffirm the importance of Black Studies

in the academy, but also propel Black student activist scholars, and the totality of the academy to engage in discussions centered on race, equity, access, and fair education.

Black Studies continues to force the discussion of race and the lived experiences of African peoples to the center point of the academy, which allows for a nuanced discussion of intersecting identities including gender, sexuality and class. Black Studies, since its formal institutionalization in the mid-twentieth century, continues to be a social movement toward change in the academy. Black Studies for Black students and the larger academy allows for self-authorship, which, conceptualized by Baxter Magolda, and King (2004), involves the student taking an active role in learning, specifically through the lived experiences of the student. Because Black student activism was a strong component of the student's identities, the learning that took place in the classroom and the experiences of activism had a large impact on student's intellectual, personal, and academic development. In a 2012 article by The Chronicle of Higher Education, Martha Biondi argues, "Black studies plays a key role in fostering education about this country's history, the significance of slavery in the creation of the nation, and black resistance and political tradition that created the opportunities that immigrants hold dear." As this suggests, Black Studies continues to play an integral role in the development of American society. Further, this substantiates Marable's (2000) conception that Black Studies is descriptive, showing the realities and complexities of Black life, corrective, which serves to challenge and revise Blackness in the academy, and lastly, prescriptive, wherein scholarship is connected to struggle, and seeks to empower the very people for which the field was developed.

Significance of Study

The knowledge produced from this dissertation has the potential to identify avenues to improve the learning experience of Black students on a college campus. In turn it can identify with areas of concern retention, college adjustment, and cross-cultural teaching processes. The role of the Black student activist scholar has not been researched as a space for learning and whether students learn in these situations that inform the academy of the benefits of extracurricular social justice involvement. Additionally, this study serves the purpose to expand the discussion and literature of Black student activists on college campuses to examine the concept of being a Black scholar, community-minded, and to address and explore the issues with which they are involved. Most importantly, this study seeks to highlight the Black student activist scholar voice, and the role of engaging in how Black student leaders interpret their scholar and activist roles. Lastly, this study will serve to be descriptive and corrective, as it will highlight the narrative of the Black student activist scholar on a college campus.

Toward a framework of Critical Race Sociopolitical Development

As stated in earlier chapters, Sociopolitical Development is the process by which an individual explores their identity in relation to the larger sociopolitical process by which they interact and with which they exist. As such, it is the consciousness of how structural phenomena, primarily racism, individually and collectively affect how power operates in one's life. This study conceptualized how sociopolitical consciousness of Black Student Activist Scholars acknowledges the inequalities that exist as well as how to take action as a response to power structures, primarily through community organizing. Additionally, Critical Race Theory is a framework that seeks to explain and improve

social and material conditions experienced by people of color by centering race and racism at the center of the discussion. The exploration of the lived experiences of the Black Student Activist Scholars connects the intersections of race, and sociopolitical development and through qualitative approaches illuminates how the two frameworks work in concert with one another. Building on this literature, I synthesize the constructions of both frameworks to create a framework of Critical Race Sociopolitical Development.

Through this study, Black Student Activist Scholars explored their racial and activist identities through personal, academic, and organizational experiences. Chapter four highlighted their development as activists, and their understandings of race, racism, and social change as they were involved with the Black Student Alliance. The opportunities presented as leaders within the organization provided an understanding of their racial identity not only on campus, but within American society, as well as how their engagement with the group was utilized as an opportunity to develop their activism. In this dissertation, I apply the analytical framework of Critical Race Theory to suggest one way in which a Critical Race Sociopolitical Development can be utilized to foster racial empowerment and racial pride through activism. Critical Race Sociopolitical Development accounts for and helps people of color respond to the various social forces that intersect to contour their social location. It incorporates lived experience and voice by involving racial identity as a foundation for the dissemination of culturally relevant approaches to activism and engagement for social change. Critical Race Sociopolitical Development serves to be a basis by which to identify tools to respond to racial marginalization and oppression under the auspice of social justice and activism.

This more critical approach as a way in which to explore Black activist identity development allows for increased consciousness and awareness not only of social injustices within the Black community, but also an acknowledgement and commitment to larger frameworks to create more socially consciousness activism. The Black student activist scholars involvement with the Black Student Alliance and their individual and collective experiences with race support the idea that Black activism is an ongoing and ever-changing process that branches into more forms of activism. It is herein that lays implications and new directions for further research.

Implications for Future Research

The Black Student Alliance served as an ideal setting through which Black student activist scholars understand their racial and activist identities. Much of the roles and activities within the organization shaped the students' scholarly identities and the educational and career experiences and directions many of the students embarked upon their entrance into higher education. In each of the participant's experiences, each student illuminated how their experiences shaped and influenced other facets of their identity. Educators may at times fail to acknowledge the contextual realities Black students that may or may not be presented in the classroom, which leaves Black students at a disadvantage. The acknowledgement of varied identities is critical to our understanding the individual, and their lived experience (Crenshaw, 1991; Brah & Phoenix, 2013; McCall, 2005;). This highlights the importance of the intersections of identities many Black students bring with them into an institution of higher learning. Educators should note the richness that comes with the acknowledgement of these identities, and how this fosters a community of diverse, critical thinkers. As Simone describes, her multifaceted

identity allows for multiple layers to be unpacked in her academic career. In ongoing discussions with Simone in addition to being a Black student activist scholar, she identified with other parts and the importance of each of her identities.

> **Simone**: I say I am a Queer Black Hip Hop Feminist. Um, so, its means that um, I believe that in navigating through this world its important to look at the intersections of race, gender and sexuality and how that affects um, your day to day life. I also – bein' an advocate of hip hop and like teachings of like Joan Morgan, and people like that who believe in like hip hop feminism and how hip hop is really the – I think in a lot of ways the model mouthpiece for Black men and women given that we don't necessarily have many opportunities to share um, our lives, our strengths, and our struggles. I think that hip-hop tends to create a way to do that. So, in using that as being the mouthpiece in many ways for Black people as a tool um, for explaining and uplift, and all those things. Bein' a feminist, I bring that female voice into situations where its not always acknowledged.

Simone illuminates the transformative power hip hop has as a mouthpiece for traditionally marginalized groups, particularly Black students. As such, hip hop provides the platform by which the narratives of traditionally marginalized communities can share their stories as a way by which to share and transform the dominant narratives that for so long have scribed the experiences of Black student activist scholars, void of their voice or experience.

The chapter opens with a passage from Nas's "N.I.G.G.E.R. (The Slave and the Master)", a hip-hop song sociopolitical in nature. When taken as a political text, the song

is rich for the aesthetics of hip-hop, and social critique of Black life within the context of systematic notions of white power. Nas is also notable for the expression of the historical narratives of how 'they' viewed Black life and culture, as well as a reconstruction of what 'we' are. In this chorus, we can see how the mouthpiece serves as a tool for sociopolitical empowerment, which like Simone argues, is a way by which young Black Americans can be uplifted and find empowerment. Further, hip-hop, in addition to Black Studies, serves as a mechanism through which intergenerational dialogues can occur, further propelling the ongoing Black freedom struggle of past and current Black activists.

Likewise for many of the other participants, my observations and interactions with each of them speak to the need for more organizations, educational opportunities and resources that encourage the development of Black student social responsibility. Additionally, more discussions surrounding racial identity and interactions with the larger society should begin before Black students enter on predominantly white campuses. Collectively, these discussions aid in our understanding of how to better create services that address disparities surrounding persistence, retention, and graduation rates for Black college students.

The counterstories of the Black student activist scholars spotlight the importance of the Black radical activist tradition that has shaped the landscape of American higher education. As such, the Black radical tradition of struggle and activism brings about new and varied Black subjectivities and epistemologies that are necessary in the development of knowledge produced in the academy. Additionally, their work serves as a reminder and a framework of the importance to challenge and disrupt educational landscapes and to ensure Black student voices, histories, cultures and experiences are equally and fairly

represented within the framework of the higher education system. By sharing the stories of the Black student activist scholars opens discussions to the varied social, psychological, cultural and epistemological complexities of Black life through Black student activist scholarship that is often dismissed in the construction of higher education.

Additionally, this dissertation reinforces the dialogues found in Black Studies around purpose, goals, and directions. Through the collective and individual experiences of the Black student activist scholars highlight the importance of Black Studies and the impact on the academy and the push for social change from a Black standpoint. As previous research suggests, Black student activists were an integral component in the development of Black Studies (Biondi, 2012; Exum, 1985; Glasker, 2009; Joseph, 2003; Rogers, 2012; Rojas, 2007). Further, by very definition of Black Studies, the students challenged the 'master narrative' that had for so long shaped how and what curriculums were taught. This allows for the disruption of white male, cisgendered, heteronormative epistemologies, and allows for the insertion of varied knowledge that includes Black voice. Furthermore, this allows for further development of a paradigm for critical thought that challenges how Black subjectivities and epistemologies are studied within the field of Black Studies. As Rabaka (2010) suggests, through critical engagement with Black Studies, scholars will engage in the process of "transfiguring white supremacy, patriarchy, capitalism, colonialism, and heterosexism, among other aspects of modern imperialism, in the interests of bringing into being a new post-imperialist humanity, society, and world" (p. 300).

Additionally, the incorporation of critical thought and hip-hop within Black studies challenges our assumptions about what it means to study Black life and

subjectivities, and to critically investigate what Black Studies means in the academy. In turn, this challenges scholars to deconstruct, examine, and reconstruct ideas of Blackness in the twenty-first century, which may further propel radical and revolutionary thought within the academy. As a result, through both intellectual and activist practice, the liberation of human social and material conditions can begin to improve.

The exploration of the Black Student Activist Scholar serves as a reminder of an acrimonious history of the Black student experience in higher education particularly on the campuses of predominantly white institutions. The quest for representation, upward mobilization and collective responsibility has been, for some, an ongoing experience for Black students in higher education and in historically white spaces. Additionally, this study served as a way to bridge scholarly activism and Black history into the academy. This research was descriptive, analytical, and biographical in nature, and extends the reach of Black Studies and education to include a noted, yet sparsely studied experiences of Black Student Activist Scholars in a specific area for Black communities. Additionally, the study serves to develop and add to multiple discourses such as Black Student contemporary activism, and Black students as intellectual activists. The dissertation also provided relevant examples of social responsibility and practical applications of Black studies by considering how racial identity and activist development shifts and evolves through the course of an individual Black student's life. Finally, the dissertation addresses the gap in scholarly literature that in general, marginalizes Black students and their narratives, their social and political action, and their intellectual production. As a result, Black Studies serves as a catalyst for Black Student Activism, sparking impetus for critical consciousness through the interpretation, correction, and true

description of the field as academic inquiry. As Gates and Marable (2005) suggest, the function of Black Studies should be more than just an edifying component of Black life and esteem, but also an area through which to act and positively transform social and material conditions of people of African descent. The experiences of these Black Student Activist Scholars illustrate that students resisted the how the larger dominant society, through racism and other facets of marginalization, relegated their lived experiences as unimportant factors not only in the academy, but throughout American society.

For Black Studies, this means continuing to expand the scope of interdisciplinary scope of inquiry that allows for the contemporary investigation of social, political, economic, improvement of the field. Additionally, interdisciplinary investigations in Black Studies give way to a stronger, more critical scholarship that lend themselves to other academic disciplines, much like Black Studies is a necessary component in other scholarly fields. Furthermore, through the incorporation of activism in Black Studies, scholarship can begin to approach contemporary issues that affect life not only with Black people, but expand the approach to include a more holistic approach to understanding the human experience.

Conclusion

The storied lives of the Black student activist scholar is connected to the ongoing worldwide Black freedom struggle. Through the understanding of their lived experiences, we gain a new perspective on the ever-changing perspective of the Black experience in education, in the larger American society, and throughout the global diaspora. Additionally, their experiences leave an indelible mark on the institution of higher education. As such, Black student activist scholars show the multifaceted

approaches to activism and social change that nuance social justice and reveal the beautiful struggle that is the Black experience. Additionally, the presentation of the stories is necessary, as it seeks to reclaim and affirm the knowledge of Black people. Further, this work will stand as a necessary contribution to Black Studies, the larger academy, and the overall human existence.

Black student activist scholars will continue to provoke thought, discussion, and disrupt the dominant narrative presented with regards to higher education. Is it my hope that this research will reframe the image of the Black student activist scholar and their contributions to the landscape of higher education, and the society at large.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Research Project Consent Form

Research Consent Form
University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (UCRIHS)
Understanding African American College Student Activism
Sociopolitical Development/Critical Consciousness

You are being asked to participate in a research project to be conducted Fall 2012. This project explores different ways African American college students understand their identities and their practice and understanding of activism and academic achievement at a Predominately White Institution. Since this project involves observation, and interviewing, your permission for participation is requested. If you choose to participate, you can refuse to take part in certain activities or completely opt out of participation at any time without penalty. If you do choose to participate, this form provides your permission for me to audiotape and videotape the interviews and the inclusion of any artifacts (flyers, publications, etc.) into my study.

Participation in this project requires a one on one interview with a focus group and myself with other self-identified African American student activists. Your privacy will be respected to the maximum extent allowable by law throughout the project. Additionally, I will use pseudonyms (false names) in place of your real name in order to maintain anonymity and confidentiality in any transcripts, notes, and other recorded documents. You have the right to ask questions about this project at any time and can refuse participation at any point during this project.

There may be times that topics discussed may be controversial. At times you may feel that your own, personal perspective is at odds or devalued during focus groups. I will attempt to minimize such feelings by helping to create an open, trusting environment in which all perspectives are valued and given equal time, and regularly requesting your input – as a collective focus group and as an individual – as to how you are experiencing the focus group. If at any time you have questions or concerns about the research or interview and/or your participation in the research, please contact the study coordinator or primary investigator at any time (contact information listed below).

If you have concerns or questions about this study, please contact the researcher, Dominick Quinney*, Michigan State University, African American and African Studies, 1 Morrill Hall, East Lansing, Michigan 48824, quinneyd@msu.edu, (517) 881-5805.*

If you have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, Fax 517-432-4503, or e-mail irb@msu.edu or regular mail at 207 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824.

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Race

- Do you identify yourself with any particular racial or ethnic group? If so, which group? Why?
- Do other people generally identify you with this particular racial or ethnic group? If not, why?
- When did you begin to associate yourself with said racial/ethnic group?
- Discuss your understanding of race.
- Discuss your understanding of racism.
- Have you experienced racism?
- Have you experienced racism while in college? What happened?

Activism

- Discuss your understanding of activism.
- Do you consider yourself to be an activist?
- In what way are you an activist?
- Discuss your experiences with activism prior to Michigan State University.
- Discuss your experiences with activism while at Michigan State University.
- Discuss your influences to become an activist.

Education

- Who or what influenced your decision to attend Michigan State University? Why?
- What is your major? Why did you choose your major?
- Has your involvement in this activist role influenced your academic choices?
- Has activism played a role in your college experience in the classroom? How?
- Has your identity shaped your experiences in the classroom?
- As a Black student, has Michigan State University helped you to become a successful student? Why or why not?
- What is your career plan after graduation?
- Do you think your educational experiences would be different if you were at another institution?
- Have your experiences with your activism on campus influenced your post-baccalaureate career?

Knowledge of Self

Discuss your familial situation and your upbringing.

- Discuss your schooling and education prior to Michigan State University.
- Are there any factors throughout your life that influence your activism?
- Are there organizations or particular experiences that sparked your interest in being an activist?

Other questions

- Are there any influences that shaped your identity outside of your family?

- Is there anything else that I didn't ask you that you would like to add?
- Do you have any questions for me?

Shaping the Experience

- Are you learning anything from your overall experience on campus?
- Have your experiences shaped your beliefs?
- Will these experiences be beneficial to you in the future? Why?
- Have these experiences shaped your relationships with others?

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