Class in the Classroom: Perceptions and Beliefs of Middle Class African American Male Teachers Teaching Low-income African American Students

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CLASS IN THE CLASSROOM
PERCEPTIONS AND BELIEFS OF MIDDLE CLASS AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE TEACHERS TEACHING LOW-INCOME AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

Dissertation by
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Abstract

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Trends in the racial make-up of students attending American schools in large districts showed significant growth in the number of Black and Latino students as far back as 1987. Further, more than half of the students who attend school in these districts were eligible for free or reduced lunch (Planty, 2008). In sum, urban schools are increasingly populated by low-income students of color. Shifts in the urban student population necessitate changes in the way in which teaching and learning are conceptualized. As the population of the nation’s urban schools becomes increasingly Black and Hispanic, the need for a teaching force whose racial background matches the student body also increases (B. E. Cross, 2003; Dee, 2005; K. Howey, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 2000a). The suggestion is that teachers who teach children who are like themselves linguistically, culturally, and racially are the most ideal to facilitate learning (Martinez, 1994).

Nonetheless, there is little scholarly discourse on the role or impact that socioeconomic class plays in scenarios where teachers and students share the same racial background.

Using Ray Rist’s (1970) seminal work as an anchor, this study employed a qualitative approach to examine the perceptions of five African American male teachers who identify as middle class and who teach in schools or programs that serve predominantly
low-income African American students. Analysis of the interviews led to the following conclusions: the differences in socioeconomic class influenced the teachers’ general perception of their students and their capability as learners. Notwithstanding these perceptions, the teachers expressed a profound sense of love and care for their students and believed themselves to be uniquely qualified to provide them with what they need beyond the traditional curriculum.
DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the two women who have been my rock in so many ways for so many years. I am forever indebted to my mother, Sandra Winn-Tutwiler, and my loving wife, Claire Tutwiler. I could not have done this without you.

To my three beautiful children, Madeleine, William, and Charles, thank you for being patient and understanding over the years.
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A little more than a decade ago, Dr. Dennis Shirley and I set down for breakfast to discuss why I might consider attending the Lynch School. From that point forward a solid professional relationship began to gel. The relationship is now indestructible. Over the past 10 years, Dr. Shirley has gone to great lengths to help me shape a learning experience that would benefit my educational and professional paths. I owe him a great debt of gratitude for sticking by my side even when it looked like I was down and out.
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Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION

It was a muggy September morning in a northeastern city. I boarded bus number 66 on the side of town highly populated by college and graduate students. The 66 delivered to me to the transfer station where I caught bus number 23. The 23 takes riders deep into the black and brown neighborhoods of Boston, MA. I arrived at The Blue Elementary School eager to work with students. At the time, I was a graduate student concentrating on teaching and curriculum. I doubled as an Americorps Volunteer to make ends meet. I spent one full school day per week at The Blue Elementary School. It served as my introduction to the Boston Public Schools, first and foremost, but also to an intra-racial dynamic, the likes of which I, as an African American man, had neither seen, heard, nor experienced before.

Once a week, I spent a full day in a first grade class at The Blue Elementary School helping with in-class activities and mentoring young students. With the exception of two Latino students, the entire class was Black. I never did any substantive research on the economic background of the students in this particular class. However, The Blue Elementary School is a neighborhood school. Accordingly, it is safe to assume most or all of the students were from low-income or lower-middle class households as the school is situated in one of the poorer sections of town. What is more, at the time, some 80% of the student body qualified for free or reduced lunch. The teacher in my classroom was a tall, heavy-set, fair-skinned African American woman. She was raised and, at the time, lived in a wealthy suburb. Upon our first meeting, she presented as a very capable, intelligent educator. She was nothing short of completely cordial and welcoming to me.
As time went on, it became apparent to that most of these characteristics and behaviors did not carry over to her teaching. She had no reservations sharing with me her lack of optimism with the academic potential of her predominantly African American class. When preparing weekly homework assignments for the students, she would often mutter under her breath, “I don’t know why I’m going through all of this trouble; they’re not going to do it anyway.” Many of her lessons were taught in a half-hearted manner and the students were scolded for their inability to immediately grasp what was taught. The most pointed example of the deep rift between the students and the teacher was her tendency to jokingly refer to certain aspects of the students’ behavior and language as “Niggerish.” Even worse, the teacher would spray an aerosol freshener on students that she described as smelling like “garbage”.

Obviously, this teacher represents the worst extreme. In my own educational experience, I was fortunate to have some, although very few, African American teachers. Some were good. Some were exceptional. Some were average. As a former high school teacher in the same school district, I can say the same for my fellow African American colleagues. Not one of the teachers of color in my schooling or professional experiences came close to the ugliness that The Blue Elementary School teacher demonstrated. However, I could not shake my internal uneasiness with this scenario – African American teachers miseducating and mistreating black children. Among the many puzzling and upsetting elements of that experience was the teacher’s blatant disregard for the educational well being of her “brothers and sisters”. How can this be? As teachers of color working in urban districts serving primarily students of color, what of our special calling to lift up our people? From where did this teacher’s fiery and ultimately
debilitating beliefs about her black students come? As these questions began to bubble, I began to wonder about intra-racial relationships. More specifically, I began to think about the most evident difference between this teacher and her students. They were all of color, but the teacher was clearly upper-middle class. Her students were not.

Some twelve years later, this experience still lives in an active place in my heart and mind. While, it is not my intention to attribute the behaviors of the teacher at *The Blue Elementary School* to Black middle class educators who do the much-needed work of educating young people in low-income, urban school districts. It is interesting, if not critical, to ponder the notion of cultural heterogeneity across class lines in the African American community. As Gatewood (1988, p. 3) suggests,

“To discuss class in America is to venture into an area fraught with perils. It may well be that class is the toughest, slipperiest opponent in the lexicon, all the more so when applied to Afro-American society. But failure to consider class divisions in the African American community would contribute to what Bayard Rustin once termed the ‘sentimental notion of African American solidarity’ and to the perpetuation of the myth that African American society is a homogenous mass without significant and illuminating distinctions in prestige, attitudes, behavior, culture, power, and wealth.” (p.3)
THE RATIONALE

Trends in the racial make-up of students attending schools in districts serving more than 10,000 students showed significant growth in the number of African American and Latino students as far back as 1987 (Sietsema, 1996). A report published by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) indicates that in the 2001-2002 school year, 69% of the students attending public schools in the nation’s largest school districts were non-white. African American and Hispanic students account for most of that percentage. The report also indicated that more than half of the students who attended schools in these districts were eligible for free or reduced lunch (NCES, 2003). Fast forward to the 2005-2006 school year and we learn that some 50% of all African American students attending public schools do so in schools with high-minority enrollments (those in which 75% or more of the student body are students of color) (Planyt, 2008). The is wide agreement on the notion that urban schools are increasingly segregated and populated by low-income students of color (Orfield & Lee, 2004, 2006; Planyt, 2008).

Logically, shifts in the characteristics of the urban student population necessitate changes in the way in which teaching and learning are conceptualized. Undoubtedly, there are divergent ideas on precisely what these changes ought to be. Nonetheless, there is considerable agreement on the belief that as the population of the nation’s urban schools becomes increasingly African American and Hispanic, the need for a teaching force whose racial background matches the urban student body also increases (B. E. Cross, 2003; K. Howey, 1999; Kunjufu, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2000a; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2010).
It is often purported that scenarios in which teachers teach children who are like themselves linguistically, culturally, and racially are the most ideal to facilitate learning (B. E. Cross, 2003; Martinez, 1994). As Millis and Buckley (in Dilworth, 1990) suggest, culture provides the very laws by which teachers operate as they develop and deliver instruction, set expectations for themselves as well as their students, and understand student behavior. Hence, the corresponding belief is that shared experiences and culture make teachers of color better equipped than their white counterparts to teach students of color in urban schools. Haberman (1995), who is historically one of the foremost researchers on urban education and teacher preparation for urban schools, is in complete agreement with this belief. The benefit of a diverse instructional force in urban schools, particularly those whose student body is predominantly of color, is not being called into question. What is curious, however, is the apparent disregard for the complex nature of race, culture, gender, and class in the plea for more teachers of color. In the prevailing research calling for more teachers of color in urban schools, there is far too little attention paid to the existence of and potential for cultural dissonance within racial boundaries.

In his classic study, Ray Rist (1970) theorized that teachers whose socioeconomic background differed from their students often had lower expectations of and held negative assumptions about their students, despite sharing racial characteristics. They also failed to make meaningful connections with and truly understand the experience of their students. This disconnect ultimately resulted in poorer academic performance. Similar evidence was presented in Silver’s (1973) investigation of Washington D.C. schools and more recently in Anyon’s (1997) work in the Newark public schools. While Rist’s work offers considerable insight on the same race, different economic class
dynamic in the urban classrooms of the early 1970’s, there are several significant questions that remain unanswered by his work and which are scarcely addressed in the current discourse on African American teachers and teaching and learning in the urban context.

Taken wholesale, Rist’s work suggests that African American teachers can and, in some cases, actively center their assumptions about the academic ability of low-income African American students on the basis of perceived economic class. It has been suggested that these assumptions and the beliefs that support them are due in large part to the structures of domination in society (Lynn, 2002). In scenarios such as those presented in work of Rist, Silver, and Anyon, African American teachers are constructed as active agents in a system of racial and class subordination. In sharp contrast to conclusions drawn by Rist and later supported by Silver and Anyon, this study does not bear the notion that socioeconomic inequities outweigh racial inequities. Instead, it focuses the cultural mores that support the perceptions of middle class African American teachers.

What is more, little is said about the role of gender in these scenarios. To be clear, there has been significant research on African American women in the classroom (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Dixson, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Almost nothing is said about African American men teaching in urban schools (Lynn, 2006). The apparent absence of discussion about the complexity of African American culture across economic class lines coupled with the paucity of research on African American male educators provide the perfect niche for this study.

Research on the Black middle class reaches back to the late nineteenth, early twentieth century by scholars such as W.E.B DuBois (Du Bois, 2007), and continues with

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seminal works by Frazier (1962; 1968), Kronus (1971), and Landry (1987). In the last
ten years, works by Graham (1999), Patillo-McCoy (2000), Hyra (2006), and Lacy
(2007) offer a modernized illustration of the Black middle/upper-middle class and a look
at the intra-racial class dynamic in the African American community. It is interesting to
note that, with the exception of Graham, each of the aforementioned authors/researchers
is a sociologist. The discussion is alive and well in sociology circles and has been for
some time, but it is notably absent in the field of research in education.

This study seeks a deeper understanding of the impact of racial and cultural
homogeneity on students’ performance as learners in urban classrooms by focusing on
the perceptions of middle-upper class African American male teachers teaching low-
income black students in an urban school district. The study will be guided by the
following questions:

1. What role does a middle/upper middle class African American male teacher’s
   identity play in the development of his social and cultural perceptions of his
   lower-income students?

2. What impact do differences in the socioeconomic status between African
   American male teachers and their students have on the teacher’s perception of
   his students as capable learners?

3. What role does being African American and male have on a teacher’s
   perception of his teaching efficacy in classrooms populated by African
   American students from a lower socioeconomic background?
To grapple with questions about African American culture across socioeconomic class lines is to blaze new trails in the educational research landscape. Further, to add a focus on African American male teachers in urban schools is to broach a topic scarcely published. With the exception of Lynn’s (2002, 2006) work, there is virtually nothing published that specifically examines African American male teachers teaching in the urban setting, much less the complexity of the same race, different socioeconomic class dynamic. However, we have a solid research foundation from which to build at the intersection of three major bodies of work: racial identity development, African American identity in the classroom, and the origin, evolution, and distinguishing characteristics of the African American middle class.

The literature review shall begin with a brief examination of the research providing a rationale for the call for more teachers of color in urban schools. This will be followed by thorough synthesis of the research on the African American middle class; its origins to a current description. I will tie in the scholarly research on racial identity development. Doing so will prove helpful in understanding how African American middle class identity fits in the scholarly discourse on racial identity development. I will conclude this chapter with an investigation of the relevant research on African American identity in the urban classroom.

THE CALL FOR MORE TEACHERS OF COLOR

In order to fully understand the importance of this investigation of middle class African American identity and the perceptions that it fosters, it is crucial to have an understanding of what scholarly research says about the need for teachers of color in
urban schools. Why do we need more teachers of color in urban schools? What do
teachers of color bring to the urban classroom that their white counterparts do not? There
is quite a bit of research on this topic, both empirical and conceptual. A great deal of it is
directed at schools of education and their role in attracting and preparing teacher
candidates of color for urban service.

There is a rather large body of research, primarily theoretical, that supports the
call for more teachers of color in urban schools populated by students of color. With the
exception of the seminal piece authored by Ray Rist (1970), the research reviewed for
this piece is recent (within the past twenty years) and speaks to the theory behind and the
methodology employed in choosing and preparing teachers of color for urban schools.
The rationale for excluding research before 1993 is twofold. First, prior to 1993, there
was very little research published on the topic of urban teacher practice (Grant, 1994).
Moreover, reaching back to dated research, such as that by Joseph Rogus (1987) on
preparing teachers for urban schools, would be a fruitless endeavor given the focus of this
study, as this publication does not even mention key terms, such as multicultural
education or the need for teachers of color. Finally, given the urgent need for attention to
teaching in urban schools (Villegas, 2002; Wiener, 2002), it is most useful to analyze
what is said about the current practices in preparing and selecting teachers for urban
service.

The demographic shifts in urban schools coupled with their specific contextual
characteristics heightens the need for teachers who are trained to face these and other
challenges that urban schools present (Hodgkinson, 2001). Training is but one element.
Are there particular characteristics that an individual possesses that will enable him or her
to perform better in urban schools than one who does not have these characteristics?
How do schools of education identify these and recruit these individuals? These are the critical questions that the recent research is addressing. Since 1986, there has not been a great deal of empirical research on this particular category. Most of the literature aimed solely at recruitment to programs for urban teacher preparation is positional. The topic often appears as an add-on in publications focusing on the larger, general topic of preparing teachers for urban service. Nonetheless, there appears to be agreement on several themes in recruiting teachers, particularly teachers of color, to teach in urban schools.

It is a fairly safe to assume that Martin Haberman is the most outspoken researcher with regard to research on what characteristics prospective teachers should have in order to be effective and carry on long-term careers in urban schools. Haberman’s (1993) study on the Milwaukee public schools showed that analysis of an individual’s responses to questions about urban education and hypothetical situations in the urban classroom is helpful in predicting the potential success of that individual in an urban school. This study and his notion of “star teachers” (Haberman, 1995, 1998), teachers who possess certain skills and experiences that increase potential effectiveness in urban teaching, leads the charge in the belief that teachers with certain characteristics, skills, beliefs and experiences will perform better in the urban classroom. Furthermore, it has provided a formula for selecting aspiring teachers to take part in preparation programs for urban schools (Perkins, 2001).

The literature on the selection of pre-service teachers overwhelmingly agrees that there is a desperate need for more teachers of color in urban schools. The recent emotional calls for this need come in the form of conceptual and position publications (K
Howey, 1999; Kailin, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 2000b; Meacham, 2000; Oakes, 2002; Sleeter, 2001; Villegas, 2002) and empirical research (Brennan, 1998; Gonzalez, 1997; Meacham, 2000; Talbert-Johnson, 1999). The argument is that the largely white teacher preparation faculty and pre-service student-teacher body cannot, by itself, endeavor to prepare teachers for students and contexts that they know little about. What is more, teacher education has not, and quite possibly cannot, change attitudes and beliefs that have formed over a lifetime (R. Smith, 2000; Tatto, 1996; Zeichner, 1998). The assumption, which is quite close to Haberman’s, is that shared experiences and culture will make teachers of color better equipped to teach in diverse urban schools than white teachers. Nevertheless, there are fewer and fewer people of color entering the profession, as those attending and graduating from institutions of higher education are seeking employment in the business and technology realm (Gonzalez, 1997).

The call for more teachers of color, specifically more African American teachers, is clear and unequivocal. The general assumption follows the line of thinking proposed by Haberman (1995). In total, teachers of color are better suited to teach students of color because of the intangible characteristics, like shared experience and shared culture. Who better to infuse elements of the students’ identity and culture into the processes of teaching and learning than a representative of that culture? Nonetheless, these calls say little about the complexity of African American identity and its role in African American teacher/African American student relationships.

Clearly, how one identifies himself impacts his perception of others. Therefore, it is crucial to explore research on African American identity and, in particular, African American middle class identity. Can African American middle class identity be defined?
Is there a single, intelligible definition? What are the characteristics of African American middle class identity? Are there discernible distinctions within the notion of African American middle class identity? If so, what is the nature of the relationship between African American folk who exist on opposite sides of these distinctions? What role does African American middle class identity play in African American student/African American teacher relationships? These are the questions that drive the investigation of the literature on African American identity and, in particular, African American middle class identity. What follows is an investigation of the seminal work on the topic as it pertains to these questions in this study.

RACIAL AND ETHNIC IDENTITY

Any investigation of African American middle class identity will inevitably encounter the broader research work on African American identity. This body of research offers a solid foundation for understanding behaviors and beliefs as they pertain to identity. It will also shed light on the reasons behind and ultimately the existence of cultural or ethnic disparities within the African American community. For the purposes of this exploration, I shall examine the research on identity and then use seminal research on racial and ethnic identity to provide a basis for understanding how both develop and why there are such notable differences within the same racial group.

First and foremost, it is most important to operationalize identity. Is there a difference between racial identity and ethnic identity? Phinney and Ong define ethnic identity as a sense of “…peoplehood within a group, a culture, and a particular setting that is dynamic, developmental and thus is constructed over time.” (2007, p. 217) They
delineate between racial identity and ethnic identity, but also suggest that both constructs share the notions of belonging to a group and the necessity of learning about one’s group. The constructs differ in that ethnic identity focuses on belonging to aspects of group affiliation. Referencing Helms (2007), Phinney and Ong suggest that racial identity focuses on an individual’s response to racism. Based on a review of ethnic identity literature, (specifically the work of Ashmore et al (2004)), Phinney identifies the major components of ethnic identity which include constructs such as self categorization, (i.e., process of an individual identifying with a particular social group); commitment and attachment (i.e., development of a sense of belonging within a group); exploration (i.e., part of the developmental process where the individual seeks ethnically relevant information and experiences); ethnic behaviors (i.e. the individual engages behaviors reflective of the culture, such as language use or seeking out and interacting with members of the ethnic group); development of positive regard (i.e., having positive in-group attitudes); and values and beliefs.

Cokely’s (2005) work on identity dovetails nicely with Phinney and Ong’s (2007). Noting the impropriety of using racial identity and ethnic identity interchangeably, Cokely discusses the perspectives of Helms (1995) and Phinney (1996) on racial and ethnic identity models. As Phinney and Ong (2007) did in their work, Cokely supports Helms’ categorization of identity models as racial only when identity elements emerge in reaction to social oppression. Identity models that focus on the acquisition and maintenance of cultural characteristics are ethnic, thus identity models focusing on race and ethnicity should be addressed separately. Cokely supports Phinney’s (1996) assertion that race is subsumed under ethnicity, thus race and ethnicity should be addressed as separate but related constructs.
Cokley (2005), along with other African American psychologists, suggests that African American identity can best be understood within the context of an Afrocentric worldview. An Afrocentric worldview is characterized by principles such as the belief in collectivism, spiritualism, communalism, as well as belief in self-knowledge. Cokely also introduces the importance of internalized racialism when attempting to understand African American identity. Internalized racism is described as the extent to which an individual identifies with and internalizes negative and positive stereotypes about their racial group (e.g., all African Americans are good dancers [positive] or all African Americans are unintelligent [negative]). The primary purpose of Cokely’s study was to determine the relationship among racial identity, ethnic identity, Afrocentric values, and internalized racism. Based on attitudinal responses from 201 African Americans attending historically Black institutions, he found that both nonracialized and racialized ethnic identities were possible. A nonracialized ethnic identity is based on attitudes endorsing Afrocentric values and positive ethnic identity, and tended to not endorse internalized racism nor have identity elements based on anti-white attitudes. A racialized ethnic identity, an interpretation he offers with caution due to the sample size of the study, is also characterized by internalization of Afrocentric beliefs and a strong ethnic identity, but also reflects anti-white attitudes and the positive aspects of internalized racism (i.e., belief in positive stereotypes).

There is considerable agreement on the notion that racial and ethnic identities are separate, but related constructs. Pope-Davis et al (2000) engage the topic from a different perspective; that involving the relationship between racial identity and acculturation or the process of accepting culture among African Americans. The research advises a less distinctive line between one’s racial identity and culture. The researchers used the Black
Racial Identity Scale (J. E. Helms & Parham, 1990) and the African American Acculturation Scale (Landrine, 1994) to determine how close race and culture are as constructs. They determined that an individual may identify with his/her race, but may not have the same sense of identification with his/her culture. Accordingly, a level of comfort with racial identity could lead one to acceptance of African American culture as a cultural reference point. Borrowing from Marin’s (1992) work, Pope-Davis et al (2000) agreed that acculturation is a learning process that occurs at three levels. At the superficial level, an individual knows facts that make up cultural traditions on a very surface level. The intermediate level is one in which the individual exhibits behaviors one would expect to see if one possessed the norms and values of a culture—i.e., they may have certain language preferences. Finally, at the significance level the individual’s world views and interaction patterns are influenced by cultural norms, beliefs, and values and are evident in the individual’s everyday life.

There is an opposing viewpoint, albeit notably small, on the idea that ethnic identity is shaped by negative experiences involving race. Wright and Littleford (2002) offer a markedly different suggestion on the development of ethnic identity. In an effort to determine factors affecting ethnic identity and group orientation, the researchers performed an exploratory study involving 115 college students from 5 ethnic groups. The researchers concluded that being a member of a social group that has historically been discriminated against and having more experiences with prejudice were major factors in achieving a strong sense of ethnic identity.

Despite Wright and Littleford’s claims, there is widespread agreement on the idea that racial and ethnic identities are separate and distinct constructs. Both can be tracked and categorized by identifiable stages which are shaped by life experiences. Life
experience and its relation to African American identity is heavily researched and stands as a notable element on which there is widespread concurrence. Research on African American identity represents a proverbial zoom out, as much of it does not reference the nuances of racial and ethnic identity, much less the role that socioeconomic class plays in framing identity. Nonetheless, it provides useful information on African American identity development and will prove helpful in understanding values and behaviors specific to the African American middle class.

W.E. Cross is one of the foremost researchers on African American identity and African American identity development. According to Cross et al (1999), identity has multiple reference points, and is not limited to one’s race only. Reference points could include gender, sexual orientation, where one happens to live, or whether one is disabled or not. Race may not be at the center of one’s sense of identity. Race and culture are very important in high salience identities, those in which race is highly meaningful. The opposite is true for low salience identities, those in which race carries less importance. This position further supports the notion of within-group diversity in the African American community. Individuals may move from low salience to high salience identity following an epiphany that moves them to a different social stance. This is a multiple-stage process to which Cross refers to as Nigrescence, an updated version of Thomas’s (1971) Black Racial Identity Theory.

Cross et al (1999) identify five functions that potentially form one’s “identity.” Individuals may emphasize various combinations of any five, thus forming an identity profile. Briefly, buffering focuses on feelings and attitudes that protect individuals from racism. Bonding describes an individual’s attachment to African American people and culture. Bridging represents behaviors and attitudes that allow an African American
person to navigate between cultures/social groups different from his or her own. Codeswitching, also referred to as fronting, describes the process in which an African American person adjusts his or her dress, language, attitude, etc., to minimize discomfort a person or organization may have with African American people. Finally, individualism involves behavior in ways that are not specific to race. Various combinations of these functions speak to the complexity and diversity of African American identity.

According to Cross (1999), African American identity develops over the lifespan. It is influenced by individual’s social context (i.e., socioeconomic status, family traditions, local institutions), as well as childrearing practices used by the family. During the stages of infancy and childhood, and preadolescence, children’s identity is influenced by the ways in which race and culture figure into the parents’ interactions with the children. For example, some parents may avoid discussions of race, others may be neutral on the subject, while in some families, race and culture are central to the information, activities, and interactions children experience as members of the family. Self-evaluation and examination, common for the period of adolescence in most social groups result in a particularly pivotal identity development stage for African American youth as well. However, the concepts of low salience and high salience come into play—meaning that race and culture may not be the primary focus of a youth’s introspection—as would be expected in low salience identities. Further the complexity of identity at this stage is influenced by the particular pattern of the five functions of identity discussed above. Cross et al (1999) suggest that even with the possibility of identity diversity at this stage, race and culture tend to be significant in identity journeys of African American adolescent youth. Positive African American identity messages from home and community challenged by contradictory public messages and experiences (e.g., negative
media images, prejudicial treatment, racism, segregation) increase the possibility that race will become an important factor in development during the first three stages of identity development. During adolescence, youth move toward a worldview that integrates the five functions of identity. Cross suggests that the worldview could be nationalistic or Afrocentric, bicultural or multicultural.

Some of the research on African American identity follows a general understanding that racial identity as a whole is inspired more so by social construction than by skin color. Steele and Davis (1984) suggest that the culture of poverty theory supports this understanding. The crux of this theory is the belief that African American identity is shaped most critically by social class. The experiences that accompany membership to a particular socioeconomic stratum inform beliefs, perceptions, and one’s cultural foundation. In support of this notion, Helms (1995) later wrote:

Racial identity theory evolves out of the tradition of treating race as a sociopolitical and…cultural construction…racial classifications are assumed to be not biological realities, but rather sociopolitical and economic conveniences, membership in which is determined by socially defined inclusion criteria. (p. 181)

Brand et al. (1974) conducted studies that drew conclusions indicating distinct cultural patterns among socioeconomic groups within the races, but particularly among the lower-status groups. A logical assumption in this theory is that, because African American identity tends to be delineated by social class lines, African American identity is heterogeneous.
A relatively recent empirical example of the heterogeneity of African American identity is present in Thorton et al.’s (1997) work on the notion of connectedness among African American adults. The researchers use data from a rather large national survey of African American Americans focused on racial group identification. Although common fate is a consistent theme across the responses of the participants, the researchers determined that, in a general sense, African American identity is heterogeneous. Income, gender, education, geographic location, marital status, and age are among the significant factors that contribute to the heterogeneity in African American identity. The authors use three dimensions of African American identity, masses, elites, and rebels, to delineate the differences considering the different factors. The masses are those who indicate connectedness with the broad notion of African American America. The elites are African American professionals and elected officials. The rebels are African Americans who are lawless or those who succeed outside of the law. Discernible groups emerge based on the descriptive factors. For example, the respondents who are younger, poor, and less educated empathized with the rebel dimension, while the older, more educated respondents tend to identify with the masses, the elites, or none of the groups at all. Similar conclusions were drawn by Parham and Williams (1993) in their earlier work.

Other theorists in the field assert the idea of cultural integrity (Boykin, Andersen, & Yates, 1979; W. E. Cross, 1978). This theory holds that African American identity is shaped by one’s ascribed racial group, not other reference groups, such as socioeconomic class. An individual’s African American identity is based in large part on his or her feelings about his race.
Still other theorists have focused on the atrocities that African American Americans have endured throughout the United States’ history and its impact on identity presently. Early in his research, Wilson (1980) argued that oppression and discrimination were significant contributors to African American identity and culture. Later, his argument favored that resembling the culture of poverty theory. Naim Akbar (1996) continued Wilson’s initial theme, suggesting that impact of slavery in particular manifests itself as an inferiority complex in the identity of African American today. This complex causes, among other things, an inability to respect African American leadership, the physical emulation of white people, and a tendency to perceive Afrocentric physical attributes, such as kinky hair and/or dark skin, as unattractive. Nobles’ (1991) work on African cultures in relation to African American identity in the United States would suggest that what Akbar describes is part of the white vice-like grip on the African American psyche. He suggests that African cultures tend be more collective instead of separatist. His research determined that an individual’s self-definition is dependent on the collective definition of the individual’s people. The people are an extension of the self. The individualistic characteristic present in American society is antithetical to that of black Americans’ African historical roots. Allen and Bagozzi (2001) also agree with Akbar’s logic, but further suggest that only some African Americans suffer from this complex. Performed in Detroit, their research suggests that others, those with an African-Centered orientation, as described by Kambon (1992), actively affirm African American mores despite a lack of societal support for them. They suggest that individuals who own this characteristic tended to shun individualism and identify strongly with their group.

Racial socialization also neatly fits in the discourse on African American
identity. According to Brown and Lesane-Brown (2006), race socialization is a process by which parents communicate to their children about what it means to be African American. Parents’ messages may focus on race pride, but they may also include communications designed to prepare children for racial prejudice and discrimination. This study is based on the premise that racial socialization messages reflect parents’ perception of the racial climate at the time children are growing up. The researchers also proposed that childhood race socialization appears to impact adult attitudes. Three historical periods were used to explore the research premises: pre-\textit{Brown v. Board of Education} (i.e., prior to 1957); protest (1957 – 1968), and post-protest (1969-1980). The researchers hypothesized that messages of race and individual pride, along with messages about white prejudice would be more prominent during the protest period. However, this was not the case. The protest period was defined by the fight for civil rights, as well as the refusal by African Americans to ignore the immoral and inhumane treatment resulting from racial hatred. While it was anticipated that messages of race and individual pride would predominate, this was not the case. The researchers suggest that it was unnecessary for parents to communicate messages of race pride, given the pride and courage exhibited by African Americans during the period. The message of white prejudice did not predominate during this period—as anticipated by the researchers. A possible explanation was that messages about white prejudice were consistent across time, and would not necessarily be more prominent during one historical period over another. Evidence for a hypothesis of colorblind messages during the third historical period was also not found. The post-protest period was characterized by integration, improved economic well-being for some African Americans, but also by more covert discrimination through institutionalized racism alongside overt interracial contact. The
researchers suggest the “. . . durability of racial stratification was exposed by isolation of
the African American urban underclass, the bifurcation of labor markets, and increasing
color consciousness in the African American community” (p. 210) following the civil
rights movements as a cause. Some parents do not provide messages that could be
defined as racial socialization—and this was particularly true for children coming of age
during the last historical period (i.e., post protest). The authors pointed to parents’
internalization of negative images about African Americans; fear that children would
become angered or bitter about race; or beliefs that racism as a social issue had
diminished as reasons for the lack of race socialization.

There is considerable agreement on the notion that racial identity and ethnic
identity are two separate constructs, the latter of which is grounded in cultural
characteristics. There is also wide agreement on the process through which one’s African
American identity, regardless of the socioeconomic plane, shapes and forms. In total,
psychology and sociology inform us that African American identity exists, but takes on
many, many shapes. Studies on African American identity tend to uncover more
dissimilarity within racial boundaries than between them (Zuckerman, 1990). These
shapes depend in large part on a multitude of factors, such as age or level of income.
Nonetheless, there are ties that bind. Researchers agree that the rugged terrain of the
African American experience in the United States offers some semblance of shared
identity and a common understanding of experience. Given what psychology has
documented with regard to African American identity, it is interesting to examine these
understandings in the education realm.
Gatewood’s (1988) comment on the complexity of the concept of class in American society is well received. One could make the case that Antebellum America resembled something of a caste system, as there were clear distinctions among the various haves and have-nots, be it with regard to wealth or freedom. Nevertheless, the nation’s history since is fraught with revolution, upheaval, and change, making it most difficult to tie down enduring socioeconomic class definitions. Consequently, an operational definition of class is essential for this examination.

To be sure, there are volumes of research and varied philosophies on the concept of class in society. Undoubtedly, the key philosophers on the topic, Marx and Weber, offer a foundation, albeit divergent, for much of the thought and discussion on class today. Situating their beliefs in the American context with respect to the African American community is a stand-alone research endeavor. Therefore, I shall borrow from the operational definition employed in Smith and Seltzer’s (1992) exploration of race and class in the African American community. As they did, I will adopt Weber’s suggestion that members of a specific class are defined as people who occupy the same class status, as defined by property ownership and standard of living (Weber, 1947). Smith and Seltzer’s expanded and modernized this definition to include income, occupation, and thus education attainment, as the three are inextricably related in American society. Clearly, there are more distinguishing characteristics of the African American middle class, yet, income, occupation, and educational attainment are the foundational measures by which class lines become detectable. A more in-depth discussion on the modern-day
African American middle Class will be presented in the “African American Middle Class Today” section of this chapter.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE AFRICAN AMERICAN MIDDLE CLASS

Discussion and research on Black teacher identity as it exists across class lines is notably absent and, thus, the principal focus of this study. A fundamental assumption then is that there are distinguishable characteristics between the socioeconomic groups in the African American community. But are there significant cultural characteristics between African American socioeconomic classes? If so, how did this come to be? What traits make up these class cultures? Jaynes, Williams and others (1989) remind us that, from the birth of this nation, there has always been an African American presence. However, the African American and White worlds were and, to some extent, remain separate. The result: a distinct African American culture. The same is true in the evolution of socioeconomic classes within the African American community.

Historically, and to a notable extent, currently, the African American middle and upper classes have existed somewhat separately from those in the lower-income rung (Frazier, 1962; Gatewood, 1988; Graham, 1999; Hyra, 2006; Kronus, 1971; Lacy, 2007; Pattillo-McCoy, 2000). The result: distinct cultures distinguishable across class lines. What follows is brief exploration of the historical development of the African American middle class and a modern-day description of the characteristics, ideology, and behaviors of those who self-identify as members of the African American middle class.
The African American middle class has its roots in the infancy of the United States. Evidence of the African American middle class is detectable as far back as colonial America. Clearly, the pre-emancipation African American middle class was composed of free African Americans and constituted a very small percentage of the total African American population in America. What is more, the characteristics they exhibited make “elite” or “upper class” more fitting descriptors. The nation’s first census in 1790 totaled the African American population at 757,208. Of that total, only 59,557 were free. By 1860, the African American slave population had grown to nearly four million. The free African American population remained small, accounting for some 488,070 of the total African American population (Cummings & Hill, 1968). According to Frazier (1957), free African Americans enjoyed freedom by way of one of five different circumstances or situations:

1. Born to free blacks
2. Mulatto child born to a free black mothers
3. Mulatto child born to white servants
4. Child born to free black and Indian parents
5. Slaves who were set free

Free African Americans were scattered about the thirteen colonies in early America. By the late 18th century free African Americans settled primarily along the South Atlantic coast, the southern states, and, to a much lesser extent, the Northeast. They tended to cluster in the towns and urban areas. For example, Maryland was home to nearly 84,000 free African Americans in 1860. Of those, almost 26,000 of the total

There are a host of characteristics that distinguish the Antebellum African American elite from other African Americans. As odd as it might sound, the most notable difference was physical. In 1850, nearly thirty-seven percent of free African Americans were mulatto. The most dramatic scenario existed in Louisiana where more than 15,000 of the nearly 19,000 free African Americans were mulatto. Ten years later, 601 of the 773 free African Americans in Mississippi were coded in the census as mulatto. In strict contrast, only one-twelfth of enslaved African Americans nationally were mulatto in 1850 (Frazier, 1957). To be clear, this characteristic stems from the abovementioned explanations for which slaves became free. This is an important element to underscore, as the physical characteristics play a significant role in the status, values, beliefs, and behaviors of African Americans occupying the middle/upper middle socioeconomic category. I shall discuss this later in this section.

Similar to middle/upper middle class whites, the acquisition of wealth serves as a key characteristic of the African American elite. In states where, agriculture and the plantation system served as the primary source of revenue, free African Americans acquired real estate. For example, in 1830, free African Americans owned some 32,000 acres of land valued at approximately $185,000. Again, the situation in Louisiana presents a dramatic example, as it was not unusual for free mulattoes, also known as gens de couleur, to own large plantations with slaves. Records indicate that free African Americans and Native Americans living in Charleston, SC paid taxes on real estate
valued at one million dollars and owned nearly 400 slaves. Free African Americans living in the northern urban centers also solidified their status as elite or upper middle class by procuring homes and land. In Philadelphia, free African Americans owned nearly 100 homes before 1800. Similar scenarios existed in New York City and Baltimore (Frazier, 1962).

African American slave ownership was small in number. The largest concentration of free African Americans who owned slaves lived in Louisiana. Outside of Louisiana, there were some 4,000 free African Americans who owned slaves before 1863 (Frazier, 1962). Most owned fewer than five. Although, records indicate that some owned as many sixty-five (Koger, 1995). It is often purported that free African Americans purchased slaves with the intention of freeing them. There is little evidence to support the notion that this was as widespread as alleged. Conversely, the records and anecdotal evidence suggests that free African Americans purchased slaves for the same reason as Whites. This was particularly the case in South Carolina and Louisiana (Frazier, 1962; Koger, 1995; Shade, 2000).

Slave ownership represented a very small piece of the personal wealth of Antebellum free African Americans. In the urban centers, free African Americans held a multitude of skilled positions. In 1850, free African Americans held occupations as carpenters, tailors, shoemakers, butchers, bricklayers, millwrights, and undertakers. Moreover, in the case of New York City, free African Americans owned small grocery stores, drug stores, and restaurants in addition to a newspaper by and for free African Americans (Frazier, 1962). Unsurprisingly, the highest number of free African Americans with skilled occupations could be found in New Orleans. There, the gens de
Elsewhere, free-African Americans founded small banks and insurance companies designed to serve the interests and needs of other free African Americans (Feldman, 1999).

There is significant evidence that many free African Americans, and even some who were technically enslaved, were privy to formal education in the northeastern states. As early as 1798, a school for African American children was established. Nearly halfway through the nineteenth century, there were large numbers of free African American adults who were coded as educated or “literate”. This was particularly so in urban centers along the Atlantic coast, but also included cities stretching west, such as Cincinnati, OH and Louisville, KY (Frazier, 1957). In most southern states, law prohibited the formal education of any African American person, free or enslaved. Accordingly, the records are somewhat sketchy when it comes to their education. Frazier (1957) asserts that, in certain southern urban centers where free African Americans were many in number, such as Charleston, SC, this law was hardly enforced. Further evidence of this exists in Charleston as seen in the efforts of the Brown Fellowship Society, an organization of free African Americans who sought to provide an education for orphaned and indigent Black children. In New Orleans, free African Americans enjoyed educational opportunities that mirrored those afforded to whites. Free African Americans who were particularly well to do sent their children to be educated in France (Frazier, 1957).

There were definite social characteristics of the free African American elite in Antebellum America. The church was indeed the centerpiece of the elite class culture.
One could argue that it was the centerpiece for all African Americans in Antebellum America (Frazier, 1957; 1963; Mukenge, 1983; Woodson, 1921). As Mukenge (1983) contends, “The origin of the African American church is due to the inability of the of the American political and religious institutions to safeguard the status of African American freemen who became more insecure as their numbers increased and slavery took on greater economic importance.” (p. 25). The other seminal explorations of this particular aspect of African American culture, namely those by Frazier (1963) and Woodson (1921), offer similar explanations. To be clear, early attempts to convert or baptize free African Americans in antebellum America were many and deliberate, especially after law declaring that Christians could not be held as slaves was repealed (Frazier, 1963; Woodson, 1921).

African Americans in Antebellum America responded most enthusiastically to the Methodist, Baptist, and, to a much lesser extent, Presbyterian sects of Protestantism (Frazier, 1963). This is due in part to the approach and in part to the message. All three were known to hold camp meetings and revivals during which was offered an emotional message of hope and salvation. In addition to sermonizing “the word”, preachers also sought to build some semblance of solidarity and connectedness among the members (Frazier, 1963; Woodson, 1921). Ultimately, the church stood as a both the social and spiritual centerpiece of the free African American communities and a beacon of hope for those who were enslaved.
The end of slavery and a burgeoning industry marked the beginning of notable growth of the middle class in America. This is particularly so for Whites, as skilled work that was heretofore completed by slaves was now paid work, open and available almost exclusively to Whites (Bowser, 2007). Socioeconomic growth and class mobility for the broader African American population was complicated and ultimately stunted by European immigrant groups whose numbers increased significantly near the turn of the century. Apparently, the route to success for these immigrant groups involved becoming “American” and then becoming “White”. Neither route was an option for the Black American. What is more, residual vestiges of the Black Codes made it almost impossible for African Americans, even those with heavily sought after skills, to find and keep work or lead any semblance of a free life. The Civil Rights Act of 1866, the first of its kind, eliminated the Black Codes and allowed African Americans many of the same rights of citizenship as Whites. United States Army presence in the South also provided a degree of protection and safeguards for implementation of the law. This marked the beginning of a substantive movement toward equality in a post slavery era. It stood as the early beginning of the emergence of a broad, detectable African American middle class (Bowser, 2007; Frazier, 1957, 1962).

Evidence of an emerging African American Middle Class was visible in various sections of the Post Civil War South. With the power to vote and access to education, African Americans assumed elected offices in South Carolina, Mississippi, Louisiana and other southern states. What is more, Charleston, SC saw a mushrooming of African American ministers, lawyers, teachers, and businessmen during Reconstruction (Bowser, 2007).
It is interesting to note the many of the same intra-racial class characteristics of the Antebellum period survived the Civil War and the newfound era of freedom for African Americans. Browser (2007) highlights a perceptible intra-racial social class hierarchy. As was the case prior to the Civil War, land-owning mulattoes occupied the top rung of African American society, followed by non-property-owning skilled artisans who worked for wealthy Whites. Former domestic slaves of upper class White families were somewhat refined and thus occupied a stratum higher than those at the bottom of the social hierarchy: freed, poor African Americans. Part and parcel of the social hierarchy was Anglo-conformity. Upwardly mobile African Americans sought aspects of life beyond professional opportunity and material goods. Browser suggests that Anglo conformity was the focal point. Those who sought a middle class existence espoused middle class behavior. Most notably, speaking Standard English, reading, writing, and exhibiting refined manners remained as markers of the African American middle class. These characteristics also served as the dividing line between middle class African Americans and their less refined and poorer counterparts, a fact about which many members of the African American middle class were proud (Frazier, 1962).

One need only examine O’Malley’s (2002) study on a post-Civil War section of Lexington, Kentucky known as Kinkeadtown to gain a general insight to the evolving, post Civil War African American middle class. African American residents of this subdivision of Lexington undoubtedly faced hardship with their newfound freedom. Nonetheless, many residents attempted to maximize the newly enjoyed freedoms by taking advantage of the educational opportunities, when and where possible, and by attempting to establish some degree of material wealth. In more ways than one, these
residents, many of whom were former slaves, endeavored to mirror the lives of middle class whites. African American citizens held positions as masons, factory workers, coopers, blacksmiths and farmhands. They owned land and, to the extent possible, participated in the political arena. Further, African Americans in Kinkeadstown sought ownership of refined household furnishings, fine clothing, and other aspects of middle class living that their White counterparts enjoyed.

Browser (2007) and Frazier (1963) describe a deeper social stratification based on affiliation the implications of church affiliation. The most upwardly mobile and well to do African Americans claimed membership in the Methodist church. The Methodist ministers, particularly those in the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) arm of the Methodist Church, sought the polished characteristic described above. In his attempt to separate the AME from what followers would describe as less refined faiths, an AME Bishop characterized Negro spirituals as “corn field ditties”. He went on to declare that AME ministers rid the AME church of such “heathenish modes of worship” (Frazier, 1963). Methodism was followed in prestige by the Baptist and the Pentecostal faiths (Bowser, 2007).

Despite the freedoms and advancement that African Americans, both upwardly mobile and poor, enjoyed during Reconstruction, the end of the era marked the beginning of a new and extraordinarily difficult period for all African Americans. Beginning in 1890, in an effort to slow the progression of racial equality, eight southern states amended their constitutions to include specific language designed to disenfranchise African American voters, regardless of class status. What is more, the Supreme Court’s
decision in Plessy versus Ferguson in 1896 set the legal precedent upon which Jim Crow legislation in most southern states was built.

**EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY THROUGH THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT**

At the hands of Jim Crow legislation and widespread racism, the African American middle class saw a considerable decline in the early 1900’s. Prosperous African American farmers, landowners, business owners, and the like fell victim to statutes designed to limit their economic success and disenfranchise them, as well as vicious attacks by groups such as the Ku Klux Klan. The southern countryside became increasingly unsafe. These and related factors spurred the early beginnings of the African American migration, also known as the Great Migration, from the southern countryside to southern urban centers, first and foremost, and then to Northeastern and Midwestern urban centers during and after World War I (Bowser, 2007; Trotter, 1991).

Another notable sign of the attempt to relegate all African Americans in the South, regardless of socioeconomic status, to a lower caste was the inward growth of African American partnership. Browser (2007) and Frazier (1962) note a spike in church activities in the early twentieth century. Churchgoers attended family gatherings, church sponsored visits to other churches, and picnics. What is more, African American fraternities, sororities, and social societies began to grow in number (these organizations are explored in the next section). Beyond the social/religious scene, business took on a slightly altered approach. Due to fear and circumstance, African American business owners served only African American patrons. African American undertakers served
only African American families. Records indicate the existence of African American-owned cafes, shoe repair shops, grocery markets, launderers, and barbers, in urban centers across the South, all who focused on a primarily African American customer base. Case in point, between 1912 and 1938, nearly three quarters of all college-educated African Americans entered the ministry or became teachers, professions which overwhelmingly sought to exclusively serve the African American populous (Jaynes et al., 1989).

In the North and, to a much lesser extent, some urban centers in the South, the situation for African Americans was not as hopeless. African Americans who were heretofore subjugated in the South enjoyed a degree of success in predominantly African American areas. With the high demand for labor in industry, the jobs were more plentiful and the discrimination while present was not as prohibitive as it was in the South.

Despite the shifting population of African Americans from the fields to the cities and from the south to the north, 30 years into the twentieth century the African American social class hierarchy looked very much like it did during the Antebellum period. There was still a small upper class, which constituted roughly two percent of the African American population. There was a notably small middle class that made up some eighteen percent of the population. The remaining eighty percent, the masses if you will, belonged to the lower class (Bowser, 2007). Frazier (1957) offers a clear description of the class distinction as it existed in the Washington D.C. area in the pre World War I 1900s. The lower socioeconomic class, the largest group, was described as a group primarily composed of recent migrants from the south who were illiterate and disorganized, with the exception of church matters. Most held labor-oriented jobs. The
middle class was described as a group with lighter-complexion and more advanced education. They held skilled jobs or owned small businesses. Frazier notes that they were not eager to consort with members of the lower class. Finally, the upper class, also described as having lighter complexion, was a group of well to do African Americans who prided themselves on refined culture. They were an educated group whose members owned established businesses or held jobs as doctors or lawyers. They too were keen on remaining separate from the lower class, however, the African American middle class was considered to be a part of the lower class.

As the midpoint of the twentieth century approached, the African American middle class began to experience growth and movement like no other period in United States history. The onset of World War II brought with it a greatly increased need for labor. Due to extensive military recruitment and a reduced influx of European immigrants, a multitude of opportunities for skilled and unskilled workers opened for African Americans (Bowser, 2007; Wynn, 1971). Gaining employment in wartime industry was far from easy. There was constant pressure for equity in hiring, led by organizers such as A. Philip Randolph. Their efforts proved successful. In 1941, President Roosevelt issued Order 8802, which threatened to pull government contracts from any company found responsible for discrimination. What resulted was a notable spike in the number of African Americans who earned middle to upper middle class pay (Frazier, 1957; Wynn, 1971).

The employment boom also caused a significant geographical shift in the African American population. Large numbers of African Americans moved from the south to the urban centers of the Midwest and West where the factory needs were the greatest.
Further, data suggests, that the benefits of war on African American employment continued beyond its conclusion. A great number of the workers who migrated to northern and western cities stayed on with their wartime employer found parallel employment (Frazier, 1957). Accordingly, southern states saw a permanent decline in African American population. For example, between 1940 and 1960, states such as South Carolina, Georgia, and Mississippi saw a 7 to 8 percent decline in the African American population. Meanwhile, western and northern states experienced a radical increase in population. For example, in the same twenty year span, California saw its total African American population grow from 2 to 6 percent. Illinois’ went from 5 percent to 10 percent (Bowser, 2007).

World War II can easily be characterized as the major catalyst for the growth of the African American middle class during the twentieth century, particularly between 1940 and 1960. There is wide agreement in the understanding that another major era in the twentieth century helped sustain this growth: The Civil Rights Movement (Bowser, 2007; Frazier, 1957; Jaynes et al., 1989; Landry, 1987). National and international attention to matters involving discrimination and inequality on American soil proved influential, as courts outlawed one segregation statute after another. Further, Executive Order 11246, the affirmative action order, put higher education and white collar jobs within reach for a wider swath of African Americans. For example, in the 1960s, the proportion of African American workers in white collar jobs rose from 13 percent to 26 percent. At the same time, the number of African American families with incomes exceeding the median income of White families rose 8 percent (Jaynes et al., 1989).
1970, the African American middle class had in many ways begun to mirror its White counterpart in size and quality of life (Browser, 2007).

The widening access to better-paying employment and education by virtue of the Civil Rights Movement and WWII before it made ascension to the middle class much easier for African Americans. Case in point, by 1962 more than one-half of African American men were in higher class positions than their fathers had been (Landry, 1987). The growing subsection of the African American community included members who heretofore belonged to the lower income stratum. It is also important to underscore that, from an economic standpoint, the African American middle class membership began to include blue collar workers, as the wages improved. Landry (1987) goes to great lengths to distinguish the African American middle class as it was for many years from the post-Civil Rights middle class. He called this “The New Black Middle Class”.

The so-called New Black Middle Class is defined by characteristics of the time and favorable circumstances. Members enjoyed broader access to clerical, government, and white collar positions than African Americans did before them. By the 1970s, it was clear that African Americans moved beyond professions in the clergy and education to those in engineering, entrepreneurship, and government positions (Bowser, 2007; Landry, 1987). Unlike Landry, Bowser (2007) suggests that the characteristics of The New Black Middle Class were quite similar to those of the pre Civil Rights Black middle class. Members still had close ties to the church. There were still neighborhoods or small communities exclusive to African American middle class families.
There is some disagreement as to the connectedness of the African American middle class to the lower income African Americans during the Civil Rights Era. Bowser (2007) and Landry (1987) argue that many of the separatist values of the African American middle class survived the Civil Rights Movement. Even for the new entrants, status mattered. Frazier (1962) and Hare (1965) agree, highlighting the apparent disconnection within the African American masses. Frazier notes that The New Black Middle Class broke from what he calls the “canons of respectability”. Frazier suggests that middle class status during the early goings of the Civil Rights Movement became more about the economic characteristics and less about the long-standing behavior and values held for many years previous. Conversely, while Kronus (1971) and Sampson and Milam (1975) agree that, during the Civil Right Movement, there was a shift in thinking, they suggest that the African American middle class moved from “…middle class black for the black middle class” to “middle class black for the black man” (Kronus, 1971, p. 14). This is most evident by the strong participation in The Civil Rights Movement by middle class African Americans. In any case, membership in The New Black Middle class meant taking on the social characteristics of and subscribing to a set of values that distinguished them from the lower-income African American community.

Perhaps the most controversial and singular analysis of the change brought about by the Civil Rights Movement is that by William Wilson (1978). He argued that the fair employment and housing practices and affirmative action essentially created a level playing field for middle class African Americans and whites. He contended that educated and/or skilled African Americans had the same access to middle class status as their
white counterparts. For this growing subset of the African American community, race no longer stood as a significant obstacle. Wilson Contended that race was not necessarily the obstacle for the poorer African American masses either. Inaccessibility to education and poor skills were the bases for their situation.

THE AFRICAN AMERICAN MIDDLE CLASS TODAY

As has been the case historically, contemporary research on the African American middle class is sparse at best (Pattillo-McCoy, 2000; Williams, 1991). Nonetheless, there are a few influential works that reveal the major characteristics of the African American middle class in the early twenty first century. Karyn Lacy’s (2007) work is among the few seminal pieces. She divides today’s African American middle class into three distinctive groups: lower middle class - individuals earning less than $50,000; core middle class - those earning between $50,000 and $100,000; and the elite middle class – those earning more than $100,000. I shall use this framework to define the present day African American middle class

The notable advancements experienced by the African American middle class between 1940 and 1960 waned in the 1980’s. The national economy experienced the converse of the desirable economic conditions that inspired growth in the mid twentieth
century. Accordingly, growth in the African American middle class stagnated.

Nevertheless, the African American middle class went from nearly 400,000 members in 1960 to over one million in 1980. By the mid 1990’s, the African American middle class surpassed seven million participants (Pattillo-McCoy, 2000). The growth spawned a host of changes in communities, most notably where mobile, African American middle class families lived. For example, since the Civil Rights Movement, there has been a notable exodus of middle class African Americans from urban neighborhoods to suburban communities. Census and housing data indicates that in a number of major metropolitan areas, such as Chicago, Atlanta, and Washington, D. C., there was considerable growth in the percentage of African Americans residing in the adjacent suburbs (Lacy, 2007).

The lower and core segments of the African American middle class are the subject of Patillo-McCoy’s (2000) in-depth focus of Groveland, a Black middle class neighborhood on Chicago’s predominantly Black south side. Groveland confirms the census data, but highlights a nuance specific to the lower and core segments of the present-day African American middle class. As was the case historically, African American middle class members seek to distinguish and distance themselves from poor African Americans. As their predecessors did, members reside in communities made of folks with similar socioeconomic status and values. However, Groveland is not a suburb in the traditional definition. It is a community composed of predominantly middle class African Americans, but is surrounded by neighborhoods which are populated by notably poorer African Americans. These embedded African American middle class communities are increasingly the norm for members of the core and lower segments of
the African American middle class. Those who meet the criteria used to define the elite Black middle class have more mobility and tend live in exclusive, traditional suburban neighborhoods (Lacy, 2007; Pattillo-McCoy, 2000). I shall discuss the elite African American middle class community later.

Grovelandites exhibit many of the social and cultural characteristics of the African American middle class from years before. Grovelandites hold white collar jobs. In fact, some 65% of the working residents hold jobs in this category. Grovelandites are educated. At the time Patillo-McCoy conducted her study, 20% percent of the Groveland population held at least a bachelor’s degree – compared with 12% of African Americans nationally. Beyond the typical measures, according to Patillo-McCoy, Grovelandites vote, own property (and take good care of it), worship in local churches, and value what many would define as traditional family mores. Groveland parents have the time and the resources to “facilitate parenting”, a notable distinction Patillo-McCoy makes from their poorer counterparts. Groveland parents have the means and capital to provide their children with a good education and fulfilling experiences. Young Grovelandites take dance lessons, vacation with their parents, and even get jobs through their parents’ connections. Groveland parents go to great lengths to restrict their children’s involvement in activities not in keeping with their values. There is heavy emphasis on participation in the church and parents are selective with respect to where their children go to school. The hope and expectation is that the children are surrounded by others with the same values.

Also particularly notable about the Groveland community is the visible affirmation of blackness. Patillo-McCoy goes to great lengths to highlight this
characteristic, noting the plethora of murals depicting historically significant African Americans, the vast celebration of Black History month, and the many representations of the African American flag outside homes and in churches. Patillo-McCoy suggests that these characteristics indicate the deep pride Grovelandites take in being African American.

While Groveland projects many positive elements traditionally characteristic of the African American middle class, its location makes for a slightly unique situation and thus a nuance in defining this stratum of the African American middle class. With little exception, Groveland is surrounded by notably poorer communities. Some of these communities suffer from significant crime and drug issues. Because of the close proximity, Grovelandites frequently come in contact with elements more representative and characteristic of the poor African American community. Patillo-McCoy cites heavy street gang activity in the neighboring communities, aspects of which filter into Groveland. What is more, the hip hop culture is alive and well in Groveland. Young Grovelandites are drawn to and sometimes emulate aspects of this culture, which also are more representative of street mores, much to their parents’ chagrin.

Lacy (2007) performs an equally rigorous investigation of the African American middle class, however, the focus is more on the core and elite strata. She refutes the conclusions reached by other researchers that the African American middle class differs only slightly from the lower class. She suggests that while this is the case for the lower middle class and perhaps even the core segment, it is certainly not true for the elite African American middle class. Lacy uses the concept of the cultural toolkit to unpack the social and psychological characteristics of the African American middle class. Public
identity, status-based identity, racial and class-based identity, and suburban identity are important tools in the tool kit. Members of the African American middle class access one more of these tools as they navigate interactions with each other, whites, and lower income African Americans.

Lacy’s (2007) research focuses on three Washington D.C. suburban communities: Riverton, Lakeview, and Sherwood Park. Mirroring Frazier’s (1962) findings much earlier, African Americans in these communities hold advanced degrees and work in highly respected fields such as law, business, education, and medicine. Despite Lacy’s suggestion that the residents of these communities differ greatly from those who occupy the lower middle class, there are many similarities. Much like the Groveland residents, parents in these communities go to great lengths to provide their children with a middle class experience – specialty classes, strong education, travel experiences, and so forth.

The D.C. suburbanites are highly participatory in the church. They also go to great lengths to separate themselves, physically and conceptually, from low income African Americans (this includes lower and core middle class African Americans). Aside from the average income, the only other major distinction between Groveland and these communities is that they represent a closer fit the traditional definition of middle class in America. They are not imbeds of an urban area. They are notably distant and separate from the communities with poorer African Americans.

Key in Lacy’s work is the African American middle class psyche. She highlights the notion of status-based identity and public identity as playing significant roles in the African American middle class communities she explored. Ultimately, members of the African American middle class, particularly those in the elite segment, go to great lengths
to project their middle *classness*. This involves speaking proper English, dressing in a way that would signal to the casual observer that one is well-resourced, or simply living in an exclusive community. This is the essence of status-based identity, which, according to Lacy, members of the African American middle class employ to distinguish themselves from other groups, particularly those belonging to the same race and a lower socioeconomic class. Public identity involves many of the same characteristics as status-based, but for different reasons. This is the mechanism members of the African American middle class utilize to decrease the likelihood that they will be discriminated against by strangers. For example, Lacy cited the need for respondents in her study to pay particular attention to their dress when shopping with the hopes that the clerks in the store might identify them as people with means and not as or like poor members of their racial group. This is a similar, but more complex modern example of Frazier’s (1962) pre-1960 description of the African American middle class. It is also notably similar to Bowser’s (2007) portrayal during the Civil Rights Era.

Both Patillo-McCoy (2000) and Lacy (2007) agree that a significant feature of the African American middle class is racial identity. The Washington D.C. suburbs Lacy studied do not have the outwardly visible representations of blackness that Groveland does. Nonetheless, residents of these communities go to great lengths to instill some sense of racial pride in their children. Lacy notes the strategic attempt on the part of parents to teach their children the ability to both navigate African American and white racial boundaries, while at the same time instill an appreciation of the value of African American social spaces and residential places.
In total, the African American middle class has remained somewhat stable in terms of definition and characteristics through the years. The research indicates that it is an identifiable group with distinctive cultural characteristics.

**AFRICAN AMERICAN IDENTITY IN THE CLASSROOM**

There is notable discussion about African American identity and teaching. Much of the discussion about African American identity in education has been fodder for the aforementioned arguments in support of more teachers of color in the urban classroom, rather than a specific definition of it Black identity in the classroom. Jacqueline Jordan Irvine (1995) suggests that it is the African American Identity that a teacher brings that so enriches the educative experience of the African American student. She explains that the cultural synchrony that exists between African American students and African American teachers prohibits the misunderstanding with regard to language, behaviors, and learning styles that typically occurs with teachers of other races and their Black students. Instead, this synchrony shows itself in African American teachers engaging students in the learning process all-the-while staying within the confines of African American culture. African American teachers also demonstrate a greater willingness to infuse elements related to African American identity in their teaching (King, 1994). What is more, Irvine noted that white teachers tended to hold lower expectations of African American students than do African American teachers, in stark contrast to Rist’s conclusions.
In addition to the affirmation of blackness that African American teachers bring to the classroom, Foster (1994) and Ladson-Billings (1994) spoke of their innate understanding of the deep significance of education for African American students. Foster and Ladson-Billings agree that African American teachers exhibit this understanding by establishing a family-like model of teaching and by including caring and empathy for their students. More importantly, African American teachers do not let racism get in the way of moving the class forward. The same sentiment is later echoed by Siddle-Walker (2001) and Ward-Randolph (2004). Both describe pre-1956, all-African American schools where the notion of the caring, realistic teacher, or the warm demander, was central to the teaching process both about academic topics and the harsh realities outside of the school.

While much of the research on African American teacher identity tends to agree with the contentions made by Ladson-Billings, Foster, and others, there is some, albeit very little, research that reverberates some of the conclusions drawn in Rist’s work. The most recent is the two-year ethnography conducted by Morris (2005). Focusing on the African American and white teachers, Morris sought a deeper understanding of how poor white students were perceived in a predominantly minority school. He found that African American teachers tended to perceive white students as middle class or at least having membership in a class higher than the African American students. White teacher’s perception of white students tended to be more accurate. The beliefs of the African American teachers tended to spill into other arenas as well. African American teachers tended to hold the white students to a higher academic standard, perceived them as better students than they actually were, and often inflicted stricter discipline on their African
American counterparts. The author attributed these perceptions as representative of larger societal ills involving superiority. Also, despite the inaccurate perceptions, the author noted that the African American teachers spoke affectionately about the African American student body, solidifying the commitment to them and their academic and social welfare at the school. Like the teachers celebrated in Ladson-Billings and Irvine’s studies, these teachers demonstrated a genuine dedication to the students with whom they shared racial membership. Nonetheless, their view and treatment of white students propagates the societal issue of racial subjugation.

While the studies mentioned above shed considerable light on African American identity and the role of African American Identity in the schools, not one of the publications focuses specifically on the elements that the male African American teacher brings to the classroom. Aside from the desperate calls to find more African American men to teach in the urban school districts, very little is written about the African American male teacher. Marvin Lynn is truly in a category by himself with his focus on the inner-workings of the African American male experience in the classroom in South Central Los Angeles.

Lynn (2002; 2006) employs Critical Race Theory (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995a) to qualitative methods to uncover that which inspires African American men as teachers. Through teacher narrative and classroom observations, Lynn investigates the beliefs these teachers hold and they are manifested in the nature of the relationships they have with their students. Lynn also explores his participants’ self-conception of identity. In both studies, Lynn identifies these teachers as owning characteristics of change agents. His participants come from communities similar to that in which they currently teach.
They have intricate knowledge of the pressures and pitfalls that befall young people of color, particularly in the urban context. They use this commonality to connect with their students in an effort to address the issues they face. He determined that African American male teachers tend to view themselves as something of a father figure to their students. Along with this view is an inherent responsibility to act as a role model, particularly for the African American male students. Much like the historical tradition of African American women in the classroom (Dixson, 2003; Siddle-Walker & Tompkins, 2004), these teachers felt a distinct obligation to their African American students. This obligation was manifested in a caring, almost nurturing approach to the students they taught.

**LITERATURE REVIEW DISCUSSION**

An analysis of the research makes plain that because urban schools have progressively become African American and brown there has been a vociferous plea for more teachers of color in urban schools. The potential benefits that teachers of color offer are many in number and logical in nature. Nevertheless, these publications fail to recognize the complexity of African American culture and the potential for dissonance despite shared racial characteristics. Taking a closer look at exactly what African American identity and culture is, while enlightening in its own right, proves that there is no consensus with regard to its definition or the factors that influence it. The only belief that cut across the theories and ideas was that focus on a common fate. It is apparent that the perceived African American identity of African American teachers serves as the necessary ingredient to cultural synchrony (Irvine, 1995). The unique understanding that
they have and the connections that they make should result in positive outcomes for their African American students. What is more, these teachers perceived their efficacy to be quite high and their purpose noble and necessary in working with African American students. Lynn (2002, 2006) arrived at similar conclusions specific to African American male teachers in urban schools, a rarely researched group.

The element that appears to be similar in Lynn’s participant pool and all together absent in the other studies focusing on African American identity and teaching is socioeconomic class. All of the participants in Lynn’s work come from communities similar to those in which they teach. As teachers in urban systems, it is likely that they do not share the socioeconomic characteristics of the student they teach, but it is logical to assume that these teachers have intricate knowledge of their students’ experiences and use that knowledge to connect with them. Neither in Lynn’s nor other reviewed research for this study is there mention of scenarios in which middle or upper middle class or wealthy African American teachers work with African American students in the urban setting. How would such a teacher describe his identity? Would the connections be the same? What background and experiences contribute to the teacher perceptions of the students? How does an African American middle class male teacher perceive his ability to connect with and ultimately teach poorer African American students? These are questions are not addressed in the literature (nor are they even posed) and are thus the focus of this study.
Educators and policy makers continue to recognize the increased racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity in United States public schools (Planty, 2008). Socioeconomic diversity also exists in these schools, although diverse urban schools are most often populated by students of color from low socioeconomic backgrounds. It has been argued that teachers who share racial and cultural characteristics with their students are better able to promote learning among these students. The complex nature of race, class, culture and gender is often overlooked in discussions about the need for teacher-student racial and cultural homogeneity.

A difference in student and teacher socioeconomic backgrounds and the impact these differences may have on racial and cultural worldviews has received less attention in educational research. As a result, the possibility of cultural dissonance as a by-product of class differences between teacher and student may have been neglected. What is more, most studies on teacher-student homogeneity from any perspective tend to focus on the experiences of female teachers. Male teachers of color have not been given enough attention to thoroughly understand the impact of racial and cultural homogeneity on their teaching identities or on the academic performance of the students they teach.

The assumed value of cultural and racial homogeneity between teachers and students is that teachers and students have shared worldviews, and a shared sense of identity that emerges from experiences of being African American in a society ruled by
dominant cultural rules, values, language, and behaviors. It is believed then that teachers of color have “insider” knowledge of their students because of shared experiences as people of color—and that this insider knowledge will translate into improved academic performance among children of color.

**RESEARCH METHOD**

*Class in the Classroom* is a qualitative study. Qualitative studies allow researchers to investigate ways people make sense of their daily lives by investigating their assumptions about everyday situations. Although there are a number qualitative methodologies, studies using a qualitative approach share the following characteristics outlined by Marshall & Rossman (2006) as adapted from Rossman and Rallis (2003): qualitative research “…uses multiple methods that are interactive and humanistic; focuses on context; is emergent rather than tightly configured; and is fundamentally interpretive” (p. 3).

Qualitative research is primarily concerned with how individuals construct their reality. The concept of reality construction is particularly important, given the focus of this inquiry on middle class African American male teachers’ perceptions of what it means to be middle class, and how this reality intersects or not with the reality constructed by the African American students from low socioeconomic backgrounds whom they teach. Understanding these perceptions will provide insight into the role and impact of cultural homogeneity on the educational interactions between African American children from low socioeconomic backgrounds and middle class African American male teachers, as perceived, experienced, and understood by the teachers.

Patton (2002) discusses the interrelationship between interpreting and describing
experiences. He proposes that interpretation is important to understanding the experience, and understanding the experience necessarily includes interpretation. This relationship is important to qualitative studies because of the interest in meanings attributed by the individual to their experiences, and the subsequent role of that meaning in developing an individual’s world view and sense of reality.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework for this study is anchored in Berger and Luckmann’s (1966) social construction of reality. Bergman and Luckmann suggested that the knowledge which drives thoughts and actions is socially relative, and reflects the context in which the knowledge develops. This knowledge is located in a subjective reality and is the basis upon which individuals makes sense of their world. Bergman and Luckmann proposed that a dialectical relationship exists between subjective and objective realities and thoughts and actions by proposing that subjective realities are maintained by actions and thoughts that occur in everyday life, and thoughts and actions are driven by subjective realities. The thoughts and actions of participants of this study provide insight into subjective meanings they apply to what it means to be middle class African American males teaching students with everyday objective life contexts different from their own.

Berger and Luckmann (1966) introduced the notion of intersubjectivity, which suggests that individuals in certain social contexts live in a world where meanings attributed to reality are shared with others within the same context. In the process of becoming socialized, individuals externalize their values into the social world, while at
the same time internalizing that world as objective reality. This point is important because it suggests that middle class African American men grow and develop in a world where a shared sense of reality exists between them and other middle class African American people. This shared sense of reality reflects an objective reality which may or may not differ from the sense of reality among African American children living in low socioeconomic contexts. Such differences could potentially impact the relationship between teacher and student. Of interest to this study is the extent to which middle class African American males reconcile or not, actions and thought needed to make sense of a middle class everyday life with those needed to make sense of everyday life in a teaching and learning context predominated by students living in poverty.

Berger and Luckmann’s framework allows for qualitative analysis of the experience of everyday life, which they suggest is the reality of everyday life. This reality is taken for granted among those who experience it as reality—keeping in mind that there are multiple realities. Aspects of one’s reality become taken for granted and routinized—so much so that when faced with unfamiliar aspects of a reality, the individual is faced with a problematic situation—that is, a situation or event which is a break from an established routine that fits with the individual’s understanding of reality. An individual may seek to shift the issue from a problematic status by appropriating meaning that locates the issue into an unproblematic category. It is also possible that the issue may be so far removed from the individual’s everyday reality that the individual may concede that he is actually dealing with a totally different reality.

It is possible that, taken for granted, aspects of the everyday life of low socioeconomic status children present or has presented in the past as a problematic situation for middle class African American teachers. Said another way, low
socioeconomic status children of color may make meaning of experiences of everyday life that are different from meanings made by middle class African American teachers—even though student and teacher share a racial background. African American teachers may be able to position these problematic situations into unproblematic categories such that they become routinized as part of their everyday reality. The extent to which teachers can accomplish this will impact the degree to which they are able to minimize distance between student and teacher that may arise as a by-product of differences in perceptions and meanings based on class—and as a result promote cultural homogeneity between teacher and students. In fact, Berger and Luckmann maintain that one’s everyday life can be enriched by the skills and knowledge needed to address problematic situations.

Two additional points should be noted as individuals engage in making meaning of everyday realities that are different from their own. First, individuals who transition into “reality enclaves” (i.e., non-everyday, unfamiliar realities) tend to return to their paramount or familiar reality. Secondly, as individuals try to make the unfamiliar reality familiar (and remove it from a problematic status) they use language that is available to them through their everyday reality to interpret the unfamiliar. As a result, a distorted understanding of the unfamiliar may occur.

The essence of the cultural homogeneity between middle class African American teachers and their low socioeconomic status African American students is enhanced by understanding the degree to which middle class African American males view or viewed the everyday reality of low income African American students as problematic. Secondly, it will be insightful to know how or if they moved the experience of these students from a problematic to an unproblematic status.

According to Berger and Luckmann, “identity . . . is a key element of subjective
reality . . . and stand in a dialectical relationship with society” (p.159). In fact, social structure is involved in the formation and structure of identity. This notion further supports the impact of social class on identity development. It is important to note however that according to Berger and Luckmann, social relations can modify, maintain, or reshape identity, and identity can modify, maintain, or reshape social relations. Based on the former notion, it is possible that the ways in which middle class African American men view their African American selves may be impacted by their relationships with students from socioeconomic backgrounds different from their own. It is also possible that the “African American self” teachers present to their students will impact the nature of the relationship they are able to establish with their students. Hence a level of fluidity is possible that may mitigate class differences. On the other hand, a particularly staunch sense of middle class identity where a middle class sense of everyday reality relegates the low socioeconomic everyday reality to a problematic status interferes with the genuine level of cultural homogeneity believed to have a positive impact on the educational experiences of low-income children of color.

RESEARCHER’S ROLE

Marshall and Rossman (2006), drawing from the work of Rossman and Rallis (2003), state that qualitative researchers “. . . (a) view social worlds as holistic, (b) engage in systematic reflection on the conduct of the research, (c) remain sensitive to their own biographies/social identities and how these shape the study, and (d) rely on complex reasoning that moves dialectically between deduction and induction. . . . “ (p. 2).

As the researcher for this study, it was incumbent upon me to acknowledge that
the participants are complex beings and that while the focus of this study is one aspect of their social worlds (i.e., their identity and practice as teachers), this aspect is influenced by the historical, sociocultural, political, and economic circumstances of a holistic social world (Florio-Ruane & Williams, 2008). Accordingly, I took a reflexive stance on race, class and gender as I am cognizant of the influences of my identity within the process of conducting the study as well as perceptions participants of the may have of me. As an African American man from a middle class background, I was cognizant of the fact that any perceived or real similarities between the participants and me may impact the study.

In her study of women in Africa, Henderson (2009) found that solidarity based on race and gender cannot be taken for granted. Henderson pointed out that she could not be sure whether being a black woman conducting research on African women led to warmer, more personal responses from her participants. Rapport was gained as the researcher became the researched allowing for participants to ask questions about her life as a black woman—which in term facilitated her reflection about her identity. The same was indeed the case in my experience. I quickly developed a similar rapport with the African American men who participated in my study. Nonetheless, I kept Henderson’s view in mind: these interactions are not those of two friends having conversation about life as African American men in the field of education.

Along these same lines, Richards (2005) advises that it is important for researchers to declare their “baggage” or preconceptions so that pre-held beliefs, assumptions, and/or expectations do not unduly impact analysis of the data. My personal experiences in the roles of student and teacher fuel some preconceived notions related to the topic of the study that require mention. On the matter of cultivating meaningful connections with students, regardless their race, my experience informs me that life
experience carries more significance than race. This belief stems from a number of encounters and experiences of a negative nature involving teachers with whom I share racial characteristics. Quite frankly, my fondest recollection of teacher-student connections involves an Asian teacher. I felt respected as a budding scholar and, more importantly, as a person by this teacher. Race was not the common denominator. Instead, I identified with the fact that he was raised by a single parent in the neighborhood where I was then living and oft spoke of scenarios and incidents with which I was very familiar. Although he did not know me very well, I was confident that he had some insight into my life. This confidence fostered a healthy respect and a great student-teacher relationship.

Beyond the assertions mentioned above, I had no additional expectations or preconceived beliefs of the outcome of the study. I felt appropriately prepared to develop a sample of African American male teachers for the study, collect data through by interviewing participants, and analyzing data collected from participants, in order to respond to the questions identified earlier that will guide the study.

PARTICIPANTS

The focus of this research involves analyzing perceptions of a specific group of teachers in order to understand the impact of social class on student-teacher interactions among students and teachers who share a racial background but differ in terms of socioeconomic backgrounds. Accordingly, the units of analysis for this study were African American men who identify as middle class and currently teach or have recently taught in urban settings with large populations of African American students from low
socioeconomic backgrounds. The sole exception involves a participant did no teach in a school with these characteristics. Instead, his exclusive charge involves working with students in a program that serves urban students of color, but in a suburban school.

Participants for the study were identified through purposive sampling. Patton (2002) describes purposive sampling as the selection of “. . . information–rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study” (p. 230). I also took advantage of emergent sampling, which is often used in qualitative studies. In this case, the researcher may decide to add participants to the original sample, after the fieldwork has begun (Patton, 2002).

The size of the sample depends on the purpose of the research. Generally, a smaller sample size will lead to in-depth information (Patton, 2002). Citing Lincoln and Guba (1985), Patton suggests that the notion of redundancy be used when determining the sample size. The wisdom therein is that when no additional or new information is emerging from interviews, the researcher shall assume that a level of redundancy has been reached. Given the goal of collecting in-depth data to the point of redundancy, I sought no fewer than 8 participants. The number seemed realistic, given the limited number pool – a point I will discuss in detail later. Further the greater the number of participants, the higher the probability that I could actualize the redundancy element.

I used a number of strategies to invite participants to be a part of the study. I contacted the president and co-chairs for membership of the Black Educators' Alliance of Massachusetts and requested permission to attach a call for participation in a research study (See Appendix B) the organization’s communication venues (e.g., newsletter, updates through email, website posting, etc.). I also posted the calls for participants on the menteach.org, a nationwide, nonprofit clearinghouse for anyone seeking information
on men in the teaching profession. A similar posting was communicated through the
Brothers of the Academy (BoTA) email list. Among other things, BoTA seeks to
produce high quality, publishable research and scholarship that focuses upon improving
African and African American peoples, schools, and communities and facilitate collegial
networks between men of color in education. The final strategy involved asking for
potential participants from contacts in the field of education—primarily administrators
with whom I have come in contact during my years as a practitioner in the field of
education.

While the effort to identify participants was thorough and exhaustive, the
response was limited. Only eight educators responded to the call for participants by
completing the survey. Of those who completed the survey, only seven met the study
criteria. Of the seven who were invited to participate, five agreed and two declined.

The underwhelming response to the call for participants is not a surprise. In stark
contrast to the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century, in 2010 only 1.7 percent of the nation’s 4.8 million
teachers were black men, according to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics
(2010). The shortage is felt even in predominantly African American school districts. A
2009 Washington Post article brought the concern to the fore, indicating that Prince
Georges County school district in Maryland, which is nearly 72\% African American, and
the District of Columbia Public Schools, which is 79\% African American, had African
American male teaching populations of nearly 9\% and 18\% respectively. The notable
shortage has led to teacher recruitment programs whose focus is to seek out African
American men. One example of these growing programs is the Call me MISTER
(Mentors Instructing Students Toward Effective Role Models) program at Clemson
University (Thomas-Lester, 2009).
All participants received an email with an attached letter of informed consent (Appendix A) and a link to a questionnaire (Appendix C). The questionnaire was designed to identify potential participants who were raised in a middle class environment, as opposed to those who may have reached middle class status as adults. Based on Beger and Luckmann’s (1966) theoretical framework, it was important that participants have experience developing a middle class sense of everyday reality. Accordingly, the questionnaire posed questions about the prospect’s parents’ level of education and profession, bearing in mind definitions the various layers of the black middle class in the (Lacy, 2007; Patillo-McCoy 2000).

The survey also sought information on the school(s) in which prospective participants worked, so as to confirm that the school or a program therein met the criteria of the study. The focus of this study is the perceptions and beliefs of African American men who identify as middle class and work in low-income schools that serve predominantly African American students. Accordingly, the schools/programs for which the participants worked needed to meet those criteria.

Individuals who were selected for the study were contacted and scheduled for an hour-long interview. The one individual who was not selected for participation was sent an email thanking him for his willingness to participate, but also informing him that his services would not be required.

**DATA COLLECTION AND INSTRUMENTATION**

In this study, I used a questionnaire (Appendix C) and an in-depth interview (Appendix D) to collect data. As suggested above, an important function of the questionnaire was to select participants with a middle class background and who work in
a low-income school or district. The questionnaire also had information that was used as part of the data analysis process. The interview, however, was the major data-gathering instrument.

The in-depth interview is a primary method for qualitative researchers gain insight to an individuals’ experiences (Patton, 2002), and is described by McCraken (1990) as a powerful qualitative method. The goal of the researcher is to ask questions that will lead the participant to describe lived experiences, and to collect data that are internally meaningful to the participant which relate to the question under study (Halloway & Todres, 2003).

Marshall and Rossman (2006) suggest that in general, the in-depth interview should seek to have the participants’ views emerge rather than those of the researcher. Accordingly, I incorporated follow-up questions, based on the participants’ responses. Marshall and Rossman further state that a level of systematization may be required when there are many participants and/or when participants are from a number of sites. Participants in Class in the Classroom share teaching experiences with one another. They all teach students who are predominantly African American and low income. However, they did not teach at the same school, on the same school level, the same subject matter, or even in the same region of the country. For this reason, I developed a set of open-ended interview questions that were presented to all participants. Follow-up questions were based on participants’ responses.

While this study is best described as a qualitative study, some features of phenomenological methodology were included in the study. Marshall and Rossman state that phenomenological interviewing is based on a specific type of in-depth interview. Citing Seidman (1998), they list three components of the phenomenological interview: a
focus on past experiences related to the phenomenon under study; an emphasis on present experiences related to the phenomenon under study; and an intention to join the previous two narratives together in order to describe the individual’s experience with the phenomenon under study.

During the interview process, I included questions that led each participant to discuss his past experiences of growing up in a middle class environment. They were asked to talk about not only about their experiences in the home, but those in their respective schools and communities as well. The primary impetus for these questions was to capture the participants’ perceptions of what it meant to be middle class.

Interview questions then moved to the participants’ current experiences of teaching African American students from a low-income background. Participants not only discussed their perceptions of their teaching contexts, but also provided rich and in-depth data regarding their students’ school, home, and community lives, and how both they and their students were influenced by these circumstances.

The last component of the phenomenological interview calls for combining the two narratives discussed above into a description of individual experiences with the phenomenon under study. This is a major feature of the analysis in Chapter four. However, to be clear, the data is presented as purposefully grouped themes that emerged from the analysis. Instead of the impact on each individual, I focused on the commonality of responses from all of the participants.

The intersection of social class and race and their impact on male African American teachers are at the crux of the current study. I included questions that allowed participants to explore the context of their socialization as youth. I then asked them compare their experiences to those of the children with whom they work. In total, the
participants were encouraged to reflect on their current interaction with children whose backgrounds are different from their own - to reflect on their interaction with these young people as their teachers.

The follow-up questions were intentionally designed to aid participants’ in-depth exploration of these experiences. To be clear, these questions were not scripted. Instead, they were questions that fit with the natural flow of the conversation. This included, but was not limited to the request for specific examples and to say more about a response. Further, I often followed their responses with deeper-probing questions beginning with “why” or “how”. Doing so not only yielded richer data, it made the interview feel less formal and more like a conversation between colleagues.

DATA ANALYSIS

While data analysis in quantitative studies begins at the conclusion of the data collection, data analysis in qualitative studies begins during the process of collecting data. Patton (2002) emphasizes that the “generative” and “emergent” nature of qualitative studies allow the researcher to begin to form ideas about data as it collected. Patterns and ideas about data emerging in the early stages of data collection were confirmed or disconfirmed later in the data analysis process. Accordingly, I recorded and tracked early insights about data as interview data were collected so that important analytical insights were not lost or forgotten. Early insights can also improve the authenticity of data by leading to overlapping—a process by which the researcher adds participants to the study to better understand perceived patterns that emerged during the data collection
process (Patton, 2002). I planned to use overlapping, particularly if it appeared that doing so would enhance my understanding of the data by confirming interpretations or allowing for alternative patterns to emerge that might contradict or cancel out initial ideas and patterns. However, given the dearth of participants, this opportunity did not present itself.

Upon completion of each interview, the audio file was uploaded on and transcribed verbatim by cogi.com. The transcribed interviews, along with typed insights recorded during data collection were entered into NVIVO 8, a Qualitative Data Analysis Software (QDAS). QDAS is often used by qualitative researchers. Some qualitative researchers are concerned that use of QDAS distances the researcher from the data, and interferes with their ability to “interrogate” data for meaning (Welsh, 2002). Others are concerned that researcher becomes so involved with the process of negotiating QDAS that considerations important to conducting qualitative research become secondary. Patton (2002), however, notes that while QDAS aids in data storage, coding, retrieval, comparing, and linking data, a human being must carry out the analysis. I employed the views of Dohan and Sanchez (1998) who challenge researchers to be cognizant of the epistemological framework for qualitative research, the purposes of their research, the amount and type of data collected, and the “goodness of fit” between the research project and software capabilities when deciding to use QDAS.

NVIVO is a QDAS that allows the researcher to carry out stages of data analysis electronically. Analysis of qualitative data normally require the researcher to organize data, become familiar with the data by reading and re-reading it, code data, and generate themes embedded in the data. In addition to the traditional approach involving reading and re-reading, I uploaded the interviews to an MP3 player. I listened to each interview
several times on walks, during my morning and evening commutes, and while at home. Marshall & Rossman, (2006) suggest that the traditional processes of reading and re-reading the data clarity eventually emerges to inform interpretations that provide insight into the question at hand. Listening to the interviews enhanced that clarity.

Upon full transcription of each interview, the narrative was subsequently uploaded in NVIVO and organized by interviewee. The software allows researchers to view the entire transcription and highlight and organize text into broad categories called free nodes. As I read each subsequent interview, I categorized text into existing categories, but also created new categories based on emerging themes. After all of the interviews were coded, I looked for common themes between the categories. For example, the emergent themes of “the role of the educator”, “why teach”, and “the importance of education” all contribute to a broader theme highlighting the moral imperative of teaching. NVIVO allows researchers to reorganize free nodes into tree nodes, which demonstrate these hierarchical relationships. This was helpful in organizing the data and highlighting the macro themes. See Figure 3.1 below.
VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

The validity of qualitative studies addresses the trustworthiness of the study, while reliability is concerned with the consistency of the data (Welsh, 2002). Validity of the study is enhanced by audio recording interviews, verbatim transcriptions, using interview protocols, narrative checks, and peer examination of data to confirm findings (Siccama & Penna, 2008). In this study, the interviews were audio recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim. The interviews were based on an interview schedule of open-ended questions posed to all participants. Siccama and Penna found that the use of NVIVO contributes to the validity of the study through processes permissible though
use of the software. These include a process for interrogating interpretations; scoping
data to ensure sound analyses; establishing connections and relationships among ideas
and concepts; and maintaining audit and log trails.

Member checks and specifically narrative checks therein are important
activities to ensure the trustworthiness of the study as well. Kirk and Miller (1986)
believe that validity in qualitative studies provides some confidence in relationship to the
extent to which the researcher “sees what he or she thinks he or she sees” (p.21). This
validity is achieved in two primary ways. First, during the interviews I often repeated or
summarized the participants’ responses to questions to ensure that my understanding
matched the intended meaning. I also asked participants for deeper explanations of their
responses. This included, but was not limited to requests to share a specific incident or
experience to illustrate a point in a response. Second, as part of the process of ensuring
the validity of this study, I conducted a narrative check. Each participant was provided
with the transcription of the interview to ensure that what was captured in writing was an
accurate reflection of the intended response. Richards (2005) reminds us that a number
of interpretations are possible, and that while it is useful to seek participants’ feedback,
that this alone does not provide total validation of the findings.

As a final component to increase the validity of the study, I asked two
colleagues to review the themes identified, in light of the data. The final two processes
(i.e., narrative checking and peer review) address limitations that have been noted about
the use of software for analysis. Human interpretation, particularly as themes emerge,
lead to a deeper understanding and richer interpretation of the data. It is for this reason
that I addressed the data both electronically and manually (Patton, 2002; Welsh, 2002).

Reliability focuses on the consistency of the data. Transparency is needed in
order for the consistency of the study is to be tested (Kirk & Miller, 1986). Practices which include clearly stated methods for collecting and analyzing data, presentation of questions asked of participants, and careful documentation of field notes or memos taken during the process of carrying out the study all contribute to transparency and thus consistency of the study.

Welsh (2002) found that the use of NVIVO also contributed to the reliability or rigor of qualitative studies. Interrogating data electronically, for example, minimizes oversight that might be possible while attempting the same process manually. Coder reliability, that is, ensuring that a coded category is used and always means the same thing is also important to the reliability or consistency of the study (Richards, 2005) and can be enhanced by use of NVIVO.

Patton suggests that the credibility of qualitative studies depends on rigorous methods, the credibility of the investigator, and a philosophical belief in the value of the qualitative inquiry (Patton, 2002). Systematic analysis is at the center of issues surrounding rigor. In order to ensure that I have captured and appropriately described participants’ perspectives, I had a critical friend review the analyses of data collected (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). In an effort to be clear about predispositions and biases prior to entering into this study, I proposed social, political, and economic issues I believe may impact teachers’ responses earlier in this chapter. The process of discussing one’s predispositions is meant to increase the integrity of the study, and remove suspicion that data have been structured to fit preexisting beliefs. While the issues discussed at the end of the literature review may impact teacher attributes, my critical friend served as a “sounding board” to support the process of exploring alternative explanations that are supported by the data (Patton, 2002).
The experience of the investigator is important when assessing the credibility of the investigator. *Class in the Classroom* is my second study using these research methods. I performed a mini research project in spring of 2003 entitled “A Minority Question: A Qualitative Study on the Extent to which a Teacher of Color Feels Connected to Students of Color whose Economic Background Differs from his Own”.

*Class in the Classroom* is a purely qualitative study that seeks to uncover the perceptions and beliefs of five African American men who identify as middle class and work in schools/programs that serve predominantly low-income African American student populations. Using Berger and Luckmann’s (1966) social construction of reality as a theoretical anchor, I engaged the participants in a discussion on their upbringing, experiences, and beliefs in an effort to understand how they perceive their students and to gauge their perception of their ability to reach them. I used a qualitative data analysis system to organize the themes that emerged during the evaluation of the data. Finally, I employed several measures to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings.

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**ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Qualitative studies must attend to ethical issues that emerge during the process of conducting the study. Marshall and Rossman (2006) state that presenting the informed letter of consent and ensuring the anonymity of participants are common practices to address ethical issues in qualitative studies. Each was employed as part of this study. Other practices focus on how the researcher negotiates entry into a research setting, ways in which the researcher maintains his/her role, and an understanding of the researcher’s part that complex issues can emerge during the process of conducting
qualitative studies.

As mentioned above, I outlined strategies used to invite participants to be part of this study. Where negotiating entry normally refers to how the researcher gains access to a site where all participants might reside, this study has multiple sites, as the participants teach at different schools. Still, the last strategy, that involving working with colleagues in the field to identify participants was carefully enacted.

I maintained the confidentiality of participants entering the study by not revealing to colleagues whether individuals suggested by them agreed to participate in the study or not. The anonymity of participants and their place of employment was paramount, given that sensitive topics may emerge that relate to participants’ professional practice and that the participants may not agree with my interpretations of their statements in this dissertation. The fact that data analysis resulted in collective themes is one way in which participants’ identities are protected. Another measure is the use of pseudonyms in the research narrative, and fictitious names for any references made to schools where participants might work.

Another issue where ethics plays a part is role maintenance. I interviewed participants with whom I share the same race, class, gender, and professional backgrounds. It is conceivable that in other circumstances we may be friends. My integrity as an African American male, an educational professional, and researcher remained intact during the process of conducting the research. In this sense, I remained open and honest, yet focused on the purpose of my developing relationships with participants. With each participant, I respectfully concluded my research relationship in a way that made future chance meetings in the field comfortable and amiable.
This purpose of *Class in the Classroom* is to gain a deeper understanding of teacher perceptions and beliefs when race is shared, but socioeconomic class is not. I sought to learn more about African American men who identify as middle class and work in schools/programs serving predominantly African American, low-income students. I conducted this research in the context of a trend indicating significant growth of the African American and Latino students in public schools nationally. The trend also shows a growth in the number of students eligible for free or reduced lunch (Planty, 2008).

Amid the increasingly diverse school populations is scholarly support for a teaching force that reflects the trend in the student population (B. E. Cross, 2003; Dee, 2005; K. Howey, 1999). In gaining a deeper understanding of the same race different class dynamic, I sought to question the assumption that shared race between teacher and student automatically supports a connection. I focused on African American men because they are notably underrepresented in the scholarly discourse (Lynn, 2002, 2006; Lynn, Johnson, & Hassan, 1999; Pabon, Anderson, & Haroon, 2011).

In this chapter I will present the analysis of the participant interviews. During the course of this research, I learned quite a bit about the participants. The participants demonstrated an extraordinary willingness to speak freely and openly, which greatly enhanced the richness of the data. The format of the presentation of the data is designed to reflect that richness.

I begin with brief portraits of the participants. The portraits acquaint the reader with the participants and the schools in which they work. Further, they provide a useful context for understanding the quotations in the later “Emergent Themes” section of
this chapter. The “Emergent Themes” section of the chapter details my analysis of the data. Each section or subsection groups comments and/or anecdotes the participants shared under a particular theme. I conclude the chapter by revisiting the research questions of the study in light of the presentation of the data.

THE TEACHER PARTICIPANTS

Finding participants for this study was a challenge. Of the eight who responded to the call for participation, seven met the criteria. Five agreed to participate. While the number of participants was lower than I preferred, the five participants represent a fairly wide cross-section. The teachers represent four regions of the country. Both the secondary and primary levels are represented. The participant’s tenure as teachers also varied from the two to 40 years of experience.

Despite the variation, the ties that bind make the outcomes of the analysis sturdier. Each of the candidates self identified as middle class currently. With one exception, all of the participants’ parents were college educated. The parents of two participants had advanced degrees. Further, all of the participants identified the student populations with which they work as at least 50 percent African American and primarily low socioeconomic status. What follows is a brief sketch of the participants.

TOMMY

Tommy is the most experienced of the participants. September 2012 will mark the 68-year old’s forty-first year as a teacher. Thirty-seven of these years were spent in the
Boston Public Schools. He is clearly serious about his role as teacher and coach, but joked about his foray into the profession. In response to a question about why he chose to teach, Tommy responded lightheartedly, “… I looked for a job where I wouldn't have to go to work the Friday after Thanksgiving.” He added, “I also don't particularly like adults and I know that working with young people is probably where I'd be most successful. The thought of being a lawyer or a doctor just never entered my mind.”

Tommy is a very articulate man. One gets the sense of the depth of him as individual just in casual conversation. When asked a question, he would often give a long pause, as if to search the extensive annals information collected in his mind over years upon years of experiences and education, both formal and self-education. Born and raised in Washington, D.C., Tommy is the only child of a school teacher and a physician who owned and operated a surgical supply store. He attended a prestigious high school in the Washington, D.C. area from which he graduated near the top of his class and at the age of sixteen, which he credits in large part to his teachers and their enduring message. He explained, “Up through elementary school, and junior high school, I had black teachers. They always use to tell us to make it in this world, you have to be smarter than white folks. You have to be better than they are. You have to do it right, and do it more right than they do, just to be even.” He matriculated to the University of Vermont, where he would eventually earn his bachelor’s degree. His experience was broken up by a decision to get involved with the Civil Rights Movements shortly after John F. Kennedy was assassinated. Tommy’s contributions brought him into close contact with some of the movement’s most prominent and celebrated leaders. He would later finish his degree and begin what has become forty-year career in education.

Tommy currently teaches United States History at Smith High School (SHS),
the school at which he has spent much of his career in the Boston Public Schools. His
career started in a different time in a different place. He explained, “I started teaching in
June of 19, I'm sorry, in September of 1970. [Davidson Elementary] school in D.C., then
I moved to [West junior high school]. Yeah. And, then I got offered a job in Newton. So
I go over to Newton in 1972. They offered me a position in a high school that sent 75%
of its kids to college. I couldn't wait to get out of south DC. And I've been here ever
since. I taught 2 years in Newton, and then school desegregation opened up in Boston.
Oh, this looks like more fun. So, I moved to Boston.”

SHS’s population is approximately 39% African American and 51% Latino.

Nearly 80% of the student who attend SHS are designated as low income, which the
Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education defines as those who
meet the following criteria: eligible for free or reduced lunch or food stamps, or those
who receive Transitional Aid to Families benefits (Education, 2010-2011).

MACK

Mack, 41, is the high school coordinator for Metropolitan Council for
Educational Opportunity (METCO) program at Southwest High School. With origins in
1966, METCO is a voluntary desegregation program that provides students of color who
live in Boston the opportunity to attend school in a suburban district through a lottery
program. There are currently 30 suburban towns that participate in the program. While
the school and community in which Mack works is predominantly white and upper
middle class, the students with whom he works are overwhelmingly African American

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and predominantly low income. In 2010, more than half of the students in the METCO program qualified for free or reduced lunch. Further, 90 percent of the students were African American. Mack supports the students in their academic pursuits, engages in parent outreach, mentors students when necessary, and teaches the Cultural Identity Group Seminar (CIGS), a course exclusively for METCO students. METCO students are required to take CIGS each of the four years they are at Southwest High School.

Mack was raised in a socioeconomically mixed suburb of Detroit. He grew up with multimillionaires. Smokey Robinson was a neighbor and members of the Miracles flanked either side of his house. There were also blue collar workers in the neighborhood, as that was the available housing situation for African Americans in the suburbs of Detroit in the early 1970’s. Mack described his parents as high achieving, having both graduated from historically black colleges at the age of 20 and having later earned graduate degrees. Mack’s father is a physician and his mother is a medical social worker.

Mack attended Morehouse College, the prestigious historically black college in Atlanta, Goergia, where he majored in psychology. His parents would have liked for him to go on to medical school, with a focus on psychiatry. Mack’s experience in the primary grades left an indelible impression on his idea of what schooling should be. He describes:

I would have to say my own experience growing up in Southfield, Michigan, and being… both from my little corner of south hill which is the predominantly black corner, to…the larger…predominantly white school in the city. My parents thought that was, an idea, a great idea because they'd seen…, in their time…, how funds have not been properly distributed in areas where whites controlled the, the
purse strings. Often, the black schools were, were not funded properly - less resources or the old resources, so it was their idea to send me away from the neighborhood school to another one. That experience was..., eye opening and I guess, at that time, somewhat traumatic with my presence there, there were certain expectations…These teachers, many of whom…probably have been in the system 10, 20 years and had old antiquated ideas about what my capabilities might have been. So it was a struggle early on and I just didn't want to see anybody else have the same trouble that I had.

Mack wound up working as a teacher in a summer enrichment program shortly after graduating. It was in this program that he found his passion for teaching and honed particular interest in working with and advocating for students of color. He is in his fourth year as METCO Coordinator at Southwest High School.

MICHAEL

Michael, 29, comes from somewhat humble beginnings. While he represents the fifth generation of successful educators in Norfolk, Virginia metropolitan area, this tradition skipped his parents. Michael was born to teenage parents. His mother was 14 years old and his father was 16. When he was eight, Michael’s mother left him in the care of his grandmother while she pursued a career in the military. Michael credits his grandparents for inspiring his interest in teaching. His grandparents were both active in the Civil Rights Movement and solidified the idea of making a difference through action. It was Michael’s grandmother, however, who had the deepest impact. She went back to
school at the age of 50, earned a degree and license in special education, and spent the latter part of her life working in the schools.

Upon graduating from high school one year early, Michael went on to Old Dominion University where he earned an undergraduate degree in English and a Master’s degree in education in a span of five years. Michael joked that he was predestined to teach, given his family history in the profession. He also credited his positive experience as a student for his love of teaching, noting that he was still in touch with his kindergarten teacher. He was hired by an urban district in the southeast corner of Virginia to teach English at Hargrove High School even though he had not yet completed the teacher preparation program at Old Dominion University.

Hargrove is High School 70 percent African American. While the state website reports that nearly 60 percent of the students who attend this school were eligible for free or reduced lunch in 2010, Michael’s perception of their status was a bit grimmer. He noted, “…my students in high school, uh live in public housing. Probably seventy-five percent plus live in public housing. When I was there… I think it was 93% free and reduced lunch - …very, very poor neighborhood; very poor kids who came in that I taught.”

Michael had experience teaching on each of the four grade levels in high school, but preferred the junior and senior level classes. It was not necessarily the subject matter that inspired his passion for working with the upperclassmen, but more his philosophy and core values. Michael teaches from what he calls a revolutionary praxis. He did not cite any particular scholarly or historical inspiration for the foundation. However, he suggested this his philosophy is anchored by post-colonialism (see Hickling-Hudson, 2007). Michael is passionate about teaching elements of freedom, social activism, and
social and cultural consciousness. The conversations were richer and there was, perhaps, more readiness to soak up these heavy themes with older students.

Michael taught English at Hargrove High School for two years. His departure was under less than ideal circumstances. Citing philosophical differences with the school’s administration on the importance of relationships with students and the value of his discussion-based approach to English instruction, Michael left to teach in the Language, Literature, and Communication department at a historically Black university in North Carolina.

CHRIS

Chris, 28, is of the belief that “your gifts and your talents and your ability line up directly with your purpose and assignment in life.” It is very clear that his purpose in life is to teach. This direction and purpose was solidified early on. He identified an experience in fifth grade as the genesis of his interest in and love for teaching. Chris’s fifth grade classroom had large closet spaces, perhaps large enough to be small workspaces or offices. Noting his strength in math, Chris’s teacher placed a desk in one these spaces to allow him a proper space to create math worksheets and activities for his classmates. Upon completion of his assignments, Chris would award his classmates with certificates. A teacher was born.

A native of Chicago, Illinois, Chris was the son of a postal worker and a Chicago police officer. While the city is full influences, many negative, he credited his mother for moving the family to the racially mixed, north side neighborhood of Rogers Park where street gangs and violence were minimal. It seems that the neighborhood was of little
consequence to Chris’s actions and decision-making. He remarked that he and his younger sister did not go out very much and focused heavily on their studies. He loved school.

Chris carried forth his love for school and for working with others to his college experience at the University of Illinois. He majored in elementary education and minored in mathematics. While he had a strong inclination for his life’s work before he matriculated to college, his experience as a teacher in a summer enrichment program (coincidentally the same one in which Mack worked many years before) after his freshman year solidified his focus. He admitted that, in the very beginning, the transfer of knowledge was the intriguing element of teaching – not necessarily working with people. Over the years and through certain experiences, Chris’s interest in teaching became more nuanced. He defines teaching first and foremost as “deeply personal” and “human interaction at…its highest threshold”. Teaching is a fulfilling endeavor with much promise provided that, “…you’re willing to invest in learning from students and learning from other people.” These are the terms he uses to describe his current philosophy on the profession.

After earning his bachelor and Master’s degrees at the University of Illinois, Chris went back to Chicago where put his philosophy to work. He taught mathematics, primarily in the middle school level and in various schools for five years. This includes a short stint at a highly touted charter school for boys and in self-contained special education programs at various schools.

In the fall of 2009, Chris left the classroom teaching for the role of math coach for an underperforming school on the south side of Chicago. This work is markedly different in that he no longer engages in direct instruction with students. Nonetheless, he finds this
work equally important, as broadens his influence on the student learning experience. He is also pursuing his doctorate at a local Chicago university.

DAN

“If you have discipline, you can achieve any goal you want to achieve.” This is the cornerstone of Dan’s teaching philosophy and a core value that he seeks to instill in his students. Dan currently teaches physical education at Waterfall Elementary School, a pre-kindergarten to fifth grade school in Atlanta, Georgia. Teaching is undoubtedly his calling. The 35 year old set his sights on profession immediately after graduating from Clark University, a historically black university in Atlanta, Georgia. Upon earning a Master’s degree at Ball State University, he went back to teach on the elementary level and to coach high school football in the very school district from which he emerged, the Atlanta Public Schools.

Dan’s background reads much like a history book detailing the historical characteristics of the Black middle class. Dan is the son of prominent minister in Atlanta. The church is Methodist, the protestant faith that Bowser (2007) and Frazier (1963) categorized a leading choice among upper middle class African Americans. Dan father’s church is among the largest in the southeastern corner of the country, a fact that has brought the family in close contact with politicians and influential people in the area. As was the case for many Black middle class men at the turn of the century, Dan’s father comes from a long lineage of college-educated men who took to the ministry. His mother’s side is equally a close match with pictures historians such as Frazier paint of the
Black middle class. Her ancestry is one of well-heeled, college-educated folk. Her family owned and operated a funeral home in the Deep South for decades, dating back to times when the choices for African American were limited to the Black-owned purveyors. In keeping with many of her family members before her, Dan’s mother was well educated. She earned Master’s degree in social work from the University of Chicago and spent many years in the mental health field in Atlanta.

According to Dan, he wanted for very little growing up. He spoke proudly of the fact that he was raised in a two-parent household by educated parents whose professions and community connections made for a wonderful childhood. He spoke fondly of his educational experiences as well. He mentioned that the schools he attended and the teachers therein were good. Nonetheless, he credits what he was exposed to outside of school as the key factor in helping him understand and relate to his current students. While Dan had all of the markings of a sheltered upbringing, he was allowed to move about quite freely as a teenager. His movement brought him into close contact with some of the negative aspects of urban life. What Dan observed shaped his perspective on his own situation, but also provided him with tools he would later use in his teaching.

All of Dan’s eleven years in the teaching profession have been dedicated to Waterfall Elementary. Waterfall is by far the least racially diverse of the all of the schools discussed by the participants. According to the Georgia Department of Education website, in the 2009-2010 school year the school was 100% African American and 95% of the students who attend were eligible for free or reduced lunch. The statistics are a close fit with Dan’s narrative description.

All of the participants designated themselves as middle class on the questionnaire. At the close of each interview, each was asked why they chose that particular option and
for their definition of middle class. While I expected their responses to the preceding questions to provide me with a deeper understanding of how each defined the middle class, the participants’ response to the direct question on the topic was nearly identical. Each participant limited his answer to the salary he earned and the neighborhood in which he lived. Not one spoke of the any values or culture that the theorists detailed in the “Black Middle Class Today” section.

THE EMERGENT THEMES

There were six themes with related subthemes that emerged from the data. The major themes include: my family and my community—defining middle classness; their family, their community, their education, — participant perceptions of low-income students; these kids really need me; teaching as a moral responsibility, and “bringing it to the ‘hood” – class-based teaching practices. What follows is the presentation of the data that support each of the five themes.

“MY FAMILY AND MY COMMUNITY” – DEFINING MIDDLE CLASSNESS

Each of the participants discussed their familial background with a notable sense of pride. This is no surprise as the participants’ backgrounds match the current and historical definitions of the Black middle class from social and economic perspectives. It is both interesting and critical to explore the participants perspectives of their upbringing and experiences because, as Berger and Luckmann (1966) posit, it these very experiences
that shape and norm their views of other people and the world.

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**MY FAMILY – PORTRAITS OF CARE AND GUIDANCE**

As the title of this subsection suggests, each of the participants credited family (mostly parents or grandparents) for elements of their current success. A predominant thread throughout all five participants was the active and involved roles their parents/grandparents took in their communities and their professions. Their activities ranged from active participation in the Civil Rights Movement, to law enforcement, to serving as the senior pastor in one of the largest churches in the southeast, to completing terminal degrees and giving back to the community. The participants were equally proud and appreciative of the guidance extended to them by their parents. Naturally, a great deal of this support and direction was focused on the participant’s educational experiences. For example, Michael’s inspiration to become a teacher came from elder members of his family who entered the profession before him, most notably his grandmother who finished her post secondary education when she was 50 years old. As he said, “…she always taught us it's only too late when you're dead.” Indeed, there was a guidance message in his grandmother’s words as well as her actions.

Along the theme of care and guidance, the participants spoke of the expectations their parents had of them and the actions they took to ensure that they were in the best situation to be successful. For example, Chris cited a move from the North Side of Chicago to a “decent” neighborhood on the South Side. As he explained, “My mother was very adamant about not being [in neighborhoods] she said [were] dangerous, where a lot of people hung out - gangs and all that stuff. So…she really didn't let me go outside
wherever we lived…”

In the same way, Tommy and Mack’s parents took significant action to place them in schools that were not necessarily close to their homes or racially diverse, but the schools better-resourced to serve students well. As Mack explained, “My parents thought that was a great idea because they’d seen, in their time, how funds have not been properly distributed in areas where Whites controlled the purse strings…The Black schools were, were not funded properly.”

Being placed in the best situation to be successful was but one of the benefits of the participant’s middle class upbringing. Some of the participants’ responses indicated their recognition of a degree of privilege this situation afforded them. In contrasting his school age life to that for his students, Tommy described his position in the following way:

I didn't have to work when I was in high school. I'm an only child. So I never had any brothers or sisters to look after or had them to look after me. More youngsters have to work. And I say “have to work” because the, their money helps supplement the family income.

Dan shared a similar description noting the difference between his childhood experience and that of his current students. As he put it, “[my experience] was 100% different… I grew up in a two-parent household. I didn't want for nothing.”

Along with the willingness to use their social and financial capital to physically move to put their children in the best situations, the participants’ parents or grandparents also had clear expectations of them. When his performance, both academic and behavioral, fell below expectations, Dan’s parents moved him to a different high school all together. Mack alluded to his parents’ expectation that he turn his sights to graduate
work in psychiatry after completing his undergraduate degree in psychology at Morehouse College. There was great clarity on expectations in Tommy’s household as well. As he explained, “My mother was a teacher. Both [of] her sisters were teachers... I grew up going to college…We had no options.”

It is unclear whether or not the participants recognize the socioeconomic components of care they experienced while they were young. While there is a recognition that they did not want for anything, the ability of parents to act on their behalf, to enhance the potential for their success by taking certain actions almost appears as a matter-of-fact circumstance—an “of course” situation in the lives of the participants. If things are not working out, you do something different. For the participants of this study, doing something different, making things work out is an act of caring.

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MY COMMUNITY – THINGS JUST AREN’T THE SAME ANYMORE
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While they made attempts to draw connections to critical aspects of their students’ lives, there was a significant disparity in the characteristics of the communities in which the participants live now and/or those in which they lived growing up and those in which the students live. Some of the participants described the differences along economic lines, but nearly all did so along the sociocultural lines. There was an interesting nostalgia for the way things used to be in their respective communities.

The description Tommy offers of the community in which he grew up resembled that for most of the other participants. To be sure, some of the notable differences were due to the time period during which the participants grew up. During much of Tommy’s upbringing, segregation was present and in full effect. As he described:
Growing up in segregated D.C. …We didn't know who was poor and who was not. The middle class sent their children to school in the D.C. public schools just like the poor people and the rich folks…We went to school with the doctors' kids, and the teachers' kids and the lawyers' kids, and the government workers' kids…All of us went to school together. The kids whose folks taught at Howard, and worked at Howard - we did, we all just went to school together, and were all taught by the same people. We lived in the same neighborhoods so you saw your teachers and your doctors going in grocery stores, drug stores, liquor stores…We ate in the same restaurants. We went to the same churches. So, we saw each other all the time. And, of course, with church and the black community, you might live over here and go to church over there. So, there was a lot of mixing.

Tommy’s description, while certainly reflective of the time, is not too different from the description of the contemporary black middle class community, which is populated by educated black people who hold respected positions in the professional community, and have close-knit ties to the church.

These communities are separate from the lower-income black community (Lacy, 2007). While Tommy suggests that the members of his community did not know who the poor people were, the description of people who lived there was notably middle class. All of participants grew up in predominantly African American communities with many of the same qualities and characteristics.

The other participants also spoke of a sense of togetherness in the community. Beyond togetherness, there was a feeling of collective responsibility for one another. Judah- Micah explained:

…And kind of going back to Foucault with the panopticon, we were always being
watched. Miss Geneva and them, they knew us. On the way to school they were sitting in their windows and watching. So we were always watched and it was a community…You could cut up if you want to, but by the time you got home you had got at least five beatings. And no one thought anything of it…

Mack highlighted a very similar sense of togetherness and collective responsibility in his description of the suburban Michigan community where he came of age.

I grew up with, with multi-millionaires and blue collar folk. That's because that’s what was available for black folk at that time - nothing other than that. It was the slums or that reality. Given the time, the era, the early 70’s, [there were] a wide range of economic realities in that one neighborhood… [Even with that,] they were all present. There wasn't any kind of a stratification that went on. No one tried to separate themselves and say, I am a lawyer etc. and you're only a factory worker. It was not that. It was the belief that because we're all there, we all had a responsibility to raise each other's kids. Because of that, it was a community. It was a village.

It is important to note that the communities in which Chris and Michael grew up were most similar to the lower middle class Groveland community described in Patillo-McCoy’s (2000) study. Mack, Tommy, and Dan clearly represent the upper middle class or elite middle class communities of suburban Washington, D.C. Lacy (2007) studies in her work.

“THEIR FAMILY, THEIR COMMUNITY, THEIR EDUCATION” – PARTICIPANT PERCEPTIONS OF LOW-INCOME STUDENTS
As will be presented in the subsequent themes, all of the participants stated that they cared deeply about their students. Further, they believed their role as educators in predominantly African American schools or programs was not simply to teach reading, writing, and arithmetic. In many ways, they believe themselves to be life coaches for their students. It is quite plausible that the definition of their roles comes from their perception of their students’ family backgrounds and their communities, and the ways that heir students present themselves at school.

THEIR FAMILY –

All of the participants knew that their students came from predominantly low-income communities that were different than their own upbringing. Many of them described their students’ family and family experiences with all of the markings of the traditional definition of poor families and assigned them far fewer attributes that make up the middle class environments that they know. Among the characteristics discussed by the participants was the departure from the traditional nuclear family model for many of their students. The family makeup among their students involved young people taking on adult roles in the household at a very young age and extended family members taking on roles as the primary caretakers. As Chris describes:

Growing up, I was not responsible for my sister, I had one sister. So it was only two of us, and I was not real responsible for her. I was kind of, but not to the degree that a lot my students have been - having to pick their siblings up, make sure they get to school, babysitting them, cooking their meals, getting them dressed. I didn't have to do all of that with my sister…
Dan concurred in his comments, noting, “…in a lot of instances they're taking care of brothers and sisters. They are the parent at home.” He went on to suggest that parents are often absent, leaving the parenting role to extended family:

it's not even the mother and father raising the kids. Now it's pretty much, primarily the grandmothers. I would say maybe 60% of the total school population are pretty much being raised by their grandmother. Not even their actual parents.

Tommy raised a concern with the family structure in his students’ community. In particular, he took issue with the rise in teenage pregnancies among students at his school. He believed this contributed to the continual breakdown of the black family. He explained:

…too many young people are having children without the benefit of marriage. They think it's just fun to have kids. It's not and their families are breaking down. People jumped all over Daniel Moynihan years ago when he said that one of the problems with black folks is they have poor family structure. It's only getting worse.

Although he did not communicate it as a concern, Mack also highlighted a difference in the Black family make up. When asked about the differences between the community in which he grew up and that for his students, he focused part of his response on the family structure. He believed there to be far more dual-parent households when he was growing up. He remarked, “in my neighborhood growing up and in most of my friends' neighborhoods or households there were two [parents].

On several occasions, the participants made references to their perceptions of their students’ families by highlighting certain aspects of their own upbringing or
experiences. They did so in the context of drawing connections to their perception of their students’ lived experiences. For example, in discussing his relationship with his students, Michael explained:

I'm willing to be visceral about my childhood. I'll let them know flat out, yes, I'm the English teacher, but I wasn't always an English teacher. I didn't always, you know, speak like this… I am very honest with them – yes, my mom was a teenage mom, my dad was a teenage dad I was raised by my grandparents too… so it just, you know, it's my way of connecting with them and also to encourage them that, you know, it's not about where you're from but where you are going.

Here, participants in most instances distinguished between their families and the families of their students in ways that problematized their students’ families. Even in the instance where a participant suggested that he comes from a similar background as a means for connecting with his students, he still situates their family and the family with whom he lived with for a period in his life as something that must be overcome—to move beyond. In this sense, he too problematizes the family structure that represents the experience of most of his students.

THEIR COMMUNITY

There was strong similarity in the way the participants described their students’ communities. Each painted a grim picture of poor and violent communities that lacked the cohesion and “village” characteristics that theirs did when they were young. As Dan explained:
Oh well okay, the communities they live in are pretty, are pretty rough. It's not uncommon for somebody to get shot in the neighborhood. It's not uncommon for people to break in their houses in that neighborhood. [There’s] a lot of crime. It’s government assisted. And contrasting to my neighborhood where I live, it's totally opposite. It's a high middle class neighborhood. We have crimes, but not to the severity of the students living at the school that I teach…They really have a rough time at it. Like I stated before, 98% of the school is on free lunch. To be honest with you [the] only similarity I can think of is we have a roof…

Chris’s description lined up almost precisely to Dan’s. He described his students’ community in the following way: “I think the, the communities where I work they were very visible with poverty. How well the communities have been kept up and maintained is evident and [they are] not always very well maintained.”

Michael provided a similar description of the students who attended his school as very poor and living in less than desirable situations. He described their home realities and the critical role that the school played in helping them fulfill some of their most basic needs. He explained:

…some of them came to school just to sleep because they're shooting and things are going on in the homes at all times of the night. Some of them came just to eat because you know, you get free breakfast and free lunch and they didn't have food at home.

He added his observation that, unlike him at a young age, the students were very aware of their lot in lot in life. As he describes:

…they're poor and they know it. As opposed to me, when I grew up, I didn't know we were poor. I just thought Mom was on the bricks fiasco for a month and
a half…These kids are poor and they know and they are very, very aware of class structures where I was pretty oblivious.

There was a strong theme of community togetherness in those neighborhoods where the participants grew up. The participants were equally keen on noting the absence of this characteristic in their students’ communities. As Mack made plain, “…[there] was a lot less in the way of having communities take responsibility for all youngsters in the community.” Michael pointed out the same gap in the community. As he explained, “…there's not a community of elders who is there to, you know, to guide them, to correct them, to take them in love. They don't have that type of community.”

Although the participants are very much aware of the dangers students face in their day-to-day lives, like their students, they seem to take this danger as part of the daily experience of life in their communities. They did not appear to be shocked or outraged that students live in situations of high crime. They did, however, lament the fact students do not have the experience of community caring that seemed to be available to them when they grew up.

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THEIR EDUCATION – PERECIEVED NEEDS AND OBSTACLES
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The connection between being African American and coming from low-income communities and student performance or behavior was evident in the participants’ responses to the interview questions. Whether it was due to issues in the home, weak familial support, a systemic obstacle, or being of color, the participants communicated that their students’ background absolutely impacted their school experiences.

When asked about his philosophy of teaching, Dan immediately spoke not of
learning or teaching but rather of his focus on discipline. He explained that this belief system is derived in large part from the way students present themselves in the school environment. Ultimately, the environment from which they come is not believed to be conducive to learning. As he explained:

…when you walk into the door…the first people they see after that long night in that gloomy environment is us. And whatever happened that night, they are definitely bringing it into the school... For the girls, my main problem is them fighting amongst each other and them not respecting themselves or respecting each other. And you see the same behaviors in the neighborhood. You see people fighting over a dollar or fighting over something that's insignificant. So basically, for the girls, they have a tough time…in my classroom. They have a real tough time with team building activities…I really don't know if that’s a part of our culture or just something that's a part of their environment.

He went on to suggest that some of the home culture might also be an obstacle to success in the school:

… they bring the problems that they have in the neighborhood or the habits that they have as far as talking back to their mothers… They try to bring that stuff into the school and it's hard for them to separate, school and home…

Michael also expressed concerns about certain obstacles in the way of some of his students’ success. This, however, was based more on the students’ decision making. As he explained:

Most of my black girls I would lose for at least a semester. They’d have to go to a pregnant girls’ school. And then they would come back. I didn't see that much with my white girls...My black boys, some of them, after a while, you didn't see
them anymore. You knew they were locked up.

Chris’s perception was similar to Dan’s, but he went a step further to suggest that some of the academic needs of students from low-income backgrounds were more acute than those from middle class backgrounds. When asked about the difference in teaching students from the two backgrounds, he responded,

I'm inclined to say expectations - the students' own expectations for what the teacher is supposed to do for them…Students who come from middle class backgrounds have more educated parents who are much more available to them outside of school…I think [those students] had less of an expectation for me in terms of my time with them…Sometimes, if they got something really quickly, some of them would want more, or some of their parents may require more…The middle class kids, they were a lot more independent… Some of [the lower income students] have more expectations for me in terms of my time and my financial resources and what they thought I was supposed to give them and do for them.

He continued by highlighting his belief that the middle class students were better prepared for school because of who and what they were exposed to at home:

[The middle class students] have more role models for what success looks like and so they kind of had a clearer picture of where they wanted to go and what they want to do versus my poor [students] who didn't have as many positive role models or diverse role models.

Parental involvement in the school surfaced as an issue for students coming from low-income neighborhoods. In response to a question on the difference between teaching low-income and middle class students, Mack replied:
Boston students require more structure, more guidance than their white counterparts because there is a lack of parental involvement or presence at least. Presence of parents, presence of family members in school conveys a certain expectation. Parents can say they expect certain things. They tell me over the phone they expect certain things, but their actions, their presence has to kind of back it up. I haven't seen a lot of that. The parents who are present here, who often show up to the functions are the parents of the students who are high functioning ones.

It seems important at this point to reference the “My Family” theme. As surmised in this theme, parental action was an integral part of the success for all participants. Thus, it makes sense for Mack to expect observable action on the part of parents, in order for him to conclude that they are involved in the education of their children.

Student potential was a particular focus of the participants, although there was not strong agreement on the depth of potential of the students they served. For example, Chris spoke at length about the potential of his students, noting that they had a fight in them that often went unnoticed. He believed his perspective to be the right one, particularly working with students of color. As he expressed it:

…I’m not as quick to jump to conclusions about people’s ability; what they can do and what they can’t do. Some might call it [being] idealistic, but I call it being optimistic about what we can do with Black kids when they are put in the right situation with the right people.

Michael’s perception of student potential, particularly that for his African American students, was less positive and optimistic. When asked about the difference between teaching African American and white students, he explained:
Black students came in automatically defeated…everything they saw around them at home just discouraged them…My white students, some of them were a little more motivated even though they may have been in the trailer park; because my white students are poor too. They may have been trailer park students, but they have a better grasp on writing. They had a better grasp on reading comprehension. So, teaching my black students, it took a little bit more work with getting them to see [that] it may take a little bit longer, [but that] doesn't mean that you're stupid.

Tommy expressed similar concerns about his Black students. In discussing the obstacles he perceived as disrupting his ability to facilitate learning for low-income African American students, he shared the following:

…They just don't seem to want to learn anything…. I guess I find teenagers jaded. They think they know it all. And, not that I didn't think I was a know-it-all when I was a teenager. But I was smart enough to know that I didn't. These kids…they don't have anything to look forward to.

A unique circumstance for students attending public high schools in Boston is the absence of the community school concept – an outcome of the 1970’s busing initiative. At the conclusion of the eighth grade, students rank order three high schools they would like to attend. District authorities try their best to accommodate students’ requests, but balance and school size are significant factors in the school assignment process. Accordingly, students are often placed in schools far from the neighborhood in which they live. Tommy finds this aspect of schooling debilitating for his students. As he explained:

…very few of the students who attend [Smith] high school live in [the neighborhood where the school is]. So there really is a disconnect between
the community and the school. The school takes no pride in the community and the community takes no pride in the accomplishments of the school…. Our kids don't feel any connection to the community [in which their school is located]. They feel connection to [the] school, but, at the end of the day... We will go in the stores and rob them. That's been going on for all of the years I've been there. My kids live in Roslindale, they live in Hyde Park, they live in South Boston, they live in the South End. They all come long distances to school and they just passed through those communities... There is no connection. It's not a neighborhood school… There's no sense of community. We don't have community schools.

Equally debilitating, in Tommy’s view, is the socioeconomic homogeneity of the students who attend his school. He described his feelings in the following way:

The black professionals don't live in Boston. They giddy-up on out of there so that their kids can go to the schools in the suburbs. The middle class in Boston does not send its kids to the Boston public schools unless they go to [examination] schools. So we don't have that mix. Poor people go to the Boston public schools and that's not the way it should be. It just is not.

The participants perceive low-income African American students as a group of students who may share socioeconomic issues similar to other non-African American students living in poverty, and who may share ethnic or cultural characteristics with their African American peers, but are nonetheless distinct. There is a clear line drawn between middle class African American students and low-income African American students, and between White students who live in poverty and low-income African American students.
The combination of their race and class, however, has precipitated the creation of a group of students who bring a unique set of circumstances to the school environment. Whether due to educational policy, or social and economic circumstance, the Black male educators interviewed view their Black students as emanating from communities that are unable or unwilling to support their education. If anything, the turmoil in their communities serves to disrupt some of the learning that could be taking place in school. The lack of overt actions on the part of parents to intervene in the educational performance or school related behaviors of low income African American students contributes to the educational challenges participants perceive are frequently experienced by low-income African American students. These circumstances seem to contribute to the dismay among the participants, regardless of whether they were optimistic or pessimistic about the educational potential of their students.

**THese KIDS REALLY NEED ME**

Despite the clear differences in the make up their communities and family lives and despite any consternation they may have felt toward their students, all of the participants highlighted the importance of relationships in their work and relating to their students. Developing rapport is a commonly understood necessity in positive and productive student-teacher relationships. However, the participants spoke of elements of relationships that went well beyond rapport. They spoke of advocacy, affirmation, students’ need for affection and love, and, students’ need for financial support at times.
There was a perception among some of the participants that low-income students were vulnerable and need someone to speak for them or someone to teach them to speak for themselves. This opportunity to advocate on behalf of students was spoken about often and with a notable sense of pride. For example, in his description of what inspired him to become a teacher, Mack remarked,

...there are so many variables that go into education and any...given student can have a positive or negative experience... And in my case, it was a struggle early on, as I said before, because of the expectations of the teachers. It took quite a while for me to bounce back from the earliest negative experiences. I just wanted to make sure that no one else at least started off that way. If they did, they'd have somebody who's an advocate for them, to [help them] get back on track.

Mack clearly seemed impacted by his vivid recollection of teachers holding low expectations of him and the experience of being the object unwelcome attention because of his race. He recalled a particularly grim experience in first grade:

...on the very first day of school [I had] predominantly Jewish classmates who kind of turned to me and the very first thing that all of them did is they surrounded me and they touched my hair - not even asking. It was like a show and tell animal...after a while, it became, well, I'm an object....At the same time there was the assumption that I would be in the lower track reading [and] math. It became obvious that, that I shouldn't be there. A lot of parents didn't like the fact
that I was there... I would see parents come in and...whisper things and the teachers would point at me...

Subsequently, a clear focus of Mack’s work as the METCO coordinator exceeds common academic support. Operating from the foundation of his experiences as a student, he described his work as particularly meaningful when students experience events similar to those he described. He explains, “Whether it's students defacing maps [or] teachers making...racially-insensitive comments to students...[I] believe that these students need more assistance and more guidance.” He went on to note that he often relayed to students that he too had such experiences, with not one person of color there to advocate for him. Accordingly, Mack describes his work as, “...being part guidance counselor, part psychologist, and...surrogate parent.”

Michael indicated the same level of importance in advocating for students. However, in his practice, he sought to teach them the skills to do so themselves. In the context of describing the challenges he experienced in dealing with what he perceived as an authoritarian administration at Hargrove High School, he revealed:

…I was kind of like blacklisted...my lessons were picked apart, and I mean meticulously and auspiciously picked apart. With my students, I was very visceral with them. I was very honest. [I told them] once this happens you always have to have your tools ready for battle anytime.

Advocacy was such a strong theme among participants that they were willing to ignore rules and polices if it was their belief that doing so would benefit the student. Beyond his own struggles as a professional at the school, Michael was equally cognizant of policies and procedures he defined as detrimental to the students’ educational well-being. He specifically cited the school administration’s unwillingness to place 16 and 17-
year-old students who were still in ninth grade in existing programs in the city for students in this position, as one example. Those students would eventually drop out of high school.

In the classroom, Michael employed what he believed to be the best strategies for reaching students, despite the direction of the department head or administrators. As he explained it, “…we had certain policies that were just set up for these kids to fail, and I never abided by those policies. You know... we're gonna do it the way I know it should be done.” Toward that end, Michael put his philosophy of revolutionary praxis to work. From embracing African American Vernacular English (Godley & Minnici, 2008) in his pedagogy to employing specific culturally relevant teaching strategies (Gay, 2010; Irvine, 2001), Michael’s advocacy for students meant recognizing student experience and background, weaving who he perceived students to be as people into practice and teaching them to use “their tools” to protect and advance themselves. (Culturally relevant teaching is discussed in greater detail in the Bringing it to the Hood section of this chapter). The participants come from action-oriented families—families that believed that if something is not working for their children, then they do something to make it right. Their advocacy is located in a family tradition of doing what is needed to improve a given situation.

LOVE AND AFFIRMATION

The participants demonstrated strong feelings for their African American students and perceived that their African American students needed to be affirmed and supported,
even more so than their white students. As Mack explained quite plainly, “… I do think that students, especially in this environment, need a little extra affirmation, for students of color that is, because they’re in, for lack of a better term, foreign territory. [They] need a little bit more affirmation - a little more guidance than their white counterparts.” He went on to suggest that an everyday endeavor of his role as the educator and the mentor was to know where students were emotionally and to be in tune with what they were feeling.

Michael underscored the same belief in African American students’ need for affirmation, but carried the theme a bit further to love. When asked about the aspect of his work with students he found most gratifying he identified love. “I teach with love in my classroom. I will get right up in their faces…But they know that I love them, and I teach them with all of my heart to the best of my ability.” He also emphasized the mutual nature of the affection. He showed his love by giving his all to students, which included in one case pro bono home tutoring visits for a student who had recently given birth to a child. Equally, he remarked that students showed their love and respect for him by only doing their very best in his class. In his estimation, students showed this by working hard in his class and at times demonstrating shame when the work they completed was not their very best. He proudly highlighted one story in which a student remained on the city bus for several hours as he worked to complete his homework. The student had no electricity and thus no lights at home. However, reporting to Michael’s class without his homework completed was not an option.

Familial love was a thread that surfaced in some of the responses. Dan believed that students saw him as the uncle they all knew and loved. He was careful to avoid describing himself as a father figure as, in his estimation, many of his students came from single-parent households - some had never laid eyes on their father. He played uncle, as
if to indicate that he was that family member who would not be there all of the time, but one who knew a lot about the students’ situations and cared deeply about them. He demonstrated his deep care for them by attempting to know and understand each individual student’s situation and responding accordingly. According to Dan, this called for yelling at students at times – hugs at others.

**FINANCIAL SUPPORT**

In the context of the teachers’ perception that the students really needed them, there was also a theme of financial support. Some of the participants were direct in their expression of this belief. For example, Tommy said quite plainly, “If a student needs money, I know because they come up and ask me for money and generally, I give it to them.” Michael communicated the same commitment, noting that students would approach him at sporting events or other extracurricular activities and ask for money. He indicated that he would usually give his students a few dollars for snacks. Equally, he kept a snack drawer in his classroom to provide students with some sustenance should the need arise. He mentioned that his teacher had done the same when he was in elementary school. As he put it, “if they have no lunch money then what am I gonna do, let them sit here hungry? I refuse to.” This certainly melds with the general theme that the participants felt a strong sense of importance in the lives of the students.

**TEACHING AS A MORAL RESPONSIBILITY**

In the context of discussions about their roles as educators whose students are in
large part African American, the participants’ focus on the subject matter they were teaching was scarce if at all. Instead, they focused heavily on the critical nature of their work and ultimately their responsibility for their students. They fashioned their work as doing what is right and necessary for their African American students. Their work was based on morals rather than academic. On the rare occasion that an academic subject or academics in general surfaced in the interviews, it was only in the context of the moral work with African American students. The theme “Teaching as a moral responsibility” is derived from this foundation. This theme is broken into three subthemes. The rationale for joining the teaching profession (Why Teach), the participants’ understanding and definition of the teacher’s role (Role of the Educator), and the desired outcomes of their work with students (What it Means to be Educated) are all tied to the larger theme of teaching as a moral responsibility.

WHY TEACH

The participants shared a common belief in the importance of Black teachers working with Black students. Each was explicit in noting this belief in their decision to become a teacher and to work in a specific district or program. For example, Tommy moved from a suburban school district to the notably more diverse Boston district at the height of the busing controversy in the early 1970s. Given his previous work in the Civil Rights Movement, this move was a closer match with his passion. It would also serve as an opportunity for Tommy to pass along the same wisdom his Black teachers did to him when he attended all black elementary and middle schools. He recalled, “[Teachers]
always use to tell us to [that] make it in this world, you have to be smarter than white folks. You have to be better than they are. You have to do it right, and do it more right than they do, just to be even. Now, I don't tell that to my students in quite that way…I do tell them, you wanna make it here in this world, you gotta be the best. The, the ordinary people just don't make it. There are no jobs for ordinary people."

Indeed, Tommy’s experiences and the philosophical foundation from which he draws in his work with students are due in large part to the era during which he came of age. Nonetheless, the other participants were of a similar mindset. Chris believes “your gifts and your talents and your ability…line up directly with your purpose.” He clearly has strong passion for the process of teaching, but he has poured his efforts into the schools that are predominantly African American. In fact, he could not recall ever teaching a white student. In describing successes in working with African American students, he noted his ability to understand some of the cultural cues his White counterparts might not. As he explained:

I just have a privileged and enriched perspective of the potential in black children who come from the poorest neighborhoods. I feel like so many of our black kids…have tenacity and fight in them that often goes unnoticed and [undervalued]. [They] are disvalued by school.

Further, he, like Michael, also described African American students as bilingual. In embracing this and other cultural characteristics, they championed their special skills, their special tools for working with and reaching their black students. These unique skill sets are major factors in their decision to teach.

In addition to highlighting the need for black teachers in black schools, the need for black male teachers surfaced as well. Near the conclusion of his interview, Dan
suggested that Black men need to find their way back into the profession. In a very sincere tone, he suggested, “in those school settings, urban school settings, it's usually [the] young African American male that's causing all the problems, and don't wanna learn. And all the knuckleheads…So you know, just being a man, and students can identify with the men. I just think that will be positive.”

ROLE OF THE EDUCATOR

Among the various connections in how the participants responded to the questions, the response on which there was quite a bit of agreement was that involving how critical these teachers’ presence was in the school program and the unique role that they played as African American teachers. The ability to reach students in a different, perhaps more effective way than their White counterparts was a thread throughout the responses.

The participants believed a significant part of their role in working with students and doing what is right for them involved tending to the affective domain. As Mack explained, his role goes far beyond general educator to “part guidance counselor, part psychologist.” As he put it, “I have to be in tune at all times with what each kid is feeling, what they're doing, if they're progressing academically, socially, etcetera.” As evidence of the importance of this role, he noted that he was often the “go to” person whenever one of his students experienced a racial incident. While there are many reasons why a student might feel comfortable with an educator, Mack credited the fact that he was African American for students reaching out to him in these scenarios.

Developing a love for learning was strong focus, particularly for Michael and
Tommy. As Michael explained:

…no one wants to come to English class. Especially when you're doing British lit. And, with this group of kids, they don't see the relevance…but getting them to see that English can be fun…I have Beowulf costumes and everything and I got dressed up like Beowulf…and walked across the desk…and we interacted and we played things out - just getting them to love the art of learning. [It’s] not just, we're going to come to memorize some stuff for the state test but, to actually learn the art of learning and then to love the art of learning.

Tommy demonstrated the same commitment to encouraging a love for learning among his students, albeit from a different point of departure. Tommy wants students to love learning, to be curious, to be interested in the happenings of the today and yesterday. He communicated serious concern that too many students were neither in love with learning nor interested in history or current affairs. As he put it:

If you come to high school every day and can't do better than C minus, there's something wrong. You've given up. You're just there. You're going cuz you have to go and that's not what school is supposed to be. I don't see a real love of learning. Kids don't get excited much when they realize something and that’s sad. It's frightening.

He went on to suggest that there was a sense of hopelessness among his students – a sentiment shared by Dan. Both communicated a sense of urgency in their work with their students and worried deeply about the direction and potential options for their students. As Tommy put in plain words, “There are not as many options for teenagers now…When I graduated from high school there was college. There was work. There was the military. When you graduate from high school now, if you don't go to college, you will
have a hard time finding a job, because the jobs that young people used to get, old people have it.” Dan, however, felt that even getting a good job would be a step in the right direction for his students. He indicated that he often felt a sense of accomplishment when he saw former students working at Wal Mart, which, as he saw it, represented a positive contribution to society.

Encouraging love for learning in general is not a unique endeavor for educators. In the case of these educators, developing a love for learning was a strong sentiment. Its importance in the lives of their students seemed to go well beyond success in school. There was a degree of urgency for this skill. It was presented as a critical life skill. Each believed educator this to be a significant part of their jobs as educators.

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE EDUCATED

Teaching as a moral responsibility by definition means that one’s work is principled and highly critical. The participants described their efforts with students in this manner. The participants’ definition of what it means to be educated, the ultimate goal of their work with students, was equally critical and values-based. Interestingly, the definition did not always match the traditional one: read well, speak well, and write well. Instead, the participants went to great lengths to offer contextualized definitions, ones that related specifically to who they perceived their students to be and the special skills they needed. Their definitions were in keeping with the perception of low-income African American students being a unique group of students, as discussed above.

Some of the participants believed that the definition of an educated person is one
who can successfully navigate racial boundary lines. A successful means to that end involves the ability to bridge (Cross et al, 1999), or move comfortably between racial groups, by understanding their language patterns as it relates to Standard English. As Michael explained:

I'm able to speak their lingo and show them how to code switch from African American vernacular into Standard English. [I] actually explain to them the grammatical and syntactic patterns of African American Vernacular English…I'm not going to diss it. No, this is a real language and [I] show them the rules. They know how it sounds. They know how to write it, but no one ever showed them, because they didn't know [that] there are actual rules that govern the dialect.

Bridging and the skills therein are not limited to language. Being educated also meant developing students’ ability to effectively handle racism or racist situations. As mentioned previously, Michael suggested that a significant part of his teaching involved encouraging students to use their tools to avoid being victims of abuse. Mack relayed a more specific example. He explained:

Whether it's students defacing maps, teachers making…racially-insensitive comments to students…led me to believe that these students need more assistance and more guidance…It's difficult to deal with these racially insensitive incidents and react in a way that is positive [or in a way that] doesn't get them in trouble or even reinforce all the stereotypes they have about them…

While there was agreement on the development of tools and a specific skill set, there was a resolute sentiment among some participants that, while it was a strong expectation in their respective upbringing, being educated did not necessarily require matriculation to college. As an elementary teacher in a large urban district, it is unlikely
that Dan would track his students beyond high school. However, he made clear that one aspect he finds most gratifying is observing former students contributing in the workforce. Tommy, went further, commenting, “I'm not training young historians.” He believed that failure to offer his students alternatives to college was a profound disservice. In his estimation students should be focused on developing a work ethic and transferable skills such as concentration. As he explained:

…if you learn how to study, if you learn how to concentrate, if you learn how to be successful, then whether you go to college after high school, or never… as you do job training, you would learn how to be a successful. You will learn what it takes to master what it is you’re trying to do.

Tommy defined being educated as possessing enough information to achieve a general level of societal understanding. In response to questions from his students on why they have to learn a concept or an era in his class, Tommy responds, “So you can be an educated human being. So a movie you see or a book you might read will make more sense to you.”

“BRINGING IT TO THE ‘HOOD” – CLASS-BASED TEACHING PRACTICES

Despite the distinctions the participants drew between themselves and their African American students, they clearly saw their roles as educators in their respective school communities and programs as a moral mandate critical to the success of their students. Tied to the philosophical foundation for their work is a skill set in the classroom that some of the participants define as culturally relevant. Some of the participants highlighted their attempts to tie specific elements of the curriculum and instruction to
CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

Joining what the participants know about their students to the curriculum was a strong theme in their responses. Chris’s comments generally cut across that for most of the participants on this theme. As he explained,

…I was always looking for ways to illuminate the concepts with cultural reference and things that they would be able to immediately and quickly leech on to…something that they could hold on to make the concept make sense. I did that in a lot of different ways. But when you use [the] identity that the student brings
to the classroom, that helps them connect to the abstract ideas that you have presented.

In his efforts to teach literature, Michael paid close attention to how his student might connect to or understand what they were reading. He engaged in what he called “bringing things to the hood where they were. Letting them code switch and work with the literature.” Here, it is important to note that there are two working definitions of “code switching”. Cross et al (1999) define situation “code switching” as the process in which an African American individual adjusts his or her dress, language, attitude, etc., to minimize discomfort a person or organization may have with African American people. Michael is suggesting something different. With further discussion on the topic, the substance of his intentions became clear. In his response to whether or not being African American influences his ability to reach his African American students, he noted:

I believe [being African American] definitely [has an] influence and it contributes… I always make a connection to something that is culturally relevant to where we are. That they just don't say, “oh, we're studying the dead old white men.” Okay, where can we find this particular motif or theme or symbol in something that we have? What about our culture?... I tell them all the time, hey, there are no more rappers. Biggie and Tupac were the last two… I play [their music] in the classroom and [then] give them a sheet and say, okay, now let's pick out the themes, the motifs that are the same in, let's say, John Donne or Andrew Marvell or one of the Bronte sisters. How is this theme overarching so they can see? I always go back to Zora Hurston and her essay, “The Characteristics of Negro Expression”…In our culture, it is okay to take that which is White and revise it for Black usage…we've been doing it for centuries. It is part of our
culture so embrace it.

In short, by code switching, Michael meant teaching students to understand cultures or scenarios unfamiliar to them by attempting find the commonalities, the connections to that which is familiar to them. Further, Michael zeroed in on themes from the literary canon to which his students might relate. He described:

I have to subvert some things. [I] have to co-opt some things. For example, last year, I would never think that my football players would fall in love with Jane Eyre. But they did because they saw themselves in Jane. Being cast away, being in foster homes and things like that with people who really didn't care.

Embracing student culture in assessing their learning was a culturally responsive approach Michael used often. As he explained:

I designed more than one writing prompt. I was challenged. Okay, if I'm gonna assess this objective, how best am I gonna do it? Well, everybody is not gonna do, you know, well with this type of writing. So I would design, you know, compare/contrast, close reading, creative things. So, some of my boys would draw. Some of my girls would write poetry. Some of my boys would rap. “Hey, can I, can I perform this rap?” And it would be everything that I wanted. You know, in terms of assessing that particular objective.

Often, mathematics is thought to be the least conducive subject to culturally relevant instruction. Chris does not accept this opinion. He detailed how teaching mathematics in a concrete fashion proved most effective for his predominantly African American classes. What is more, he tied his teaching to specific African American traditions, most notably storytelling. As he explained:
My kids always told really great stories. I think telling stories is a part of the African American oral tradition. I think our people are just really good at telling stories. So being able to talk and communicate and dialogue about concepts, even when they were real abstract and I didn't have a really good example - being able to talk about it and think about it in different ways.

Chris equally spoke on how he wove who his students are into classroom culture. In describing the aspects of the profession on which he found himself the most accomplished he noted:

I found the most success in building classroom culture and community; building positive, productive relationships with my students - coming up with and using what I knew about the culture of my students to deliver instruction in a way that was creative and engaging and relevant to them.

Toward that end, knowing what students were interested in served Chris well. He cited watching certain television shows, such as 106 and Park, a popular music video show on the Black Entertainment Television channel, as being one mechanism through which he would make sure he was connecting with his students.

While he did not cite any particular pedagogical strategy, Dan made reference to his intricate knowledge of his students’ home life. He suggested that being mindful of their realities helps him remain grounded as their teacher and helps tailor his approach to them. As he explains it:

I've had to take those kids home, and goin' into those houses, when you have roaches, and you have plumbin' problems, it is definitely hard to concentrate on anything. When you're stomping roaches and spraying roaches and insects and bugs and things of that nature all night long. So basically, when they get [to
school], you have to reprogram them and actually take their mind off of that environment. Before they can learn, you almost have to pacify them to the point and make them feel like that life is worth living. And it is.

CULTURALLY RELEVANT TEACHING – TEACHING BEYOND THE STANDARDS

Some of the participants spoke about their culturally responsive approaches in the classroom. They did so in the context of teaching the state standards. A subtheme emerged with respect to a focus on teaching their African American students skills and concepts that they needed. To be sure, many teachers teach students skills and convey information beyond the subject they teach. In an attempt to make the curriculum more reflective of the students who are learning it, some teachers might even knit African American authors or present African American perspectives into the fabric of the curriculum. This is the essence of culturally relevant pedagogy (Gay, 2010; Irvine, 2001).

Michael highlighted a specific skill set that he believed his students need. As has already been mentioned, code switching, what Michael defined as the ability to understand the inner working of African American Vernacular English as means to learn standard English and use it when the situation calls, was a critical skill. Chris agreed, suggesting that schools would be better positioned to serve African American students if they approached educating them in the same manner as appropriate for English language
learners. In his words:

…I came to this understanding that black people are bilingual. In a lot of ways we are bilingual. And if the schools treated black children as if they were bilingual in terms of the respect and the approach you take when you're teaching English language learners, you value and esteem the language that they speak. And then some of us learn that language so that we can speak and communicate with our students the same way.

Mack did not talk much about instructional approaches that fit the culturally responsive paradigm. The element of his work that fits the definition is more in the curriculum (what) realm than the instruction (how) realm. As was mentioned in the participant sketch, all of the students in the METCO program at Southwest High School are required to take the Cultural Identity Group Seminar (CIGS) course each of their four years. This is not a course prescribed by the school or the METCO governing body. Accordingly, Mack was given wide latitude to determine the topics, the material, and the instructional approach.

With the autonomy Mack is given in determining the CIGS curriculum (see Appendix E), that which he believes is important to the development and success of his students surfaces. Unsurprisingly, in the 2010 syllabus there were scheduled meetings with a primary focus on standardized test and college preparation. There are also two scheduled college visits – one to a New Hampshire fair and the other to tour historically Black colleges along the eastern seaboard. The selected readings offers some insight to what Mack sees as matters of import. For example, students are required to listen to the speech, Education for Independent Thinking, by Naim Akbar, a scholar cited in the racial
identity development section of the literature review. The piece focuses on the increasing value of education in the African American community and power of an education. They also read several works that describe the successful black student and the pitfalls that negative peer influences create for those focused on succeeding in school. There are also a number of pieces focused on African American History from the perspective of debunking historical inaccuracies about Christopher Columbus. Linked to this theme, the students read excerpts from The Debt by Randall Robinson - a controversial call to action for repayment to the African American community for all they have given and sacrificed for the country. The students were also required to submit essays in response to the following questions: ‘is literacy important & why?’ and ‘why are whites afraid of black literacy?’

The CIGS course is designed for students in the METCO program, all of whom are of color. Accordingly, the focus on African American subject matter is not unusual. Mack’s decision to focus on the notion of the successful Black student (as opposed to successful students in general), the theme of education as power, and historical perspectives that highlight African American contributions that might not make it into the curriculum or history textbooks says something about what Mack thinks is necessary for his students. He believes in their need to feel good about being of color, first and foremost. What is more, he believes his students require reminders of the profound value of education and positive exemplars of the successful African American student.
THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The previous sections of this chapter detail the themes that emerged as a result of the data analysis. The themes do not directly respond to the research questions of this study. What follows are responses to the foundational questions of this study using the findings.

1. What role does a middle/upper middle class African American male teacher’s identity play in the development of his social and cultural perceptions of his lower-income students?

2. What impact do differences in the socioeconomic status between African American male teachers and their students have on the teacher’s perception of his students as capable learners?

3. What role does being African American and male have on a teacher’s perception of his teaching efficacy in classrooms populated by African American students from a lower socioeconomic background?

QUESTION 1

In discussing his philosophy on teaching Chris explained:

I think that teaching is all about how individuals, how people interact with one another. And how we interact is directly influenced by where we come from, how we grew up, what we've seen about the world, the experiences that we've had in the world. You know, whether you grew up poor or you grew up rich; you grew up in this school, you grew up in that school. You have both of
your parents, you didn't. You were in a good relationship, or you haven't had a good one. All of these different things that effect our personal lives and directly influences and impacts how well we interact with other people especially with people who are different from you, but also people who look the same as you…

This statement lines up nearly identically with the theoretical framework of this study. The participants’ objective reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) was markedly Black and middle class as defined by Lacy (2007) and Patillo-McCoy (2000). In the “My Family and My Community” section, the participants described elements of their upbringing and their neighborhoods in vivid detail. Their experiences growing up and the values and philosophies they espoused matched those presented in Lacy’s and Patillo-McCoy’s seminal work on the Black middle class. And, as Chris suggests, much of how they viewed their students was a function their middle class upbringing and middle class values.

Dan, Mack, and Tommy were raised in what Lacy calls the elite Black middle class. They are the sons of prominent and professionally accomplished fathers and mothers who have advanced degrees. They grew up in supportive households with parents who made certain that they had the best educational experiences. They lived in tight-knit upper middle class Black neighborhoods with like-minded people of similar socioeconomic status and substantially separate from poor Black communities. When provided the opportunity to describe their students’ communities, their families, and their education, the responses where notably grim. Their descriptions contrasted with the upbringing and community that they knew well. It is clear that Tommy, Dan, and Mack see the discrepancies between their lives and the lives of their students.
Interestingly, while the life experiences of Chris and Michael were more in line with Patillo-McCoy’s description of the lower-middle class Black community, neither demonstrated a closer connection to or more gracious perception of their low-income students. As a matter of fact, their descriptions of students’ communities, their families, and their education were, in some cases, more dismal than their upper middle class counterparts in the study. The participant’s socioeconomic distance from the student did not matter. The important difference was that between middle class and low income.

In both instances, whether their backgrounds were upper or lower middle class, the participants clearly saw their lives as distinctly different from those of their students. Their comments regarding their students’ lives were presented disdainfully. Indeed, the middle classness of the their backgrounds acted as the barometer used to measure what appeared to be lacking in the lives of their students—and allowed them to make judgments that the students must feel this deficiency as do they.

The participants’ positionality with respect to class parallels four points made by Berger and Luckmann’s (1966) discussion of social reality. First, given participants’ grim perspective of the everyday lives of their students, it is plausible that the participants at one time, but more than likely currently, view the lives of their students as problematic. Using Berger and Luckmann’s work as a frame, it appears the participants have done much work to make the problematic situation of their students’ lives unproblematic. As mentioned earlier, the ability of the participants to de-problematize the lives of their students would influence the extent to which the teachers would be able to minimize the social and, based on the comments of some of the participants’, emotional distance between student and teacher. Based on the long-standing teaching careers of some of the
participants, their sense of commitment and responsibility to their students, and indeed, the level of caring for the students they teach, it appears the teachers have been able to appropriate meanings to the lives of their students, in ways that facilitate and enhance their ability to serve as their teachers.

It is also clear that the participants’ perceptions and actions fit with Berger and Luckmanns’ notion of “reality enclaves” or unfamiliar realities. Berger and Luckmann suggest that individuals who are able to transition into reality enclaves tend to return to their primary or familiar reality. This situation was evident among the participants as they spoke about their middle classness. None spoke of anything negative about their social and economic status, and all appeared to continue to fully embrace the values, beliefs, and behaviors that make them middle class men. In this way, the participants’ middle class identity remained intact throughout the years they worked with low socioeconomic African American students. It is as if they are saying; “I know you, but I am not you. I can teach you, and I care about you, but I am not you.”

QUESTION 2

The participants’ perception of their students as capable learners aligns closely with their perception of the students’ family and their community. Although most of the participants did not directly comment on their students’ learning capability, the elements about which they spoke are closely related. As is noted in the previous subsection, “their education”, the participants communicated concerns about their students’ potential to be successful in the classroom. This is due in large part to the
problem-filled communities from which they come coupled with weak familial support. What is more, in the opinions of Michael and Tommy, certain aspects of the school or district structure, culture, or policies are additional obstacles for students. In contrast, it should be noted that Chris was adamant in his support of his students as capable learners. He qualified his statement, noting that he is “… optimistic about what we can do with black kids when they are put in the right situation with the right people.”

The finding for this particular question bears a strong resemblance to Rist’s (1970) findings. In his study, teachers’ beliefs about their African American students’ capabilities were manifested in iniquitous ability grouping. Poor students were on the negative side of these actions in this all-Black school. The grouping essentially locked students into a track for the remainder of their education. To be clear, Rist’s study was purely observational. He did not collect any data directly from the teachers via interview. Nonetheless, what he observed had a profoundly damaging impact on the learning potential and overall school experience of the low-income students.

The participant comments related to their students’ capability as learners were eerily similar to the perceptions of Black teachers Morris (2005) reported in his study. Much like the participants in my study, Morris reports that Black teachers in the school he studied tended to believe that their White students were better students than they actually were and better prepared than Black students. The same was so for some of the participants in this study. Not only did some of the participants suggest that the Black students were less prepared than White students, there was also the suggestion that middle class Black students were better prepared than poor Black students. Conversely, the Black teachers in Morris’s study spoke about their Black students lovingly and demonstrated a commitment to their academic and social welfare. In the subsection
entitled “these kids really need me”, all of the participants in this study communicated the same sense of connection to and sincere emotion for their students.

In the context of Berger and Luckmann’s (1966) theory of social construction of reality here again the participants’ perception of the students as learners stems from the problematic – the marked difference between the participants and their students from a socioeconomic standpoint. This is a place where previous studies have landed (Anyon, 1997; Rist, 1970). The major difference is the point of divergence - when the positive perceptions and feelings of love and connection to their students from the standpoint of shared race surfaces. The latter seems to outweigh class differences and the perceptions therein. However, because this study did not include classroom observations, I cannot match the expressions of care with observed participant practices in the classroom. Indeed, in this particular context, what they describe does not match what Rist and others observed.

QUESTION 3

Identifying a problematic is but the entry-level. The critical skill involves making sense of that which is problematic with the hopes of making it unproblematic. Again, the extent to which participants can do so has a direct impact on their potential to minimize the gap between themselves and their low-income Black students that arises due to differences in perceptions and meanings based on class. Clearly, the participants have developed this skill set as evidenced by their strong sense of their efficacy with their...
low-income, African-American students.

The participants believe that they play a special role in the lives of their students. The relationship between teacher and student is different from other adult-child relationships. Through incorporation of skills and dispositions specific to their role and position in their students’ lives, teachers can interact with them in ways that distinguish between the roles of parents and the roles of teacher. Teachers, then, become an additional caring and responsive adult in a student's life, and in the process not only honor the special relationship between teacher and student, but also improve relations between the school, and the family and community from which the child comes.

Through the elements of advocacy, love and affirmation, and financial support, the participants demonstrate the major tenets of an emerging theory called “culturally relevant critical teacher care”. Among its most prominent contemporary proponents is Roberts (2010) who uses this theory to describe the care that African American students need and the skill set that African American teachers have historically delivered. Borrowing from the work of Siddle-Walker (1993; 2001) and Noddings (1992; 1995), Roberts examined the notion of care among African American teachers and their African American students. She found several prominent themes. Her findings were similar to those Siddle-Walker (2001) highlighted in the historically segregated, all black schools in the South. In these schools, African American teachers focused heavily on academics, but equally, if not more, on the affective factors. This includes supporting students emotionally and financially, and emphasizing skills that will help them navigate a less than accepting society. As the African American teachers in segregated schools did, the teachers Roberts studied demonstrated profound concern for their African American students’ future and often engaged in what she called “color talk”, racial discourse.
between teacher and students who share the same racial characteristics.

In Siddle-Walker’s (1993) study of segregated Casewell County Training
School in North Carolina, she described a learning environment in which caring
predominated and one that was characterized by commitment to children and their
education. Support and encouragement were school mandates and familial interaction
between students and teachers was common. The participants’ demonstration of
profound care and a willingness to extend their efforts with their black students beyond
reading, writing, and arithmetic melds well with Siddle-Walker’s description of black
teachers in segregated schools. It interesting to note, however, that these teachers are
doing so in schools where there is less cohesiveness around black teacher culture than
that described in the segregated schools. Students may experience advocacy and love and
affirmation, and might even receive some financial support from their African American
teachers, but the participants said little of this being part and parcel of a teacher culture in
the school. Further, in Michael’s case, he reported that his relationship building and
extraordinary support for his students was frowned upon by the school administration.

The original question in the study focused on these teachers’ perceptions of
their efficacy because of their race and the fact they are men. While there is strong
evidence of the perception of efficacy based on shared race, only two participants, Dan
and Chris, communicated anything related to gender and their charge as educators. Both
did so in the context of communicating their concerns for Black boys.

The substance of the problematics discussed in the previous section seem
incongruent with the extraordinary lengths to which the participants were willing to go
for their students and their strong belief in their efficacy with them. The participants
were not asked about this specific inconsistency, but sociology provides a logical answer.
First and foremost, the participants’ description of their students’ family, and community were based in large part on their middle class identity. Phinney and Ong (2007) would categorize these descriptions as the ethnic identity: cultural norms within a particular group. They were purposeful in delineating ethnic and racial identity. Racial identity is developed in response to racism. Merging their acute awareness of racism with their high emphasis on being African American, the participants had high salience racial identities. This identity served as the proverbial bridge to their students. This identity translated to their work in providing students with skills beyond the standard curriculum and encouragement to be extraordinary in the context of a difficult world that might not understand or embrace them. What is more, the participants feel uniquely qualified to provide the students with these needs because they share this racial identity.

It also interesting to consider the alarming similarities in the way the participants in this study characterized their work and the portraits of African American men teaching in South Central Los Angeles in Lynn’s (2002; 2006) work. Both groups of men see themselves as change agents working on behalf of their students. Both groups see themselves as owning unique characteristics that make them more fit to meet the needs of their student than, perhaps, their White counterparts. The striking difference, however, is that the teachers who participated in Lynn’s study came from neighborhoods and circumstances similar to their students.
Chapter 5 SUMMARY, DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

SUMMARY

Each of the participants comes from a demonstrably Black middle class environment. While their socioeconomic backgrounds varied from lower middle class to upper middle class, there were many parallels in their descriptions of their upbringing and family and community norms. For example, the participants described the communities in which they grew up as tight-knit and supportive. They also characterized their parents as educated and supportive and their home lives as stable. It should be noted that all but one participant had a dual-parent household. There were also marked differences between the participants’ descriptions of their family and community and that for their students. There was unanimity in their description of their student’s communities as violent and disjointed. There was similar agreement in the description of students’ home life as unstable and unsupportive.

Given the commonalities in the participants’ socioeconomic background, the parallels in their perceptions of their students are not all that surprising. In the context of shared race, the class-based perceptions appear particularly incompatible with what one might naturally assume, particularly in light of the numerous calls for more teachers of color, and particularly African American men, in urban schools. Nonetheless, as I shall describe below, the class perceptions are overshadowed by a sense of kinship based on shared race.

The participants feel strongly about and connected to their African American students. The expressions of familial love, advocacy, and financial support for their
students together with the overarching view of their work with them as a moral mandate were made among all of the participants, regardless of their age, experience, age of children they teach or region of the country. Strong teacher-student connections of this sort have been discussed in previous research. Irvine (1995) and Lynn (2002; 2006) found strong connections and a unique level of understanding between African American teachers and African American students in their work.

In addition to the importance of the work they do as teachers, the participants expressed that they were uniquely qualified in providing their students with what they need beyond the curriculum. Similar themes emerged in King’s (1994) work. In many ways, the unique abilities coupled with the way they wove their deep feelings for their students into their charge as their teacher exemplifies the major tenets of the emerging theory of culturally relevant critical teacher care (Roberts, 2010). The expressions of love and care and their unique abilities are linked to shared race with their students as fellow African Americans.

A sense of family ties among and between African-Americans who have no official blood relation and connection through marriage is a known and researched phenomenon. In sociology, the scenario is called fictive kinship (Kane, 2000). Rooted in historical tradition, fictive kinship describes family-like relationships between African-Americans who have no real familial ties, but treat each other with the same love and care as a blood relative. With respect to the participants in this study, each felt a close, family-like connection with their African American students. Their willingness to advocate for their students and support them financially, coupled with the expressions of love were the most pointed examples.

The participants’ perceptions of their students through a socioeconomic class
lens is a bit different than the race lens. The descriptions of their students’ family and communities and their perceptions of the students as capable learners were notably inconsistent with the warm expressions in the context of fictive kinship. The participants come from varying levels within the Black middle class, but each one of the participant’s perceptions is virtually in line with what the research says about the beliefs and characteristics of those who grew up in the Black middle class context (Kronus, 1971; Lacy, 2007; Pattillo-McCoy, 2000). The critical point to underscore here is that even with socioeconomic class differences between the participants and their students, fictive kinship still seemed to trump everything, including class.

**DISCUSSION**

In the outset of this study, I had strong preconceived notions about the outcomes and how the participants might respond. The premise of Berger and Luckmann’s social construction of reality, while dense in its presentation, provides a simple, logical framework for understanding how human perceptions are formed. Ultimately, one’s views of what is normal and what is not are based in large part on his or her lived experiences. The socioeconomic context in which one comes of age becomes very important in the development of perceptions. Hence, a safe assumption before gathering any data (and based on my own experiences and the previous conclusions drawn by Rist, Anyon, and Silver) is that the middle class participants would present a disconnect with their low-income students despite sharing racial characteristics. While this was so to an extent, the veracity of that line of thinking becomes less certain at the
intersection of race and class.

As I reflected on the outcomes of this study, an experience I had in a course I took during the summer of 2008 solidified the trustworthiness of the race-over-class finding in this study. In an attempt to illustrate the differences in how people from different racial backgrounds identify themselves, the facilitators asked each participant in the class to write how they would describe their identity. “Who are you?” was the question. We had about three minutes to write down factors and characteristics that we believed contributed to how we identify ourselves. Thinking nothing of its importance I scribbled down “African American” in addition to “husband”, “father”, “educator” and several other important descriptors. When the time expired, we reported out. I was perplexed by the fact that the African American participants, of which there were three, were the only ones who cited their race as a major part of their identity. This experience underscores, as the data in this study confirms, that being African American is a significant part of how we identify ourselves. It is a characteristic of which we are constantly reminded. It is characteristic that is present in our everyday lives.

Although Critical Race Theory (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995b; Tate, 1997) was not used as the framework for the current study, aspects of this study can be more clearly understood from a Critical Race Theory (CRT) perspective. Even though my study focuses on class differences, the impact of class on the participants’ perceptions of and interactions with their students could not be fully discussed in isolation of race. The centrality of race in discussions of what Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) refer to as systems of power (e.g., gender, class) was evident in my study. Further, participants had a clear understanding of the structural and institutional circumstances that served as barriers to their students’ success—and tended to address these barriers more from the
perspective of race than class. While the participants of this study were keenly aware of
the poverty status of their students, they recognized that both race and class combined to
impact the everyday and educational lives of their students. As Ladson-Billings and Tate
point out, educational inequities cannot be explained by class alone, hence the necessity
for including race from a theoretical perspective in order to explain the experiences of
people of color.

Given the notion of racial solidarity and kinship despite the class differences,
it seems logical and appropriate to go back the major study that, in part, inspired this
work. Thirty years after the original publication, Rist’s (2000) landmark work was
republished. In the foreword, he responded to what must have been an onslaught of
criticism on statements made about the intersection of class and race stating, “Let me be
clear, I was not then arguing that class superseded color, but that they together created a
powerful interaction” (p. 258). While the data collection approaches were vastly
different (Rist did not interview the teachers and I did not observe or interview students),
some of the conclusions are similar, particularly those involving teacher perception of
their students related to social class, whether communicated verbally in my study or via
action in his.

As classroom observations were not part of my study, I cannot report on the
nature of the relationships between the participants and their students. I cannot describe
what the elements of care and affirmation that participants expressed look like in the
classroom. Further, and perhaps most importantly, I cannot report on the how these
teachers’ expressions of love and care for the students and their willingness to teach them
information and skills beyond the curriculum impacts the students’ academic ability.
However, through the interview and data analysis, I have a strong sense for what these
teachers believe about their students. Had Rist included a teacher interview piece, readers would have a better understanding for the meaning of their actions in the classroom. Given the primary finding of my study, race over class, it is quite probable that the teachers in Rist’s study were teaching in ways they felt necessary and appropriate given the socioeconomic status of the teachers and their perceptions of what their students needed to know to be able negotiate their worlds. They might well have believed these practices to be in the best interests of their students, which would be a manifestation of the fictive kinship element. Of course, it does not make the actions right or indubitably in the students’ best interests. Nonetheless, had we more knowledge of the teachers’ beliefs we might have understood their actions.

In the context of student input, it is interesting to juxtapose the findings of this study with one that focused specifically on the student perceptions of teacher characteristics that facilitate learning. In his two-year, qualitative study involving African-American students attending urban schools on both the primary and secondary levels, Howard (2002) determined three teacher strategies that, according to students, improved engagement and overall achievement:

1. Establishing family, community, and home-like characteristics
2. Establishing culturally connected, caring relationships with students
3. Use of certain types of verbal communication and affirmation

While this study did not include student input or any measures of student achievement in the participants’ classes, there is a strong likeness between these three strategies and the participant expressions in the themes of Advocacy, Love and Affirmation, and Teaching Beyond the Standards. This study does not feature any student data, but it is not too
much of a stretch to assume that their described actions and values could yield some degree of student success, given Howard’s work.

**IMPLICATIONS**

A number of scholars and education policy-makers have written about the importance of teachers of color in classrooms predominated by students of color (Darling, 2005; K. Howey, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 1999, 2000a; Murrell, 2007; Weiner, 2006). The assumption has been that the shared ethnic background would be enough for children to see themselves in their teachers and this would be educationally beneficial to them. Programs, such as the Call me MISTER program discussed previously, have sought to improve the education of students of color by seeking to increase the number of male teachers of color who originate from low socioeconomic backgrounds. In this sense, this program recognized the important role social class might play, where it had not be an overtly discussed component in the discourse on increasing the number of teachers of color in urban schools.

The current study has implications from two perspectives. Given the commitment and sense of responsibility participants of this study had for their African American students, efforts to increase the number of African American teachers in the classroom should persist. Secondly, while teachers from low socioeconomic backgrounds likely bring a valuable perspective to the classroom, so do African American teachers who do not share a socioeconomic background with their students. These teachers bring a perspective, grounded in their sense of middle classness which is intended to support the education and well-being of their students. In this sense, the exposure low-income African American children have to middle class African American teachers is proposed
as yet an additional opportunity to learn from caring adults.

Curricula that focus on diversity have long been a feature of the required coursework for aspiring teachers at schools of education. I took two courses on the topic at two different schools of education and co-taught one as a doctoral student. Nonetheless, as the Smith and Smith (2009) note in their expansive study of urban teachers, an overwhelming majority of those surveyed indicated that they were not well prepared by their respective schools of education to teach in a low-income school district.

Requiring students to reflect on the notion of difference, which classes of the sort I mentioned often do, is appropriate, if not critical. I did not ask the participants about their teacher training programs, so I cannot be sure if they have engaged in deep reflection on who they are and their experiences in relation to those of their students’ though focused coursework. However, if this was an experience that took place in their respective teacher preparation experiences, the data reflects a zero sum impact on the teachers’ perception of their students in all cases, but that for Chris. Given that the negative perceptions were class based-based in a race-over-class dynamic, their perceptions may not have a negative effect on the students because of the shared race characteristic. The impact cannot be known based on the data collected.

In light of the data and findings, the implication for schools of education is twofold. First and foremost, in partnership with urban districts, schools of education need to recruit more male African American teachers. The fact that black men make up less than two percent of the total teaching force is abysmal. Further, as the findings suggest, black men, regardless of their socioeconomic background, may be uniquely prepared to overcome particular problematics when they share race with their students.

In addition to focused recruitment, there needs to be learning experiences for these
teachers that allow them to identify their perceptions of their students in relation their own upbringing, community, and experiences. Ultimately, teacher prospects need to be trained on how to make that which is problematic unproblematic. In this study, I cannot be sure if the participants even knew that they have made the problematics unproblematic. Nonetheless, the participants demonstrated a particular readiness and skill set absent any formal training on how to deal with their perceptions of difference. Cultivating a curriculum to help them develop that sense of awareness would, perhaps, make them even better prepared.

LIMITATIONS

As was mentioned in Ethical Considerations section of chapter three of this study, the focus is very close to who I am and my lived experiences. As a middle class African American man who taught in an urban school, much of what the participants described was very familiar to me. In one way, this shared experience proved helpful in the interview process, as there was an immediate connection. I credit the connection for the smooth, open, and honest characteristics of the conversation. Nonetheless, it is important to note the researcher bias. The data was coded and analyzed through the lens of a researcher who knows what the participants describe very well. The peer review was helpful, but they were working from the foundation that I built.

The study is also limited in that it presents the views of only five teachers. The paucity of the black men in the field made finding participants difficult. Establishing additional criteria, middle class and teaching in an urban, low-income school, made the participant pool even smaller. Nonetheless, additional participants would have provided me the opportunity to employ the overlapping process (Patton, 2002). Because there are
so few participants, I cannot be sure that there are no additional themes or substantive data that would contribute to my understanding of questions. Accordingly, the results of should serve as the foundation for further study, but are yet generalizable.

The study focused purely on the narrative contributions of the participants. There were no classroom observations or any input from the participants’ students. Given that the sole focus of the study is teacher perceptions, interviews are certainly appropriate. However, observing the participants in the school environment in addition to the interviews would provide a vivid picture of the how their perceptions impact their work with students in the classroom. Further, interviewing some of the participants’ students would provide an interesting perspective on how the teachers’ intentions are received. Further, from a value standpoint, it would be important to know if the participants’ perceptions based on race and class had any impact on the academic performance of their students.

FURTHER RESEARCH

The limitations highlight most of the areas for further research. In sum, the next steps in this study include a broader participation by African American men who identify as middle class and teach in poor, predominantly African American districts. Such a study should include classroom observations, and student interviews in addition to the participant interviews.

One of the determinations of this study is that the participants have a unique willingness to make that which is problematic unproblematic. In this case, the
problematic is socioeconomic class differences. Shared race had everything to do with their willingness and/or ability to move the class differences to an unproblematic place. Given this premise, it would be interesting to engage in an in-depth investigation on racial identity development with a population similar to that in this study. For those who show the same race-over-class dynamic as the participants in this study, when and how do they acquire this ability? Were there experiences or reflections that contributed? Such a study might also help to determine whether this in fact something that can be learned.

A notable omission in this study is comparison. The study does not present the findings in comparison to potential presented by members of other races. Accordingly, potential next step in this study would involve a comparative study - one in which the researcher examined perceptions and beliefs of White men who identify as middle class and teach in predominantly African American low-income schools in comparison to their African American counterparts. In such a study, I assume that the problematics with class will surface and that the African American participants will present shared race as the mechanism by which they connect with and ultimately overcome the class problematic. Assuming that White middle class men present the problematics with class and that they feel a connection and a degree of efficacy with their low-income African American students it would be interesting to discover what socio-emotional mechanisms they rely on to cancel out the class problematic. The findings of this study might help inform the coursework on the social context of education or a general diversity curriculum.

The primary focus of this study was the perceptions and beliefs of African American men who identify as middle class and teach in low-income predominantly
African American schools. While I chose men because of their underrepresentation in education research, I did not focus on their identity as men working in schools. Instead, I zeroed in on the racial and socioeconomic identities of the teacher participants. There are still questions that remain with respect to the gender identity piece. This is a logical piece that should be considered in a future study.

While it was not a major part of this study, there were several references and connections to segregated schools, both by the participants and the researcher. There seems to be a growing body of research that supports the notion that there is some useful information for teaching Black children in the all Black schools prior to 1957. The research cited in this study (Noddings 1992, 1995; Siddle-Walker, 1993, 2001; Roberts, 2010) highlight the efforts of the Black teachers in Black schools in the pre-Brown era. To be clear, much of this research is presented in the context of care, affirmation, and relationships. Further, teaching particular skills beyond the curriculum was significant in the Noddings and Siddle-Walker pieces. The approaches are not necessarily tied to specific academic learning goals. However, in the context of building relationships in predominantly African American schools, there is certainly some value to deeper investigation. Further, as it relates to this study, the fact there were so many Black men in the teaching profession prior to WWII (Jaynes et al, 1985) and so little focus on their efforts is a missed opportunity of gargantuan proportions. A study on the their work in all Black schools with the same focus seems like a worthy endeavor.

Finally, a major impetus for the focus on the same race, different class element of this study was my experience as an Americorps volunteer at The Blue Elementary School in Boston. It therefore seems appropriate to revisit that experience given what I have learned from this study. To be clear, the teacher and nearly all of the
students in *The Blue Elementary School* classroom were Black. The teacher, whose upbringing and status at the time was unmistakably middle class, treated her students in a way that was far from loving and she often uttered comments that clearly demonstrated her belief that her students were incapable learners. I used this example in the outset of this study because it had such a profound impact on me and raised questions that ultimately became the focal point of this study. Truthfully, and as a result of my findings in this study, I am no closer to understanding why this particular teacher treated her students so badly and held such negative beliefs about them.

The participants in this study expressed negative views of their students in the socioeconomic class context. In the shared race context, their comments reflected profound love and care, much like family members would express from one to another. Regardless of context, the *Blue Elementary School* teacher spoke negatively about her students. As a result of the study, I have a firmer grasp on the same race, different class dynamic. That said, I do not see a strong connection between what I observed in this classroom and what the participants shared. Instead, if the participants’ perceptions of their students represent the “rule”, what I saw and heard in the *Blue Elementary School* represents the “exception”.
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APPENDIX A

Letter of Informed Consent

Dear ______________.

I am a graduate student in the process of completing doctoral studies in the School of Education at Boston College, Boston Massachusetts. I would like to invite you to participate in a research project focused on the experience of African American males teaching in urban schools with large populations of African American students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. I am interested in exploring the impact of differences in student and teacher socioeconomic backgrounds on teacher efficacy and student performance in the classroom. As you may know, much has been written about the impact on teacher-student relationships and interaction of teachers who share racial and cultural characteristics with their students. Fewer studies have focused on the impact socioeconomic status has on these interactions.

As a participant, you would complete a questionnaire, and then participate in a face-to-face interview that will take approximately 60 minutes. You would also be asked to read a transcript of the interview, in order to ensure that I have accurately captured the points you wish to make. Participation in the study is completely voluntary and even if you agree to participate, you can withdraw from the study at any time. Your name or any identifying information will not be included in the final report of the study. Quotes from the transcribed interviews will be included however in order to illustrate broad themes that are part of the findings of the study.

The dissertation that results from this study will be shared with dissertation committee and other appropriate member of the Boston College community. It will also be published in a hard copy and online and housed at the Lynch school of Education. If you have any questions about this study, please call me at 617-407-0673 or email me at ptutwiler@gmail.com. You may also contact my dissertation committee chairperson, Dr. Shirley at shirleyd@bc.edu.

Sincerely,

Patrick A. Tutwiler
617-407-0673
ptutwiler@gmail.com

Please sign below if you are willing to participate in the dissertation project discussed above.

Signature ______________________________________________

Print name________________________________________ Date______
APPENDIX B

Call for Participation

I am seeking participants for a research project focused on the experience of African American males teaching in urban schools with large populations of African American students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Your involvement would include completion of a questionnaire, and a face-to-face or virtual interview that will take approximately 60 minutes. If you are currently teaching in this environment, and would like to be a part of this study, please contact me, Patrick Tutwiler at ptutwiler@gmail.com.
APPENDIX C

**Questionnaire**

Name: ____________________________________________ Date of Birth

Current Teaching Grade/Subject _____________ Current number of years teaching ______

Mothers Occupation ____________________________

Father’s Occupation ______________________________

Education level completed (please indicate the highest level):

**Mother**

- O Elementary (5th)
- O Junior High (8th)
- O High School (12th)
- O College or higher

**Father**

- O Elementary (5th)
- O Junior High (8th)
- O High School (12th)
- O College or higher

How would you describe the socioeconomic status of your family while you were growing up?

- O Low socioeconomic status
- O Lower middle class socioeconomic status
- O Middle class socioeconomic status
- O Upper Middle socioeconomic status

How would you describe yourself currently?

- O Low socioeconomic status
- O Lower middle class socioeconomic status
- O Middle class socioeconomic status
- O Upper Middle socioeconomic status

How would you characterize the population of students in your classroom?

- O Less than 50% African American
- O 50% - 75% African American
- O More than 75% African American

How would you describe the socioeconomic background of students in your classroom?

- O Primarily low socioeconomic status
- O Primarily lower middle class socioeconomic status
- O Primarily middle class socioeconomic status

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. I will be in touch with you to arrange a face-to-face interview.
APPENDIX D

Interview Schedule
Each participant will be asked to respond to each of the questions listed below. They will be asked to expound on topics and/or asked additional questions based on their response.

1. Tell me about your background.

2. What life experiences influenced your decision to become a teacher?

3. Describe your philosophy on teaching. How have your life experiences informed your philosophy?

4. Tell me about the school community and the communities in which your students live. How are they similar to yours? How are they different?

5. How are your students’ day-to-day lives different from the life you experienced growing up? How are they similar?
   a. Given the differences, what has helped you do well in this context?
   b. Given the differences, what obstacles have you had trouble overcoming as urban teacher?

6. What do you find to be the most challenging aspects of your teaching day? What aspects do you find the most gratifying?

7. On what aspect of your profession in this context do you find the most success? Why?
   a. What characteristics or qualities do you believe facilitate your success in the area you identified?
   b. Talk about an incident, experience, or turning point that has shaped your success or made it difficult for you to be successful.

8. How does being African American influence your ability or not to reach your African American students?
   a. Talk about a specific incidents or incidents that shape your view, one way or another.

9. How does teaching African American students differ or not from teaching white students?
   a. Talk about a specific incidents or incidents that shape your view, one way or another.

10. How does teaching poor students differ or not from teaching middle class students?
a. Talk about a specific incidents or incidents that shape your view, one way or another.

11. How do your students’ race/ethnicity and/or socioeconomic background impact their learning? How do they impact your teaching?

12. What else would you like me know or understand about you as a result of teaching black children?
南西 METCO 计划
文化认同小组研讨会 (CIGS) 课程 - 2010

九月
- 欢迎与 METCO 学习室的规则
- CIGS 的意义与目的
  - 阅读：《债务》由 Randall Robinson
  - 视频：ABC NEWS 夜线：债务/赔偿
- 美国国会及“粉刷”历史

十月
- 哥伦布：人与神话
  - 阅读：《哥伦布之前哥伦布》由 Ivan Van Sertima
  - 阅读：《哥伦布与非洲大屠杀：资本主义的崛起》由 John Henrik Clarke
  - 讨论：多米尼加共和国和海地 (Hispanola) 以及哥伦布的影响
  - 两个哥伦布遗产的差异
- 地方考察：新英格兰大学协会大学录取指导
  - 招生博览会
  - 教室演讲者：指导顾问/PSAT, SAT & ACT 研讨会

十一月
- 阅读：《要流行还是要聪明：黑人群体》由 Jawanza Kunjufu
  - “什么才算是聪明？分析成绩差距。”
  - 对历史黑人大学和大学的紧迫性
  - 如何选择合适的学院（头脑风暴你理想的高等教育机构）

十二月
- 阅读：《嘻哈与 MA’AT：一种心理社会价值观分析》由 Jawanza Kunjufu
  - 影响你的人或什么？作文提示
  - 如何影响他人？积极或消极地影响
  - 克万扎，马尔纳·卡伦加的用途
  - 像我们这样的人：群体动态
- 写作个人陈述及其它自传性信件
- Guidance Counselor Personal Statements Workshop

January
- Video: Becoming American: The Chinese in America
- Essay on Becoming American: The Chinese in America, finding similarities between Chinese immigrants and others
- Martin Luther King: Protector of Democracy w/ Reflective Essay
- College Interviews: What Questions Should I Ask and What will be Asked of Me?

February
- Video: NOW: Earth Conservation Corps – Black Youth in Anacostia
- Essay: Comparing Slave Realities to the Contemporary Anacostia Lifestyles
- Joel Freeman: “A White Man’s Journey Through Black History”
- Video: NOW: Earth Conservation Corps – Black Youth in Anacostia
- Essay: Peer Influence and The Earth Conservation Corps

March
- The Heidelberg Project: Tyree Guyton & Urban Beautification
- “I’ve Freed 100s of Slaves and Could’ve Freed 100’s More if They Had Only Known They Were Slaves”
- CIGS Survey and Feedback
- Target College: Responses From Colleges and Testing Services
- Reflective Essays About: Target College: Responses From Colleges and Testing Services
- Sign up to Retake Tests (Juniors)

April
- The Real Story About Early Americans: Pre Columbian America
- Why Do We Know So Little About Native Americans and Where Are They?
- Reflective Essay
- HBCU College Tour

May
- METCO Cup
- Malcolm X: Make It Plain
- Na’im Akbar: Education for Independent Thinking

June
- Essay: Is Literacy Important & Why?
- Prepare for “My Sophomore/ My Junior Year Goals” Presentation
- Essay: Why Are Whites Afraid of Black Literacy?