Making Room:

Creating Space for Black Boys to Tell Their Own Stories

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation examines the lives of four adolescent Black American boys as they relate to education, media, race, and the law. As a case study using elements of narrative research analysis and portraiture, this research offers an in-depth understanding of the individual journeys of these young men as a way to provide an understanding of their adolescent male urban experience. Thus, in this dissertation, I explore the intersections between media-constructed narratives and my participants' educational experiences, as I pursue a better understanding of how the participants view themselves within the construction of their own identities.

Through conversations, this dissertation offers a platform to empower my participants' voices and allow them to tell their stories by answering open-ended questions. For this study, I met with each participant on a biweekly basis to have conversations that lasted between 10 and 30 minutes in a New York City coffee shop in Harlem over a winter period of 3 months. This research showed that through intentional and thoughtful conversations, Black American adolescent boys who live in urban settings conveyed exactly what they need not only to survive,

but also to thrive in a country that systemically puts them at a disadvantage. Finally, this study was framed by W. E. B. Du Bois's research on how Black Americans perceive themselves in the United States; this study utilized his double consciousness theory as its theoretical framework.

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B. G. D.

DEDICATION

To my mother, for being my rock,

to my sister, for your unwavering support,

and

to my Dad, for always telling me to finish strong.

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

> When you empower a Black man, you empower families. You empower his wife. You empower sons. You empower daughters . . . you light up the world.
>
> - Oprah Winfrey, Morehouse College Commencement, 1989

The World Is Yours

There is an art to storytelling. In the New Testament of the Bible, John 1:1 states, “In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God.” In today’s world, stories make up a fundamental quantity of our society and our civilization through movies, literature, music, news broadcastings, religions, and architectural designs. From the paintings in the ancient caves at Lascaux to the bedtime stories told in the bedrooms of children, the inspiration and stimulus of storytelling are visible in all aspects of our lives. Storytelling defines our morals and ethics, our desires and dreams, as well as our prejudices, animosities, and, ultimately, our hate. Stories have made up our history and have guided us into our present in multifaceted ways. It is without much doubt that one must first understand the essence of storytelling before one understands the narratives that spring from it.

In the year of 2018, the narrative of the adolescent Black American male has been linked continuously with words such as “crisis,” “disappearing,” and “vanishing” regarding the Black male’s educational trajectory (Harper, 2006). This case study employed narrative research analysis and portraiture to take an introspective look at how narratives are created and have

labeled adolescent Black American males in relation to the broader understanding of who they are. This study facilitated the use of my chosen methodology to articulate and illustrate the experience of four Black American adolescent males who told their own stories in their own words. The word "media" is defined in this paper as television shows, movies, and news programs (Campbell, 1995; Entman & Rojecki, 2000).

Research Question

The goal in this dissertation is to contextualize and humanize the stories of my Black boy participants in this study without sacrificing research-based information, but ultimately honing in on an extensive truthful look at how their narratives reflect a broader picture. By design, this dissertation is as experiential, gripping, and emotionally involving as possible, with an overall emphasis placed on storytelling. Specifically, in my dissertation I answer the following question:

- What happens when you create space for adolescent Black boys to examine their identity and place in society?

Explanation for My Research

I arrived at this research question because I wanted to elaborate on how the media possibly construct narratives on what it means to be a Black boy in the United States and that relation to academic success (Entman & Rojecki, 2001). I believe that researchers are constantly "trying to fix the problems" for Black boys, yet the problems still persist. I deeply question whether, collectively as researchers, are we really listening or are we acting as if we are all colonizers on an excursion in the Amazon, letting "natives" know what is good for them without asking who they are? What I mean by this is I have seen this approach time and time again in academia when discussing Black boys, and yet Black boys are rarely, if ever, in the room when discussions about them take place. I have never recalled any Black boy eager to discuss a

prestigious academic journal that deliberated his experience, and I never see *enough* Black boys leading conversations about their own stories. Stories make up our history and guide us into our present, but these stories can also be one-dimensional. When one-dimensional, the multiplicities of what Blackness looks like can be flattened and skewed to one dominating image (Hall, 1992). When one has media that globally saturate a very distinct and limited image of what Blackness is and is marketed specifically to adolescent Black males (and to everyone else), the message says to them, "I am constructing an image of who you are, selling it to you, and will present it to you everywhere."

These images are reflected in rappers, athletes, magazines, and billboards, as well as in television shows and movies. Adolescent Black boys become inundated with these images and may possibly begin to perceive that the imagery surrounding them is the ideal (Chung, 2007). It is argued that the ideal is created because of White America's infatuation with the exoticness of urban culture. For example, the rapper The Game is not successful just because he is a great rapper. The Game was constructed because the notion of a big, Black, shirtless, sexual, muscular gang member that could, at any given moment, destroy feeds the stereotypical ideas of White Americans and other racial American groups about what "Blackness and maleness" is. When people who have never been in urban America glimpse the urban Black adolescent males' reality, it validates an already oversaturated and overwhelming preconceived narrative of them (Gross & Livingston, 2002; Morrell, 2007). It satisfies a lust for what the exotic other is because the other forms of Blackness do not feed what allows White supremacy to exist (Hooks, 1992; Schuhman, 2007).

When stereotypical imagery is sold to Black males, they might internalize the image and believe that is the way they should look, talk, act, sag their pants, and hence, it creates a platform

for validity, visibility, and attention (Clay, 2003). So, as this media construct affects Black adolescent boys' images when they are in school, it is quite possible for them to feel invisible and then latch on to these stereotypical identities just to be heard. These images are not necessarily antithetical to achievement, educational success, brilliance, or introspection, but they complicate the desired end. If young Black boys are not taught that they have hybridized identities, that they do not have to make a single decision of who they are, that they can wear their multiple identities all at once, it may lead them to create a lock-step social identity of the Black adolescent male and feel the pressure to live that out. With social identity (Trepte, 2006), a Black adolescent male does not have one "personal self," but reasonably numerous selves that parallel to broadening spheres of an assembly. This means that different situations may cause a Black adolescent male to ponder, sense, and behave a particular way. As other adolescents, they deserve the room to explore these behaviors without being seen as a fixed characteristic of all Black male adolescents (Turner, 1982).

A Case for Qualitative

I chose to do qualitative individual interviews because they allowed me to cover topics related to the participants' personal experiences in relation to understanding what they each thought it means to be an adolescent male, to be Black presently, as well as understanding their previous knowledge about the Black experience in the United States and their journey in discovering these ideas. As mentioned by Rossman and Marshall (2010), personal interviews tend to allow participants to explain themselves in a comfortable setting, but we can only do the best we can to establish a comfortable environment. In this sense, the study benefitted from the intimacy of these types of interviews. Further supporting my decision to hold individual

interviews was the intention to diminish any fear of distrust that might affect each session by trying to make the experience as organic, respectful, and personable as possible.

By using narrative research analysis as my method in conjunction with open-ended questions, my participants were able to flourish and help me understand how aspects of the Black American adolescent male experience, such as classroom experience, racial implications, and the wanting life successes, were all intertwined. I recognized that individual interviews could serve as a space for deliberation and reflection of meanings. Being a Black American adolescent boy and having life experience are essentially collective events. Thus, a qualitative individual interview results in a space for a participant to create and share alternative and, hopefully, safe significances of their experiences in relatively short periods of time. Needless to say, I recognized the need to include the interviewees' voices in as much of the project as possible, and I sought to let my participants shape the nature of the conversation.

Limitations

While I feel the interviews conducted in this study created an extraordinary analysis of what many real aspects of the Black adolescent male experience in the urban context are, I also recognize that there are limitations to these data and they are not representative of all Black adolescent males. First, there were only four participants in my study. If I were to expand or continue this study, I would want to include more participants. I also found that because the teacher chose my participant pool, I was led to the question: What were some of the other experiences of the students at the school? I did not engage with any participants who were unsupportive of ideologies or who viewed education, teachers, or their curriculum in a completely negative light. I do not interpret my participants' positive response as unanimous support of a Black narrative or educational experience within the school.

If I were to recreate or continue this study with a more balanced participant pool, I would likely take the advice of one of my colleagues who has also engaged in extensive qualitative research: "talk about the way that we see race as more than just the way we understand Black boys," and discuss how students "see race playing out in [the] classroom . . . and outside of the classroom and in what ways do [students] think about race as a whole" in a way that is "less theoretical." In addition, I also recognize that several other factors must be accounted for when considering an expanded participant pool. My participants were students of a teacher who was educated from a historically Black college and whom I know personally. I would be interested to know whether my experience would have been different if I were not working with students who were at one time taught by a friend.

Finally, I also recognize that my participant pool was comprised of all boys. I do not necessarily consider this to be a limitation, especially given that this study was a study on Black adolescent boy's narratives. However, I understand that this may also reflect a general concept of putting Black boys first, not Black girls, and only highlighting them in their plight for academic and professional success. As such, Black women and girls are the center of my life and my participants' lives, and so to honor these women and girls, every chapter of this dissertation is prefaced with a quote from a Black woman.

The Storytellers

In the tradition of storytelling, oral stories were passed down from generation to generation. No one can truly distinguish when the first story was essentially told. We can ask: When did it happen? Where did it happen? Maybe it was in the dark, mysterious shadows on the hallow ground of a cave? Perhaps the first story told was the chapter of Genesis of the Bible or maybe in the Sūrat al-Fātiḥah of the Quran.

We may never know. But it is to be believed that a derivation of storytelling may have begun as a vindication for failure. Imaginably, stories could have been used to create tranquility to diminish the fears or doubts of the household. As families assembled with other families and formed into kinfolks, the storyteller—who was good at telling historical, heroic, or important monumental events of the community—gained them to have influence, respect, and power. People found them fascinating and started to value and listen to them. The ministers, the judges, and the kings were possibly the earliest to use this art successfully in the history of storytelling. To have order, stories had to be told to condition the masses to follow. If the storyteller was not imprisoned or killed, he was respected. He could sometimes effortlessly find an audience who was enthusiastically ready to consume every electrifying moment of knowledge in their stories. These stories were then shared with others in faraway lands. When people would travel, the stories journeyed with them. When they came home, they would bring with them exciting new tales of exotic lands and nations.

Storytelling in these ancient times were considered important. Before men or women could even write, they had to retain information verbally to learn anything. Because of this, someone had to listen. One of the oldest stories is that of Gilgamesh, which predates Homer's writing by 1500 years and mirrors the actions of a legendary Sumerian king. The earliest identified documentation on the basis of storytelling can be found in Egypt, when the sons of Cheops told their father variations of different stories. The origin of storytelling exposes how stories come in a diverse range. From mythologies, farfetched legends, fairy tales and fables, haunting spirits, heroic narratives, and extravagant explorations, these stories were articulated and repeated continuously. These stories also reflected the astuteness and knowledge of early human society. There are stories often recycled to clarify important but often confusing events

and disasters in nature in those early times such as great fires, storms, and floods. It was common for people to trust in the narratives of gods, which conjoined people into mutual heritages, principles, and theories.

The Story of Seven

We were in the midst of the beating pulse of the winter of 2017 and it was ice cold. A winter storm had just concluded, following with what seemed to be a well-deserved Monday of sunshine. It was Martin Luther King's Day and I received a text message from my friend Naeta, asking if I was available to go for a walk with her and her dog Seven. Although it was cold, I was really excited for some sunshine, so I agreed. Within the hour, I heard the doorbell ring. I answered the door, and there was Naeta and Seven. Naeta identifies as White, 5'1, and super consciousness of her positionality in every space she holds, but at first glance one would not assume she would own a dog like Seven.

Seven is Black, a Pit Bull mix, and all muscle. When you try to walk him, he is actually walking you—well, really dragging you. So there we were, walking into Central Park. There are so many dogs in Central Park, but very seldom do I ever see Pit Bulls. A lot of negativity surrounds Pit Bulls, with many, mostly in the media, saying they are mean, aggressive, and not trainable. Pit Bulls have a history of being used as "fight dogs," a way to make a profit for those who own and train them to be vicious. However, because of this connotation, it has made many people automatically fearful of them.

As Naeta and I walked with Seven, I noticed how every time we got close to another dog, whether big or small, or children of any age, Naeta became Seven's translator. She began to speak in high squeaky voice and said things such as "We are a sweet puppy who just wants to play" or "We are a friendly puppy who wants to make friend." I raised an eyebrow to Naeta

because I did not quite understand at first what she was doing. I had grown up with dogs my entire life and I understood that Seven was not even a year old and had a lot of energy. He loved to lick someone's hands and, with more training, he would be the perfect companion for anyone. However, then I noticed a family with three young children and two standard cream-colored Poodles, the parents walking them immediately went to the other side of the road before Naeta could get close enough to speak in her squeaky voice. In that moment, I got it.

Naeta, as Seven's guardian, was trying in her own way to soften her dog's image and make him less subjected to the assumptions she knew he would face, no matter what, with a squeaky voice. She knew that Pit Bulls are seen as ferocious animals with little value in the mainstream. She knew that if she had not adopted Seven when she did, he was at a higher risk of being put to sleep over other breeds. She knew that because of his black fur coat, the assumptions of those who didn't know her puppy would only be enhanced. And she knew that as much as she tried to soften her puppy's image to others, she still had to protect him from other dogs who could start trouble with him. She had to be ready to defend him when anyone said it was Seven's fault.

In 2013, Michael B. Jordan did an interview with Oprah Winfrey to promote his movie *Fruitvale Station*, where he famously said, "Black males, we are America's Pit Bull, we are labeled vicious, inhumane, and left to die on the street." In no way am I or would I ever compare Pit Bulls to Black boys. However, for Black boys, if their value is in constant question, whenever they move in a society that systemically puts them on a track that either eradicates them or lets them be eradicated by others, how can they survive? When the media paint false narratives about them, when the education system erases their history and culture, and when loopholes are found within the law to put them away, what does that do to their livelihood? Naeta was not just

softening Seven's image; she was telling his story to others who crossed paths with him. In 5-second spurts, she was giving information about Seven that shifted the narrative, with the understanding and assumption about who this Black Pit Bull puppy was. In the same way, I hope this research, line by line, will begin to shift an understanding of Black adolescent boys in America.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

> Black boys became criminalized. I was in constant dread for their lives, because they were targets everywhere. They still are.
>
> — Toni Morrison

This chapter is a literature review of research centered around Black adolescent male life organized in six subfields: Black Boys and Media, Black Boys and Double Consciousness, Black Boys and Urban Education, Black Boys and Racism, Black Boys and Institutions, and Black Boys and the Law. The review of literature is intended to offer those who have a limited or a wide range of depth of knowledge on the topic a consumable overview of a tremendously rich and diverse body of research. It reviews an important set of materials, characterizing many of the essential approaches and themes that distinguish scholarship on Black males as a whole.

Black Boys and Media

When I was a 17-year-old adolescent who was then obsessed with listening to Jay-Z's 1997 debut album *Reasonable Doubt* and Nas's 1994 debut album *Illmatic*, I realized that these two albums inspired me to have more for myself in my life. I remember watching various media and motion pictures such as *Juice, Boyz in the Hood, Menace II Society, Higher Learning, The Wood, Boomerang, Love Jones, Soul Food,* and *The Best Man*, as well as television shows like *A Different World, The Cosby Show*, and *The Wire.* They gave me such a broad view of the Black American culture. When I think about adolescent Black boys trying to understand who they are

and how to navigate the world, I think about listening to those two albums as a 17-year-old boy. I felt powerful, unafraid, and enlightened. I felt as though no one could stop me.

The media space is a contested one (Entman, 1990). There is a corporate vision that tries to construct the media, but consumers underestimate their resistance in that space. Hip Hop, for example, is a resistant medium (Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002). We see some of the first and most powerful spokespeople for young Black adolescent males through the music genre of Hip Hop. As educators, we need to help young Black adolescent males both understand how to read the negativity of the media and also see themselves as media producers. One way of doing that is reinforcing the importance of media studies and media literacy education. With media studies (Ott & Mack, 2009) being the foundational grounds of research in the media realm, scholars such as Mark Poster, Siva Vaidhyanathan, Mary Ann Doane, Guobin Yang, and Jelani Cobb have all reinforced the argument that media scholarship needs to always have a permanent seat at the academic table. Media literacy (Potter, 2004, 2008), however, is the skill set of being able to think critically of the media one receives day by day and be able to articulate the messaging behind it. Correspondingly, Renee Hobbs, professor of communications at the University of Rhode Island, argued, "with the rise of digital media, there are a range of important new media literacy skills, where we must consider issues of personal and social identity, the complex interplay between what's private and what's public and legal and ethical issues" (Hobbs & Jensen, 2009, p. 9).

Black boys should be taught that being a media producer, as well as media consumer, is part of their self-realization and an empowering academic enterprise. The media of the 20th century was largely an education of consumption (Entman, 1990). Media consumers read books, magazines, and billboards and memorized their content. The media of the 21st century is largely

an education of production (Ott & Mack, 2009). As members of society, we must ask ourselves: How do we reestablish certain norms and ideas that were taken away from Black Americans during years of culture consumption (Entman & Rojecki, 2000)? What are the ways in which they can produce differently? As members of society, and educators in particular, we must create spaces where young adolescent Black boys are engaged in the production of their own media and thus their own narratives. There must be an alignment of positive reinforcement and notions of success tied to the production of these narratives—and they will realize this success when they witness the number of views and positive comments they receive through various social media. We must make sure they are taught the skills they need to not only navigate the world, but also to shape and change their future world.

We need to reconceptualize our thinking and view adolescent Black boys more as young media producers and reimagine education in ways that can have them engage with their own stories and help them create new ones. There are educators who are doing this work which opens space for is a new wave of hope for the future for Black adolescent boys (Sealey-Ruiz & Lewis, 2011a). While the current hegemonic structure is not an immutable future (Entman, 1990), the future is up to Black people to design for themselves and think about how to apply their strengths. As Black people, our collective resilience and the power of our stories are ways that we can articulate and entertain, teach about and resist oppression, and engage in a sustained resistance to the status quo that has been written for us. The musicality in the lyrics of our language as we convey our words are undeniable. These are elements of Black culture that have both displayed the strength of Black people and made Black people strong.

Mainstream media is evolving and is definitely not perfect (Livingstone, 2002). A study that targeted bias in television news stories depicting violent perpetrators in Chicago noted:

> . . . accused Black criminals were usually illustrated by glowering mug shots or by footage of them being led around in handcuffs, their arms held by uniformed White policemen. None of the accused violent White criminals, during the week, were shown in mug shots or in physical custody. (Entman, 1990, p. 337)

Contrary to the stories that are told about us, Black people are not solely victims. We are a historically and present-day marginalized group surviving in a network of power that is constraining and limiting. Scholars on Black males (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Harper & Harris, 2012; Kirkland, 2013; Noguera, 2013) have insisted that Black boys are not the problem, but that society and its systems are to blame for the persistent condition of Black lives being undervalued. Many scholars on Black boys and others believe that the system (including the influence of the media) is a barrier we need to overcome. It is also believed that if we do not include Black boys in the transformation of media, the transformation will be incomplete. Media engage young people in the discourse that matters to them, and it becomes transformative when they transform (Kirkland, 2013) and witness themselves doing so. This point of transformation opens up the potential for an intersection between intellect and activism. The media they produce empowers them.

Black Boys and Double Consciousness

> I sit with Shakespeare, and he winces not. Across the color line I move arm and arm with Balzac and Dumas, where smiling men and welcoming women glide in gilded halls. From out of the caves of evening that swing between the strong-limbed Earth and the tracery of stars, I summon Aristotle and Aurelius and what soul I will, and they come all graciously with no scorn nor condescension. So, wed with Truth, I dwell above the veil. Is this the life you grudge us, O knightly America? Is this the life you long to change into the dull red hideousness of Georgia? Are you so afraid lest peering from this high Pisgah, between Philistine and Amalekite, we sight the Promised Land?

This quote is perhaps W. E. B. Du Bois in one of his finest moments, where he shows that he knew the rule of cultural capital, and as a Black scholar, can summon, control, elevate,

and command the greats of Western civilization and literature and align them in the struggle of Blackness. I love that quote as much as I love the quiet of the night. The world is loud. The quiet creates a space that allows me to be me, the man who I am, by myself, in my skin, authentically and unapologetically secure, and within my four bedroom walls. It is a place where I am truly alone, in my room, and where I can find peace and solitude for myself within my own identity. During the day, I am in constant questioning with myself. Who am I in the eyes of the other? Do they perceive me the way I perceive myself? Am I conveying my words in a way that is deemed fit and aligned with intelligence? Do they truly see me? Do they hear me? Does my existence matter or am I simply camouflaged in the background? These thoughts can be exhausting but they can be defined as double consciousness—"The sense of looking at one's self through the eyes of others" (Du Bois, 1903, p. 3). Du Bois defined double consciousness as a theory that he first explored in the 1903 publication, *The Souls of Black Folk*. He described double consciousness as a distinct sense of feeling, as if the identity is split into numerous portions, creating it as a challenging experience to partake in. Du Bois contextualized this experience within the framework of race relations in America. He argued that because American Blacks have existed in a civilization that has historically suppressed, intimidated, and undervalued them; it has become problematic for them to amalgamate their Black identity with their American identity (Edles & Appelrouth, 2010).

I think about double consciousness when talking about negative media narratives such as the condemnation of the intellectual capabilities of Black American adolescent males in urban context. In an article titled "The Media Narrative of Black Men in America Is All Wrong," the author Jamal Hagler (2015) stated:

> More Black men are going to college than ever before in our nation's history. Black men make up the largest share of people of color in the U.S. Armed Forces. And Black fathers living with their children are more likely to take on everyday child care duties than fathers in other demographic groups. Yet many portrayals of Black men in the media continue to focus on the negative. Unfortunately, these outdated stereotypes neglect the breadth and depth of the lives of American Black men, who have many roles—including father, husband, mentor and community leader, just to name a few. (p. 1)

Double consciousness cannot be dissected without deeply interrogating the perceptions of Black American males at large, their views of their own selves. Du Bois (1903) said, "the history of the American Negro is the history of this strife,—this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self" (p. 41). It is understood that we have a deep history in this country that has labeled people who live in subalternate spaces (urban spaces) as being the underbelly of the culture in American society (Burkhalter & Castells, 2009). That is just how it has always been. So when those spaces were inhabited by Black Americans, along with other populations, they too were labeled as the underbelly of American culture (Wood, 2013).

Du Bois (1903) candidly said in *The Souls of Black Folk*, "Herein lies the tragedy of the age: not that men are poor,—all men know something of poverty; not that men are wicked,—who is good? not that men are ignorant,—what is Truth? Nay, but that men know so little of men" (p. 226). The issue is that for those other populations, Whiteness and White skin allow them to escape the underbelly over time. So, as they are able to climb up American capitalist society and escape the trappings of the nuances of urban America, they can become successful, make a great salary, move to other communities, and erase the fact that at some point they were in a subalternate, urban space. What happens with Black people, specifically, is that there is no way they can divorce themselves from their Black skin. And so, they have a mergence of being situated in urban spaces and urban settings that are automatically viewed and understood as

being the worst situation to be in. They have skin they cannot erase, and because of that, some may believe they lack an intellectual capability or are not smart, which has to be continuously countered in the histories that date all the way back to slavery (Berlin & Philip, 1991).

Du Bois illustrates this as Black artisan in *The Souls of Black Folk*. Burdened with this situation, the American Black person is then caught between wanting to make a life that mirrors his self and his environment, and then a life that is profitable and satisfactory to a broader population. He is torn, but ultimately has to make a choice to survive henceforth; he is engaged in a combat of dual goals, but is still faced on both sides with the negative perceptions of the broader society (Edles & Appelrouth, 2010). By making a life that mirrors his self and his environment, he will be deemed as low-class and fruitless; by making a life by doing work that is satisfactory to the broader society, he may become more successful, but fails to express who he truly is. This then can translate into a rejection of one's self and become ultimately self-hate. When applying this specifically to Black urban adolescent males, they have a pool of negative perspectives that condition them to be torn, and so by just being born, they inherit all of this and then go into the school system. Therefore, if Black adolescent males are perceiving themselves as not being successful in schools because they inherited what society has inscribed on them, the work then becomes not only how do they achieve in schools, but also how do they deflect all the blows that are coming from society in conjunction with the fact that they still have to achieve in these schools and ultimately make a living? Du Bois (1903) reinforced this thought when he said:

> It is not enough for the Negroes to declare that color-prejudice is the sole cause of their social condition, nor for the white South to reply that their social condition is the main cause of prejudice. They both act as reciprocal cause and effect, and a change in neither alone will bring the desired effect. Both must change, or neither can improve to any great extent. Only by a union of intelligence and sympathy across the color-line in this critical period of the Republic shall justice and right triumph. (p. 188)

To understand DuBois is to understand the theory. It is to not only hear his enormously boisterous voice on a platform of passion, but to look past Du Bois's scholarly work as brilliant literature and into his global politics tracing other affiliations (homeland, heritage) that refuse to perish and continually ascending—even where they seem no longer to belong (Cooppan, 2005). The theory of double consciousness is a forever burden and a seeming responsibility to Black adolescent males to carry these perceptions. This can have a serious impact on their ability to be successful in traditional schools and ultimately in adulthood . . . that even in the quiet of the night one can never truly escape.

Black Boys and Urban Education

There are just some things we have to accept as being fact and not fiction. As I write this review of literature, it is important to position myself because I am writing this paper in its entirety on Black American adolescent male narratives in an urban context in New York City that has the most segregated public school system in the United States. In 2014, Black and Latino students in the state had the highest concentration in intensely segregated public schools (less than 10% White enrollment) (Kucsera & Orfield, 2014). According to *The Schott 50 State Report on Public Education and Black Males*, one in four Black male high school dropouts is incarcerated or otherwise institutionalized on an average day in the United States. Among the male high school dropouts who were incarcerated between the ages of 16 and 24 in the years of 2006 and 2007, 22% of them were Black. Nationally, only 52% of Black males graduate from high school in 4 years, whereas 78% of non-Hispanic White males graduate in 4 years. According to a recent report disseminated by the National Center for Education Statistics (Snyder, de Brey, & Dillow, 2016), the national average Black American 12th grade student reads at the same level as White 8th grade students.

The current narrative surrounding urban education is synonymous with Black male education post-1970. It is a troubled one because it has been fraught with the conjuncture of two forces (Noguera, 2003). These forces include the decline of tax bases in cities and the under-investment in educational systems (Toldson, 2008). Pedro Noguera (2003) stated, "The effects of growing up in poverty, particularly for children raised in socially isolated, economically depressed urban areas, warrants greater concern, especially given that 1 out of every 3 Black children is raised in a poor household" (p. 435). This overtly counters the ideology that education is a way to middle-class livelihood (Davis & Harper 2012). It is actually a precipitous nationwide decline in the investment in urban education and it also has a connection in the problem of mass incarceration (Western & Petit, 2010). The two are not mutually exclusive in so many ways. If the first system fails, the second one is certainly there to insinuate itself into many boys' lives (Sullivan, 2012). To put it in the proper perspective, because of media-constructed narrative, people think of urban education as the biggest city school districts in the country (Milner, 2012), with examples such as the 1995 blockbuster film *Dangerous Minds*.

If one looks at the Council of Great City Schools, the data reveals there are more than 60 districts that are considered urban and more than 35,000 students. Together, they have about seven million of the 50 million students in America that attend K-12 schools in the United States. Less than 15% of the U.S. population attend urban schools, so it is possible it can be an education in the city, but it normally means an education for any group that is considered an "other" (Lewis, Simon, Uzzell, Horwitz, & Casserly, 2010). Thus, Black Americans, Latinos, and poor people all get clumped into this group. So when examining urban education, it intersects with a comment made by Dr. Andre Perry in the Hechinger Report when he said, "Black boys and young men know all too well how it feels to be a problem" (p. 1). Many might

ask: What does it mean to be a problem or be deemed as problematic? When one gets classified as urban in the discourse of American education, one is classified as the problem (Mauer, 1999). Why are Black American males categorized as a problem (Darensbourg, Perez, & Blake, 2010)? Schools that are classified as urban often have fewer resources; they often have high-track classes where some classes are read as high-achieving (Ballou, 1996). Many times students of color, particularly Black American males, are not in those types of classes (Scott, Allen, & Lewis, 2014); Sealey-Ruiz & Lewis, 2011b). There are many conversations about the conditions that are created around the illusion of urban education, but there is a need to move past euphemism and start talking about an education of exclusion and inclusion (Olgetree, 1976).

Black Boys and Racism

In the current moment in which we live, the idea of White supremacy as a way of thinking about education values, ideals, beliefs, practices, norms, and control in any number of institutions or practices in our society is valuable, but perhaps not as valuable as it once used to be (Gilborn, 2005; Hayes & Juárez, 2012). There is a powerful and persistent attachment in the U.S. culture to the idea of Black inferiority (Hochschild,1995) that is not only promulgated, but some people in this society who identify as being White also embrace it, which then saturates the entire culture (Oliver, 1989). This becomes a very important aspect of what the term *systemic racism* is.

Coined by sociologist Joe Feagin (2006), systemic racism is a prevalent way of illuminating the implications of race and racism, which include past, present, and future. In the introduction to his book *Racist America: Roots, Current Realities, and Future Reparations*, Feagin wrote, “Systemic racism includes the complex array of antiblack practices, the unjustly gained political-economic power of whites, the continuing economic and other resource

inequalities along racial lines, and the white racist ideologies and attitudes created to maintain and rationalize white privilege and power" (p. 6).

This is a period in which we are living in instances of numerous complexities (Walton, Priest, & Paradies, 2013). We lived in a time where movies are created to highlight and bring to light the injustices of Black American males and Black Americans such as Ryan Coogler's *Fruitvale Station*, Steve Mcqueen's *12 Years a Slave*, or Ava DuVernay's *13th*, all of which tell the stories of past and present injustices in this country. However, in this same timeframe, we have inaugurated the first Black American president of the United States of America—or in another example, this is the same timeframe in which Thurgood Marshall concluded his 24-year tenure as the first Black Supreme Court justice in the very same year Rodney King was brutalized and the injustice spurred the Los Angeles riots. These contrasts continue, however, in an article entitled "The Obama Presidency and the Question of Social Justice: A Critical Analysis of the Meaningful Milestone," in which Lawrence Hanks (2009) stated:

> On January 20, 2009, essentially 200 years after the enactment of the embargo against the slave trade, 40 years after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., Barack Hussein Obama became the 44th President of the United States of America. Using the one-drop rule for racial designation, which has prevailed in the USA for most of its history, America had elected its first Black President. Using the new standard created by the U.S. Census Bureau in 2000, America now had its first commonly acknowledged bi-racial President. All can agree that Obama is not "wholly white,"—he is a "man of color" and therein lays the milestone; someone other than a white male was President of the United States of America. Analysts on the right were quick to declare that the US had overcome the challenge of race and the term "post-racial" abounded—from their perspective, race as a barrier to social justice had clearly been overcome. While acknowledging the achievement and progress of the major milestone, analyst on the left adamantly rejected the term "post-racial" and argued that race still mattered with respect to one's life chances of success. (p. 1)

Now in the Trump era, this period is a flash in time where the afterlife of White supremacy is very much present. But it is also a moment in which the idea of Black inferiority, specifically Black male inferiority, is nested in a much more complex and complicated structure

(Kennington, 2014; Noguera, 2003; Plous & Williams, 1995). There are people in power who stand on American stages to say on the subject of Black adolescent boys that they prefer to sell drugs than to succeed educationally. As Sharon Moore (1995) pointed out, “Black male’s environment (i.e., socioeconomic situation) can play a major role in his choice to use or sell drugs. All too often the victim is blamed for his condition without any further investigation of the factors that influenced his decision to participate in the behavior” (p. 114). Therefore, generalizing and condemning the Black adolescent male experience take away from the numerous success stories that happen every day and that take place against enormous structural odds and impediments (Goings, 2015).

This then leads into the question of structural racism not just in schools (Blaisdell, 2015) but also in prison (Fagan & Kupich, 2011; Heitzeg, 2009), in the job market (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2003), and in housing (Seitles, 1998). Structural racism becomes a question of individual ambition, individual success, and ideology—for example, the notion of education as not relational, that it is a matter of individual drive, dedication, and commitment, and completely ignores some of these structural dimensions while dehumanizing at the same time in an obstinate way (Buchanon, Brown, & Murphy, 2014). Education should be the most deeply humanistic practice in the culture—a sharing of an imparting of knowledge valued (Kirk, 1999). If conversations around ideologies and ideological practices do not live in a society in which the best pedagogical practices are encouraged, supported, and nourished by our policies, one can argue that it as problematic (Harper & Harris, 2012; Harris & Wood, 2014).

If our policies, which include testing for an individual’s merit through standardized testing and the normalization of education with discipline as the norm, (McNeil, 2000; Nirje; 1969; Rothstein, 2004), then the normative baselines that organize the way we think about and

practice education in this society has a strong anti-human aspect that is a part of what is giving power to neoliberalism (Biebricher, 2014). Education is being used as a tool to prepare not for citizenship and participation in democratic institutions, not for political literacy (Cassel & Lo, 1997), and not for cultural literacy (Hirsch, 2001) that would allow Black adolescent boys to live and flourish as human beings (Kirkland, 2013). Rather, it is being used to prepare them for either a market or expendables to consign to margins of the economy to make license plates and chairs for a pittance, as inmates in a privately-owned prison (Goff, Eberhardt, Jackson, & Williams, 2008; Goff, Jackson, Lewis-DiLeone, Culotta, & Ditomasso, 2014; Kirkland, 2013).

Black Boys and Institutions

It is my personal belief that no Black adolescent boy should come into his first day of high school and see himself as a failure (Emdin, 2012). As Emdin argued:

> Part of our collective failure to meet the needs of Black males is a fear of acknowledging that they are always being compared to a white middle-class norm from which they often differ. This culture of fear, stoked by political correctness, only serves to hamper efforts to meet their needs and will inevitably maintain achievement gaps. (p. 13)

Which leads me to this point: America was founded on a utopian ideology (Chordas, 2010) that included institutions such as schools to support and educate its next generation (Harber et al., 2012). In *Globalization and Education: Education Perspectives*, Cameron McCarthy and Greg Dimitriades (2001) argued the “shopping mall” theory, which is used as an approach to multicultural education. As the authors stated:

> On Monday of a given week, students begin their unit on Native Americans. They learn that Native Americans lived in teepees, used tomahawks to scalp white folks, wore headdresses, and danced together around a fire before eating their meal of blue corn and buffalo meat. By Wednesday of the same week, literature is added as an important cultural artifact; therefore, one or two poems (sometimes including Longfellow’s “Hiawatha”) represent tribal life of the past and present. By Friday, students take a trip to The Museum of the American Indian with its unsurpassed collection of artifacts and carry

> home their own renditions of teepees, tomahawks, or head dresses that they made during their art period. (p. 195)

As with Black adolescent boy's culture, like multicultural education, its essence or intelligence should never be compromised in a classroom or included in the classroom in a "shopping mall" approach. I am led to believe that an institution (Franković, 1970) such as a school within a utopian ideology is based in love, trust, mutual respect, and unlimited resources. An institution such as school does not seemingly judge what a person looks like or how a person speaks to be then viewed as a problem or a threat (White et al., 1998).

Many institutions around us exist in this present time that attempt to inhabit those ideologies and lift up Black adolescent boys (Haddix & Sealey-Ruiz, 2012; Noguera, 2003). Some of those institutions may not even be schools; they may be homes, churches (Drezner, 2013), afterschool programs, or mentoring programs (Jackson, Sealey-Ruiz, & Watson, 2014). If we only look at institutions as the hegemonic institutions (Prantl, 2014), then we miss some of the subcultures already in our society that are already successful (Flacks & Thomas, 2007). Noguera in *The Trouble with Black Boys* (2003) stated:

> Throughout the country, Black children are overrepresented in special education programs. Those most likely to be placed in such programs are overwhelmingly Black, male, and poor (Harry, 1996). The situation in special education mirrors a larger trend in education for African Americans generally and males in particular. Rather than serving as a source of hope and opportunity, some schools are sites where Black males are marginalized and stigmatized (Meier, 1989). In school, Black males are more likely to be labeled with behavior problems and as less intelligent even while they are still very young (Hilliard, 1991). Black males are also more likely to be punished with severity, even for minor offenses, for violating school rules (Sandler, Wilcox, & Everson, 1985, p. 16) and often without regard for their welfare. They are more likely to be excluded from rigorous classes and prevented from accessing educational opportunities that might otherwise support and encourage them (Oakes, 1985, p. 53). Consistently, schools that serve Black males fail to nurture, support, or protect them. (p. 436)

When looking at the justice system, there are economic, social, and psychological impacts (DeAngelis, 2014; Goff et al., 2014). The psychological impact of the criminal justice

system is making 13- and 14-year-old Black boys feel as if they are at war and combat within their own country (Harper, 2009). Black adolescent boys in urban settings can be surveyed and stopped by police officers at any time (Fagan, 2010), and this may happen to them before they even come to school (Fagan & Wilkinson, 1998; Lassiter, 1995; Rolland, 2011). The question then presents itself as: What kind of mindset will they come into the classroom with (Thompson & Shamberger, 2015)? What type of life possibilities does a boy then have for himself in a society where he can only be 13 years old, and instead of being someone's child, he is seen as a statistic or a criminal (Goff et al., 2014; Rios, 2006)? The psychological impact this has on all Black adolescent boys has been consistently underexamined and underexplained (Horne & Kiselica, 1999). Even for those who have the resilience to fight against these impacts, exhaustion comes, along with a social distrust (Biafora, Taylor, Warheit, Zimmerman, & Vega, 1993).

It is psychologically impossible to start a new dawn of the day in schools with a blank slate with Black adolescent boys and how they see themselves in relation to society (Noguera, 2003). The American justice system has criminalized (Mauer, 1999) these young men at a very young age, and that has an impact on them primarily when they miss role models such as fathers, grandfathers, brothers, and uncles who have been seemingly incarcerated for unjust reasons and elongated periods of time (Mandara, Murray, & Joyner, 2005). This then creates a multiplicity disjuncture in a way that a community is able to transmit its culture when there are so many extracted (More & Elkavich, 2008; Mauer, 2011). For example, this can be seen in other societies as a result of war, where a huge fragment of the population is removed for a war (Barbara, 2006) that cannot be completely explained. That reality has become the Black American narrative in the United States, with Black males seemingly fighting a war within their own country (Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007) and losing their men, thus hindering the pursuit to

transmit culture and resilience to these boys (Anderson, 1991; Cooper & Cooper, 2015; Smith, 2005; Toldson, 2008).

Some say the legal system has failed Black people (Starr & Rehavi, 2013; Yablon, 2014). There is a nation of Black men behind bars that has surpassed the population of small countries, which then transcends into an economic consequence of taking away another income (Western & Wildeman, 2009), which leads to a reduction in resources in the homes and the overall communities. When understanding the criminal justice system, we also have to attach larger things at play. We have just completed an era of a Black president, and the presence of Barack Obama ushered in the perception that we are living in a post-racial era (Dawkins, 2010; Janis, 2009; Smith, 2005; Tesler & Sears, 2010). So if we are generally perceiving we are living in a post-racial era, at the same time we are not troubling the fact that when we are talking about White supremacy (Gilborn, 2006), we are talking about the evolution of the idea of how a White middle-class ideal (Perry, 2001) becomes the norm by which everyone is judged (Crozier et al., 2008).

White supremacy is not saying that there are Ku Klux Klan members everywhere. It is saying that everyone is being judged by a White middle-class ideal (Mehler, 1999). So if we are living in a post-racial era, untroubled the fact that everyone is looking through the lens of the White middle-class model, that White middle-class ideal is not only happening in classrooms through teaching. It also becomes an aesthetic (Ferber, 2007; Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009; Jorgensen, 1995; Lundy, 2003). If a young Black man walks down the street and we perceive him through a White middle-class lens, then his aesthetic alone becomes a symbol of criminality with him not having to say a word (Rios, 2006; Welch, 2007). And if that is being judged through a post-racial lens (Janis, 2009), it then says racism is over. If one is anything other than

the ideal, then one is criminalized; and if one is continuously criminalized by one's look, then that becomes the first step to being ushered into the criminal justice system (Curry, 2009). Thus, there are webs at play that entangle us all, but we are being told in this current era that those webs do not exist and the spider is only hanging in thin air (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2009). However, like Charlotte, every spider has a web.

Black Boys and the Law

When looking at the law (Kreene, 2010), it is relevant in addressing the structural and cultural barriers of Black adolescent boys (Dowd, 2013). However, this experience that many young Black males in urban spaces have with the law is usually a punitive one (Kennington, 2014; Yates & Fording, 2005). It is an encounter with the criminal punishment system (Feeley, 1979; Savelsberg, 1999), and not about the recognition of, or the vindication for, their rights—and it certainly does not align with the human rights guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to all human beings on the planet to education (Wahl, 2013). Thus, there needs to be recognition of the limitations of the law (McAdams & Hotelling, 1981). This is a political problem that is centered on and around power (Peffley, Hurwitz, & Sniderman, 1997). It is a problem that can be addressed in part through the law, but the kind of analysis and action that are necessary to highlight the nature of the problem and combat it are political and not legal (Levinson & Sachs, 2014).

The law as we know it, on a grander scale if looking broadly at the laws of the land, stands as a set of documents and principles that are equitable (Lasswell & McDougal,1943; Levinson, Sutton, & Winstead, 2009). The issues are not in the law itself all the time, but there are exceptions. The issues are oftentimes in the execution of the law rather the implementation of the law (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). For example, if the law says no parking in the handicapped

space without a proper sticker, and a police officer drives by a car in that space without a sticker, it is execution, not implementation if the officer continues to drive on rather than give a ticket. Thus, the law itself exists, but in absence of context, it stands as a sort of equitable practice (Solorzano, 1997). The issues then become:

1. Who is responsible for the enforcement of the law?
2. What are the mindsets of people who are in charge of executing law in certain spaces?

Society must ask which people in power on the ground will ultimately go out into the communities and enforce the law (Freund, 1904; Sax, 1964)? In New York City in particular, the New York Police Department has been heavily criticized for often not having their police officers reflect the communities they police (Chevigny, 1969). Usually, they do not come from those communities, and recruitment does not exist in the communities of the people they are policing (Wilson, 2014). If people in power have a mindset that when they go into work, they are entering an "amazon of the unknown," conflict arises because they then perceive their job as serving humanity while others see it as dealing with a community of people who act like wild animals (Holdaway, 1991; Stone, 1934). People must understand that laws can be enforced, but the law itself has power to a certain limit (Yankwich, 1950). The issue then becomes: Who does one perceive (Fagan, Braga, Brunson, & Pattavina, 2016) to be the perceptual person breaking the laws, and how does one perceive oneself as a person enforcing the law (Davis, 1998)?

This then brings together politics and the law. We cannot understand the law on the ground without understanding the politics of law (Rudovsky, 1994). The law is many things, but one thing that it is a continuation of politics of other means and other terms (Jensen, Gerber, & Mosher, 2004). We live in a society in which our political culture is organized very much around

the language of the law (McClain, 1993; Rose, 1991). The rhetorical commitments to such things as the rule of law and equality of the law are commitments with which many are familiar. But certainly the experiences of many Black American adolescent boys consider that the promise of the law, which would include them in the "We the People" discussed in the Constitution, is highlighted more in its breach than in its fulfillment (Gaines, 1996; hooks, 1992; Kelley, 1996). The political task of the Supreme Court, as labeled by many who have opposed the court in the last 25 years, is that it must roll back the gains of the Civil Rights movement (Amsterdam & Bruner, 2000; Davis & Graham, 1995). If that is true, then we live in a society where the highest court in the land has—for example, within the context of the death penalty (Epstein, 1992)-had no problem in collectively accepting and acknowledging it as problematic. We cannot look to the court system to fix all of the problems, but we should concede that there is a problem of justice in the system (Duff, Shapland, & Willmore, 1985).

Chapter III

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

> So many killings of Black men in my lifetime. The physical shock is astounding.
>
> — Alice Walker

Narrative Research Analysis and Portraiture Method

Out of the theoretical framework of double-consciousness come three principal theories:

1. perceiving one's self through the eyes of the other;
2. tension between how oneself perceives themselves; and
3. Seeing oneself, seeing the other, seeing themselves.

These theories frame my methodology of my case study using the elements of narrative research and portraiture. Both inquiries are a distinct form of qualitative research combined with a valuable contribution to the literature. As a research methodology, a narrative begins with describing the experiences that are expressed in lived and told stories of individuals. The narrative research design describes the lives of individuals, collects and tells stories about people's lives, and writes narratives of individual experiences. For educators looking for personal experiences in actual school settings, narrative research offers practical, specific insights. By conducting narrative studies, researchers may establish a close bond with participants (Howie, 2010).

According to Vera Lúcia Menezes (Kalaja, Menezes, & Barcelos, 2008), narrative research "can be described as a methodology which consists of gathering stories about a certain theme where the researcher will find out information about a specific phenomenon. In order to

collect the data, several techniques can be used: interviews, journals, autobiographies, oral recording, written narratives, and field notes" (p. 3). Narrative research seeks to uncover the unanimous realities and echoing narratives that shape stories in the details and intricacy of life. It is an engrained practice that encompasses an ethnographic presence in a way that delivers a more complete comprehension of the research topic.

As time progresses, interest in narrative research continues to expand as more and more people are intrigued by its substantial impact. Narrative research design in the field of education surfaced in the early 1990s with researchers D. Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly, who provided the first stance on the method in their illuminating article "Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry," published in *Educational Researcher*; they expanded on these ideals in "Narrative Inquiry" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The use of narratives is universal; it embodies a situation while intrinsically motivating one to learn more about those being described. The "narrative turn," as Reissman (1993) called it, explicitly reminds one of all human sciences—a variety that appeals to writers, historians, anthropologists, medical practitioners and the like. Extensive professions use narratives to proclaim their own convictions and reiterate their own stances on public or private matters. To narrate is to vindicate those who are speculative since a means to communicate has been met. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) defined narrative research as "a way of understanding experience" involving "collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus" (p. 20). It is a protagonist human life in a way that renders an emotional response and change in outlook.

An old spoken cliché is "everyone has a story to tell and a song to sing." Telling stories has been a way of life for centuries. For many, telling a story was a form of educating one

another in the aspect of traditions past and behavior principles going forward. Each story unique to one's situation is an indicator of one's circumstance. In every action they take, humans must build on stories and lessons to move forward, to learn and grow. Narrative research design epitomizes storytelling on the basis of human interaction, both mental and emotional, while being explicit in its purpose. It challenges the status quo of a person's ability and divulges one's life experiences not for the significance of other but for self.

Also, in this case study, I bring elements of portraiture which attempts to merge the meticulousness of a customary research study with creative, imaginative illustrations as in a storybook. Portraiture puts a researcher in the right state of consciousness. A picture not only stresses cultural significance but also social well-being or the lack thereof. As a qualitative study, portraiture involves creating a picture or image of individuals using a written account of their feelings and expressions within a multidimensional context. People are born with psychological predispositions that allow them to think and interpret while ultimately saving those interpretations to their long-term memory. Ultimately, these experiences can have lifelong effects on their interactions and influence their decision making, instinctive behaviors, and learning.

Silently, this portraiture personifies the work of the researcher, creating a rawness that is noted by the viewer as significantly piecing together an impactful story. In the book titled *The Art and Science of Portraiture*, Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot and Jessica Hoffman Davis (1997) described the foundational aspects of this methodology known as portraiture. Portraiture was founded in the Geertzian ethnographic practice. In *The Interpretation of Culture*, Geertz (1973) guided the researcher towards an indulgent vision of the ethnographer's study as a "dense thicket of interpretation" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997, p. 91) and "through piled up

structures of interference and implication" (Geertz, 1973, p. 7). Portraiture allows for more interpretation than what was previously realized through any cross-examination. Moreover, it creates a narrative that is constantly being proclaimed through those willing to share. Portraiture research is used in an extensive capacity to grasp and envelop viewers in a way that they can epitomize a situation. It focuses on the social constructs and physical attributes of present times as well as historical pretenses. Portraiture can be used to induce change and promote equity or the lack thereof. Explicitly, portraiture allows individuals to validate not only themselves but others in a way that rectifies the story. It focuses on the construction of symbolic meaning that is significant to one's own story that is reframed and imparted to others by the interpretation of their lives. The vulnerability in portraiture is what creates the lasting impression of the researcher in how and what he or she is able to interpret the observations made. The researcher provides the interpretation for the subsequent data and observes, examines, and reflects on the portraits as they are constructed (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997).

According to Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman-Davis, the portraiture process includes utilizing themes that develop from the data creating a narrative framework. As a phenomenology, portraiture meticulously intertwines past experiences with reality, which is always left up to interpretation. The portraiture methodology illuminates the power of art and speech through experiences, emotions, viewpoints, and values to develop a representation of authenticity (Lawrence- Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997). The theme of this research, then, is ultimately to "create a narrative that bridges the realms of science and art, merging the systematic and careful description of good ethnography with the evocative resonance of fine literature" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005, p. 6). This research design allows one to gain personal perspective into the lives of others, to embody the feelings and emotions of such subjects in a

profound manner. The collaboration between researcher and subject provides oneness to the overall project, ultimately creating an impactful relationship for further study. It puts things into a societal and cultural construct that is developed through participant observation. It is riveting because it illuminates authentic unheard voices, and the researcher's presence is conveyed through the portrait as well. Portraiture reflects on the inner connectedness between life history, biography, and fieldwork. Lastly, the duality of portraiture makes it prevalent. As Marianne Williamson (1992) stated, "As we let our own light shine we unconsciously give other people the permission to do the same" (p. 38). So it is with this research design, by telling the stories of those who otherwise would not be heard.

Background

As with any popular tool of methodology, many scholars have had supportive and opposing opinions about the use of both narrative research analysis and portraiture. Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2000) raised the issue in a very precise way that is also valuable when using this methodology:

> Every act of knowledge is a trajectory from a point A, which we call ignorance, to a point B, which we call knowledge. In the modernity project one can distinguish between two forms of knowledge: regulative-knowledge, whose point of ignorance is called chaos and whose point of knowledge is called order; and emancipatory-knowledge, whose point of ignorance is called colonialism and whose point of knowledge is called solidarity. . . . By not looking at the epistemological critique of modern science, critical theory, though it aspired to be a form of emancipatory-knowledge, ended up as regulative-knowledge. (p. 29)

In the context of how narratives are shaped in constructing the Black adolescent boy persona and how they may possibly be stereotyping what it means to be a Black adolescent boy, narratives come with an understanding of heteronormativity and homogeneity. To reconceptualize the ecology of what we think Black adolescent boys are, we must make room by not using one-size-fits-all tactics. We do this by first allowing the boys to tell us who they are and not preempt their

identities, masculinities, or ideas. In his book *13 Ways of Looking at a Black Man*, Henry Louis Gates (1997) stated, “Writing a profile is in part an exercise in toning down your stentorian certainties; people benefit from a slightly more gingerly approach than texts” (p. 215). He added, “You start approaching people as cultural homework . . . you’d better hang it up” (p. 216). Part of the evil in racial ideology is accepting the biological determinist aspects of race and not really focusing on what we adhere to, which is cultural history. That cultural history is diverse. Biological determinism limits us if we think there is only one way of being Black or a normative way of being Black. Moreover, when thinking that Black adolescent boys might face that same problem in trying to conform to stereotypes that are perpetuated onto them, what we should be asking them is: How do they view their own experience? How do they want to be a better version of themselves? How can education do that for them?

I feel that by using narrative research analysis and portraiture as passengers in the automobile of a case study, I have found the right fit for me as a methodological tool for numerous reasons. The main reason was the emphasis on being able to hear the voice of the person who is being researched. Being only 11 years removed from high school, 9 years removed from being a teenager, and both Black and a male, this case study allows me to be open to listening, to recording, to helping shape the story and tell it by positioning myself as a witness.

By using these elements as my methodology, I am also able to center my work as a way to honor these young men as experts in their own narratives, rather than as “cultural homework.” I am allowing this study, if I choose to expand on it, to almost reflect digital space in which communities are constructed to have conversation. For example, #BlackTwitter is where Black people from all around the country come together and have shared conversations about what Blackness is and what Blackness should be, which could include any phenomena that emerged

during that time. It can be anything from television shows and movies such as *Atlanta*, *Scandal*, *How to Get Away Murder*, or *Black Panther*, to an Obama speech, but Black people can be in comfortable conversations around the country in what is considered a safe space for them. I think my case study, like #BlackTwitter, does due diligence at identifying space and creating a community between the participant and the researcher, so that both together can forge a wealth of knowledge for the reader in these spaces. As such, this methodology elevates the research when so many other methods have been deconstructed by social practices. It creates for me a real opportunity to claim a community within the research that could have become lost.

Teacher Participant Recruitment and Design

For the qualitative data collected to assess and understand these young men and their perspectives, I conducted four individual and biweekly Sunday afternoon interviews in a Harlem coffee shop over a period of 3 months. In this specific case, these interviews allowed not only a better understanding of who my participants were, but also provided time for them to process and evolve their thoughts as the study proceeded. I used a criterion-sampling strategy (Creswell, 2007) to recruit my four participants and I targeted Black American adolescent males currently enrolled in and taking classes in a New York City high school. My main recruitment strategy was to post on Facebook and send out emails through student campus organizations at my graduate school of study that included a synopsis of what I was doing in my study and what my ultimate purpose was. My goal was to find a teacher who taught students with the demographics I was seeking and who could assist with helping me find four participants.

After finding a teacher willing to assist, he or she would then need to receive permission from the principal to allow me to do my study at the school. Once approved, I then would give the teacher permission slips for each participant to have his parents read and return to the

teacher. However, the realness of acquiring my participants did not happen in this way. To provide context, during my first summer living in New York City, I made five friends: Josh, whom I met in the gym at Columbia University; Demetrius, who attended undergraduate school with Josh; Dominique, who went to Howard University with me; and Katy and Kenisha, who went to Howard University and were friends with Dominique. Five years later, we are all still friends, but Katy and Demetrius are the only remaining two in the city. In August 2017, Katy gave a party in her apartment where Dominique and Kenisha were staying from out of town. I attended, along with Kenisha's best friend, Mr. Keating. Kenisha and Mr. Keating had grown up in Queens together. I had met Mr. Keating 4 years ago when the two were roommates in Harlem and had television-watch parties. Mr. Keating was entering his sixth year teaching at a Bronx charter school. At Katy's party, I discussed my dissertation study and asked if he would work with me to recruit his students at his school. He asked me who specifically I was looking for and my response was: Black male students between the ages of 14 and 19 who self-identify as Black within the African Diaspora. Within a month, he emailed me with four willing students who were interested in participating in my study. The students were given an IRB-approved participant form (see Appendix A) and an IRB-approved parental consent form (see Appendix A).

Mr. Keating

Pseudonyms are used for Mr. Keating's real name and school of work.

Mr. Keating is a teacher and team leader at the Real World School, a public school located in the poorest congressional district in the country (District 9 of the South Bronx). He began his teaching career there in 2012, immediately after graduating with a bachelor's degree in Business Administration and Marketing from Morehouse College. A graduate of the New York

City public school system, Mr. Keating credits his success to the meaningful connections he made through various government-funded programs.

As a teenager, Mr. Keating was acutely aware of the disparity between students who attended schools in Manhattan versus the outer boroughs of Queens, Brooklyn, Staten Island, and the Bronx. As a teenager, during his experience with New York City's Summer Youth Employment Program which provided employment opportunities to inner-city youth, he noticed that teens in Manhattan were offered the chance to intern at Fortune 500 companies such as Bank of America, doctors' offices, and prestigious universities, while those in the outer boroughs were offered just as respectable opportunities, but mostly positions in daycares and local parks.

To remedy this, Mayor Bloomberg launched the BoysREACH initiative (today known as Ladders for Leaders), which placed males from underserved communities in competitive internships for the summer. Through this experience, Mr. Keating was able to intern for Tishman Speyer, one of New York City's largest commercial real estate firms. During his summer internship, Mr. Keating gained a mentor who paid for his college tour and application fees. Through a gift of $300, Mr. Keating gained exposure to colleges all along East Coast, and eventually selected Morehouse College as his institution of choice because of its focus on developing both the intellect and character of its students and its mission to *develop men with disciplined minds who will lead lives of leadership and service.*

As Mr. Keating neared graduation, he faced a tough choice about his career path and how he would choose to make an impact. While he studied marketing and had several relevant job offers in Atlanta, personal circumstances called him back to New York City, where he accepted a job as a high school history teacher through Teach for America. Though teaching was not the path Mr. Keating had envisioned for himself, his family was on the brink of homelessness, and in

his absence during college, he realized he had a responsibility to return home and help his three younger siblings and parents. Although he worried about meager paychecks and a lack of preparation, he accepted the offer. Once in the classroom, Mr. Keating realized that many of the skills he obtained through his various programs and education at Morehouse College made him a valuable asset to his school community, which mirrored many of America's public schools today.

He decided to focus his graduate studies at Fordham University on strategies to improve educational outcomes for inner-city youth. It was during this research that he learned that America's teachers are disproportionally female and White. Furthermore, Black men make up less than 2% of teachers, although minorities now make up a majority of students in public schools. These statistics troubled Mr. Keating because his own experience as both a student and a teacher in New York City's public schools made it clear that Black men have unique insight into the life, educational challenges, and discrimination that students of color experience and they are equipped to better understand the needs of these students based on firsthand experience. In his most trying moments, Mr. Keating often thinks back to the influential male role models that both inspired and provided him with a platform to learn and grow in all his various pursuits. It is has been and will always be Mr. Keating's sincerest hope that his students, and in particular his Black male students, can one day call upon him for the same level of advice, guidance, and access that he received as a student in New York City.

Participants

The extraordinary participants in this study were all 17-year-old high school seniors. The intentions behind the selection of these participants were to find young men of the African Diaspora in its entirety rather than solely African American. Each participant represented a

different ethnic group including African, African American, Jamaican, and Dominican, but all collectively identified as Black. Below I provide the pseudonyms that were crafted by my four participants (see Table 1). I also provide their racial and ethnic identity, ages, high school grade levels, and favorite hobbies.

Table 1

Participants' Names, Race and Ethnic Identity, Ages, Grade Levels, and Hobbies

Participant	Race & Ethnic Identity	Age	Grade Level	Hobbies
Deangelo Sexton	Black/ Jamaican	17	12th	Basketball and National Honor Society
Jelly Pablo	Black/ Dominican	17	12th	Basketball/ National Honor Society
Muhammed Ustafah	Black/ African American	17	12th	Fashion/ Photography/ Basketball
Abu Bacar X	Black/ African	17	12th	Basketball/ Piano

Teacher/Participant Relationship

This study stalwartly benefited from the strong bond between Mr. Keating and my participants. Individually, my participants had taken a class from Mr. Keating at one point during their high school years. As a veteran teacher, Mr. Keating sees every student who walks into his class as his own child. He nurtures them, supports them, embraces them, and challenges them. My participants often referred to him only by his last name as a way to show the close-knit bond they had with him because he truly understood them. Black boys disproportionately are segregated into particular categories of emotional disturbance or categories based on a fear of a teacher's interaction with them. Mr. Keating has continuously stated, "A teacher who fears a Black boy is probably not teaching them very much." Mr. Keating not only championed my participants during their time in school, but serves as all of his students' financial resource when

they most desperately need it. He maintains an account to which he contributes a portion of his salary to be saved for distribution in case of an emergency for one of his students. His constant love and support for his students created a gateway for myself as a researcher to enter conversations dealing with the most sacred territory for my participants unscathed.

Interviews

The actual individual interviews took place from December 2017 to February 2018. The biweekly interviews lasted between 10 and 30 minutes, starting at 2 p.m. and concluding at 6 p.m. I was the only interviewer engaging with each interviewee and I used my cell phone to record each session. Mr. Keating was present at each interview session, but did not interject in the interviews. During each interview, I took notes on the salient points of the interviewees' responses and the individual interviews would cover topics related to participants' personal experiences in relation to understanding the Black American male experience, as well as their previous social knowledge and education implications of their journey as it relates to education, media, race, and the law. The personal interviews also facilitated the exploration of the most meaningful and private events that have influenced the participants´ identities.

Setting

The reason for choosing the location for data collection related directly to the nature of the participants' relationship to it, which had both individual and social implications. The teachers of the Real World School often tutored their students on the weekends and frequently used this particular coffee shop in Harlem to do so. As gentrification plays a major role in the current narrative of Harlem, I would be remiss not to acknowledge the assumption that the neighborhood of the coffee shop would be perceived as a "safer" environment than that of the location of the Real World School in the Bronx. The narrative of the Bronx has been crippled

continuously as an environment that is deemed unsafe due to crime rates, but an overt lack of contextualization of the systemic oppression that plagues its people beckons the call of racism. However, even though my participants stated that the location of their school was once considered gang-infested territory, it did not play a part in my decision to choose my location for data collection. These individual interviews were able to cover topics related to the participants' personal experiences in relation to an understanding of themselves and the world, as well as their previous knowledge and thoughts of their journeys in the discovery of these ideas. As personal as these interviews were, they needed something that facilitated the exploration of their most meaningful and private events of influence. Therefore, in a comfortable and familiar space, the study indeed benefited from the intimacy of the coffee shop.

Data Collection Methods

This study followed the Human Subjects Regulations and Policies as set forth by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. As the responsible graduate student and researcher that I am, I insured that all interactions with the study participants met the guidelines presented in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services regulations for Informed Consent of Human Subjects, Title 14, Part 46, Subpart A, Section 46.116. This section stipulates that all human subjects should be informed of the purpose of the study and are given a briefing on the expectations of their participation in the study, including duration, benefits, and possible discomfort. I fully complied with these rules, as I informed each participant of the expected interview duration, the subject of the study, methods to keep their identities confidential (if they wanted), and awareness of possible benefits or discomfort with participating in with my study.

I also continuously reminded the participants of their rights within the study, initially after they agreed to cooperate with my research and then throughout my interactions with them

during interviews. I captured each time they gave verbal consent to collaborate with my study by recording these conversations with digital audio recorders to document the work. I promised to destroy all recordings once the final draft of this study was submitted.

Worthiness of Study

Finally, to erase negative perceptions of Black boys, we must first start with Black boys and this study does just that. Black boys understand how negative perceptions and stereotypes affect them first-hand and the only way we can erase those negative stereotypes is by responsibly sharing the realities of their lives. For example, how many Black boys are graduating high school every year? Although the number is in the millions, there is a discrepancy in a state like New York because it has the lowest graduation rate for Black boys, more than any other state in the country. This study is about telling stories and it is about Black boys shining their light against a force of darkness that diminishes their voices. Some researchers believe they might have a responsibility to speak against those negative perceptions with realities, but we also have a responsibility to advance, promote, and raise voices. Society does not have a Black boy problem—it has an education problem, it has a criminal justice problem, it has a media literacy problem, it has an American problem. These problems are compounded by the recidivism that is at the heart of systemic oppression. But the voices of these Black boy participants are that light in the darkness. This study is worthy because they were born.

Chapter IV

DEANGELO SEXTON

> All we seek is an America where every person is given the chance to productively contribute to his country and where he can receive a fair and equitable share of the wealth that production creates.
>
> — Coretta Scott King

Deangelo is a young man whose personality shines bright. He treats everyone respectfully and professionally. He is thoughtful and courteous when conversing with his colleagues, but a side of him loves to joke around. During our time together during this study, I found him to be intelligent, analytical, and able to set a vision, gather support and resources, and successfully implement his goals. At the beginning of this study, Deangelo had already been accepted into the University of Virginia, but was waiting for his acceptance into his dream school, Binghamton University. At a very young age, Deangelo knew that his way to being successful in this world was through education. Throughout high school, he tackled his challenges head on, yet had the wisdom to seek advice from different points of view and to listen. Although he continuously made it clear that he made time for extracurricular activities such as basketball, his studies always came first. Moreover, as a Black young man, he understood that he was going to have to work harder than others to reach his goals.

Physical Description

At about 6 feet, 3 inches, Deangelo is very tall. He weighs about 160 pounds and wears rectangular glasses. He has mahogany skin and a gap between his teeth. His hairstyle varies from week to week, but he maintains a consistent high-top fade. Sometimes he will have the top of his

head platted in individual braids or have them corn-rowed. His style is very much so the current style of many American teenagers. He usually wears athleisure apparel. Atheleisure is brand that provides an athletic aesthetic to everyday clothes.

Background

Deangelo was born on June 26, 2000 in the Bronx, New York. His family has always had many high expectations for him, specifically his mom, but his dad as well. Because of these high expectations, he has always been expected to exceed and go far. His mother and father are Jamaican, but his dad does not live with him. However, he emphasized that he sees his father every day. He has an older brother who is currently 20, but in lieu of going to college, his brother went to a trade program. When it comes to Deangelo's ancestry, he feels he is limited. His mother's parents died before he was born and he never met his father's parents. When asked about Jamaica, Deangelo knew his parents are Jamaican and he knew that the British colonized Jamaica; he said he wanted to go to that country one day to see it for himself.

The way he has always found a connection to his Jamaican roots was through food. His mother makes Jamaican dishes such as curried chicken, jerked chicken, certain types of rices, and side dishes. In a way he feels he eats a lot of the cultural foods, but lacks the history behind them. When I asked Deangelo if he identified as Black, he responded "yes." He conveyed that even though he is Jamaican, he understands the history of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade that went to Jamaica and came from Africa; thus, if one has ancestry from Africa, then one is Black.

Interviews

Day 1

It was a cold December day, the air brisk with no sunlight and fierce overcast. I sat in the coffee shop with Mr. Keating awaiting Deangelo, who was scheduled to be my first participant.

Mr. Keating told me that he ordered Deangelo an Uber and it was scheduled to arrive within 5 minutes. This coffee shop was busy. You would think that it was close to Grand Central Station, but it was actually in a more residential area of Harlem. They were playing great music. Tevin Campbell's "Always in my Heart" was on and I wanted to sing along, but right when I was about to open my mouth, Deanglo arrived.

Deangelo walked in and shook Mr. Keating's hand and then shook mine. Before the beginning of this study, we were introduced and I gave him the details of this project, what type of questions I would ask, and assured him his identity would be completely confidential. I asked Deangelo, "Are you ready?" and he responded, "Of course," with a slight grin on his face. We began.

I asked Deangelo about his background, specifically about his parents and his ancestry. He identified as Jamaican and said he came from a family that believed in hard work.

DuBose: Okay. So what do you know about your ancestry?

D'Angelo: Ancestry? Since my parents are Jamaican I know that Jamaica was colonized by the British, so I know there's some sort of British connection way, way back and that's about it.

DuBose: Have you been to Jamaica before?

D'Angelo: No, but I know a lot of cultural food my mom makes like curried chicken, jerked chicken, certain types of rices and side dishes and stuff like that. So I eat a lot of the cultural foods, but I don't really know a lot about the ancestry behind it.

DuBose: So you identify with being Black?

D'Angelo: Yeah.

We continued our conversation discussing Blackness and his understanding of it. Deangelo found that he would say there were a lot of advantages because Jamaica has so much culture and has various connections to the people in Barbados. He felt there was a lot of cultural

diffusion, and he felt Jamaica was a part of a consortium of islands and not just Jamaica. He acknowledged that everyone was not going to get along with everyone else, but like with every culture, there is some type of connection with either food, dancing, or language. Specifically, with language, Deangelo spoke Patois with his mother, which made him feel even more connected to his cultural roots.

Our conversation evolved into Deangelo's hobbies, for which he expressed his love and admiration for business and basketball.

DuBose: What are some of your interests and what are some of your favorite pastimes?

Deangelo: Interests as in like hobbies?

DuBose: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Deangelo: I mean, like playing basketball. I like watching YouTube videos. I like film a little bit to because I went to Rochester at the university to do a film class and I found it interesting. So on my free time I'm either on YouTube, playing basketball, doing work or hanging out with friends. That's really about it.

DuBose: What would you say that you're really interested in?

Deangelo: Like the most? I would say basketball.

DuBose: Not the most, but I mean outside of just kind of like . . . you know, there could be a lot of different things that you could be interested in. You could be interested in, I don't know, mathematics. You could be interested in cars. You could be interested . . . I mean there's a whole range. I think that a lot of the times when we hear somebody's interests, it's like, "I like to jog, I like to play basketball, I like to play video games," and those are your go-to, but what are some other things that people might not know about you or something that you don't talk about as much.

Deangelo: My interest in business I guess I could say, because I want to be a financial advisor in the future or something around those lines. So I first started a business . . . I don't know, I was playing GTA and then it has sort of like a business standpoint in there and I sort of found it interesting. And I started looking up more stuff and I started watching movies about the stock market and I sort of found it interesting and stuff like that. And . . . what else? I don't really have . . . I don't know. I like a lot of stuff but most things that I usually do is like business, basketball. That's about it.

DuBose: Business and basketball.

Deangelo: Yeah.

DuBose: And what do you think brought you into your fascination with business so much?

Deangelo: Business . . . I don't know. Just the lifestyle that they portray in the movies . . . I know it's probably not like that in real life but the life style that's portrayed in the movies, it sort of looks fun in a way, so like you have this.

Deangelo continued to say that he had watched a movie with an actor named Zach Galifianakis. In this movie, he was a businessman and had this nice-paying job. It was a lot of work, but then it became fun when he had a lot of money to save up and he took his family on vacation. He seemingly takes advantage of his financial freedom by doing things he could not do when he was younger. I followed up with his response in asking Deangelo what his parents did. He told me that his mother did not really have a stable job, but worked when she could as a nurse's aide. She helped people around their houses and cleaned. His father had two jobs: He worked at Costco as a fork lifter and also at a bar as a security guard.

Since Deangelo wants to be a financial advisor, he knew he would have to go to college and presumably do well. When I asked him about his previous school experiences, he told me he liked school, but the environment makes the academic experience for him.

Deangelo: School? I like school. Not more so of the classes . . . it depends on the teacher though. The teacher and my friends. So let's say I have a bad teacher and I'm in a classroom where it's like one or two friends that's in the class. I mean I will understand the content no matter the teacher says, but it's like, if the teacher's not interesting I'm not really going to really like the class even though I get the work done. So it's more of an interest factor. So like kindergarten I started off, my teachers in elementary they were all good. Except for fourth grade I had a teacher who was very snobby. She always had an attitude, so I didn't like that class or anything she taught in general.

DuBose: And so from sixth to eighth grade, what was the race of your teachers?

Deangelo: It was straight . . . it was Black. I had a lot of Black teachers actually in most classes and then I had about one to three White teachers who taught humanities and history. That was my only two teacher who were White. Everything else was Black.

DuBose: Okay. And what was the population of students?

Deangelo: Students? It was mainly just Black and Spanish.

DuBose: Okay. Did you prefer your elementary school time more so than the middle school time? How did you feel that your flow was during that time?

Deangelo: I would say I liked middle school more, but not because of the race of the teachers, but more so who the people were in general. So they were all good people. And then elementary school, besides that one teacher they were all good people too, but I feel like I had a more better experience at my middle school, it was like all the activities we did and all like that went on, so I feel like I had more of a connection with all of my teachers.

DuBose: And so how was that transition from middle to high school?

Deangelo: Transition? It wasn't really that big of a transition but it sort of was. Like the neighborhood standpoint, the neighborhood wasn't the same. My middle school was in sort of like a higher income neighborhood, it was more buildings, it was more cleaner and stuff like that. It was in the uptown Bronx. And then coming to my high school, it was more dirty, I guess you could say. It was right next to the projects, and I was like, "Oh." When I first . . . when me, my mom and all my other family first came to view how the school was, I looked, and they went, "Oh, this is different." Now it was more like a lot of homeless people outside and stuff like that. And I was like, "Oh yeah, this is sort of like a neighborhood change. It's sort of different." And one of my other friends was telling me, "Oh, people get robbed and stuff like that." Somebody got their change snatched previous to the day I went there. And I was like, "Oh really, that's how it is?" He was like, "Oh, one of my best friends got shot in front of me in the projects are right there." So it sort of had me skeptical about how safe the neighborhood was, but when I came in ninth grade and got used to it, it wasn't that bad as like it seemed.

DuBose: Okay. And when high school is over and you graduate and you get the cap and gown and you're off to college and doing everything else like that, how would you look back on your experience?

Deangelo: It would be like a retrospective experience, I guess you could say. I came a long way from ninth grade, not knowing a lot and then you look back and it's like, twelfth grade is right here, I'm about to graduate, I'm about to do something with my life, go to college, you know, break a cycle or something like that. It will be a very humbling moment—

DuBose: You said break a cycle, what cycle?

Deangelo expressed that he was going to be a first-generation college student, and he understood that responsibility came with being a first. Deangelo will be the first one in his family to go to college, and for him that is a big milestone. I asked Deangelo if he felt “pressure” in achieving his goal of college, and he said he did not. Rather than pressure, it was a constant understanding of expectations. He made said he wanted to “be something in life” and was applied to his performance in school. So rather than “settling” for grades such as 75s and 80s, he pushed himself to get 90s and 100s—not for his parents, but because he wanted to see himself achieve. He self-motivates every single day to be the best he can be. When I asked him where did that self-motivation come from, he replied:

> I just want to help my family out and I want to see myself be successful in the future and not struggle to do certain things that my family struggles to do now. So it’s basically the self-motivation and what I see my family go through. I don’t want to see them do that in the future. So I want to help out.

Day 2

On our second day of interviews, I was interested in diving more deeply into Deangelo’s educational experience. He had great energy that day, as he was excited to have finally finished his college applications. Deangleo started the conversation by expressing how his favorite subject from kindergarten to eighth grade was Math because there was always one answer and it was easy for him to find it. He felt that because there are always multiple steps to get to a problem in different ways, one will always get the same one answer. When asked about his least favorite subject, he felt he did not think he had one. “I don’t know,” he responded. He then said it would have to be during ELA class in the fourth grade because his teacher was very “obnoxious.” What Deangelo meant was that as a student, if he did not get the questions quite right, the teacher would bash him about it. The ELA class was designed for literacy, intended to

hone in on learning how to read and comprehend a text, and answer questions to see if the student comprehended it. He felt that his teacher was overexcited over things that did not matter and she did not help her students understand the material. As a teacher, Deangelo felt she just told them the material rather than taught it, but regardless of what they did, they never understood how she talked about it anyway. Then, as a response to not understanding, she would bash her students. However, he made it clear that the teacher was the reasoning behind not liking the class; in fact, he liked the class, and even took an ELA class in his senior year of high school and really enjoyed it.

> DuBose: Okay. My next question, in that same vein, ninth grade to twelfth grade, what has been your favorite subject and what has been your least favorite subject, and why?
>
> Deangelo: Hmm. I'd say my least favorite would have to be . . . that's tough. It'd have to be an elective class. I wouldn't say a core class, but the Art elective, my teacher Mr. Brown, I feel like, that's the worst class I've ever had because I'm not an artist and stuff like that. He pushes us to draw like we're artists, but I'm not an artist so I can't really produce the greatest work. Because of that I got like a 75 or a 70 in his class and that destroyed my average for one year. That's my least favorite. My most favorite right now would have to be ELA 12 Honors because of the topics we talk about, more like decider issues, the educational system, I like stuff from back then that impacts us now . . . I feel like that's the most insightful class that I had, that's why I liked it.
>
> DuBose: Again, that's interesting. ELA is your favorite subject. Let's talk about Art for a little bit. What is it about Art that you find difficult? Or what was it about that class that you found difficult?
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> Deangelo: Here again, let's say, like an outline, you gotta, let's say, draw a shape or something like that. So I'll follow the outline, and the way he does it comes out perfect, just like that. But when I do it, it comes out horrible and it doesn't even look up to par with his. So I started to make the comparison with the teacher . . . Mine is not good enough to be like that, this, or that, so I don't know.
>
> DuBose: What did he do to help you? Did he do anything to work with you?
>
> Deangelo: He made [a raised sector liner too?] and enjoyed himself . . . But yeah, he just wants you to figure it out on your own in order to do it.

DuBose: Do you not like that? Or is that not easy? Is that not helpful for you?

Deangelo: It's helpful but it takes time to become an artist and I feel like . . . It's a mindset . . . On our first project, we should automatically draw everything perfectly, stuff like that . . . It should come out of the best of our ability, but, the best of my ability is probably the worst drawing in the class.

DuBose: What makes it bad and what makes it good?

Deangelo: The drawing?

DuBose: Yeah.

Deangelo: What makes it bad is my opinion of its appearance, how it may look to others. What makes it good is that at least I tried.

DuBose: When you're in your ELA class, and you cooperate in ELA class, what makes that good?a

Deangelo: I guess the independence. We're taught to be independent, so we may go through a "Do Now" or a lesson . . . they may teach us one thing, we get an article, we do it either with our partner or by ourselves, and then we can come back as a class and discuss it, we get to say our opinions on it. We have fishbowls where we talk about certain topics that we've learned about, and I just the fact that I can hear everybody's opinion, we can all talk together, and stuff like that. That's why I like it.

DuBose: You don't feel like you did that in Art?

Deangelo: Yeah, but that's not really what we were focusing on in the art. We focused more about drawing and not really . . . We focused on perspectives, in the sense of you drawing and how it looks, but not really communicating.

DuBose: Interesting. So what do you think your strengths are?

Deangelo: In art?

DuBose: No, in your subjects.

Deangelo went on to discuss that it was his ability to problem solve quickly. If he could get a problem he had never saw before, he then thought back to a problem that may have looked like it and he can connect it. For example, his ELA course was all about interpretation, not really about wrong answers, but if he interpreted it in various ways, it was not necessarily "Oh, it's

wrong," but rather just a different perspective of it. In his Economics course, he said it was all about the Constitution and how knowing past cases could impact future cases and set up precedents. Each class was all about connecting what one learned before to what one is learning now, and Deangelo found his strength in this. I continued to ask Deangelo about his favorite teachers. He had a longer list than I originally expected him to have based on his initial experience with his ELA teacher.

> Deangelo: Elementary school, my favorite teacher was my fifth grade teacher. Her name was Ms. Vetere and I feel like she understood all the students. She took time out of her day to get to know us well . . . We had little parties because she had assistant teachers each month, so we would get to know the assistant teacher, we would get to know the teacher, and then we would have a little party at the end. . . Sort of like our accomplishment with the assistant teacher. She treated us with a lot of respect, and she got the same thing back, and her expectations were high for us so that's what we had for her. That was my favorite elementary school teacher.
>
> In middle school, my favorite teacher had to be a teacher named Zoni, she taught . . . What was her class? Humanities, she taught Humanities. It was like a mix of ELA with some history, I guess. I like her because she's always happy. She communicated with everybody. She took the time out of her day to check on us, "How was your day?" this and that. Outside of the classroom, it's not like she tried to shy away from us, but she interacted with us in class and outside of class . . . school trips, in the playground, and stuff like that. That's why she was my favorite middle school teacher.
>
> My favorite high school teacher . . . This is where it starts piling up. Ninth grade, it was Ms. Achmed for ELA. I felt like she's a happy person, she wanted to see everyone in the classroom do better, and she was just all-around good vibes, she was always happy. Tenth grade, Mr. Sing was my favorite teacher because he's very enthusiastic, the way he teaches keeps me in tune and doesn't make me shy away from it. He always forces people to participate so if you try to not raise your hand up in class, he will call on you. Eleventh grade, Ms. Keating because he was my favorite teacher in eleventh grade. I like U.S. History and he always made the class interesting and he kept everybody involved and the topics we learned about, we learned about in different ways, so it's never one routine style but a variety of styles in the way he taught. And twelfth grade, it would have to be Ms. Franks, my Calculus teacher, because she's also very enthusiastic. She has a high expectation for everybody, and if you don't understand, she'll take the time to help you in class, outside of class. But it's your responsibility to make sure to tell her that you don't understand, so you don't just sit there in the classroom just

being there not understanding. If you don't understand, raise your hand, she'll help you and she'll take as much time needed to help you.

Deangelo expanded on his admiration for his teachers by expressing how integrated his high school teachers were with their students' lives. He made it clear that he felt like school for him was a "safe environment." "I believe it is," he said. Deangelo discussed how in the ninth grade, people told him numerous stories about the neighborhood where the high school was located, but when he started there, nothing really happened. He admitted that in the ninth grade, there was more negative activity surrounding the school that would encompass many fights.

After ninth grade, Deangelo felt that the neighborhood got quiet and now it appeared to just "normal." "You come there, you go, you go home, there's nothing really extra that happens anymore," he said. When I asked what his biggest worry was about the school, he said that a friend who was going to the school on their first day of ninth grade got her change stolen from her pocket, and this same friend later saw her best friend get killed in front of her in the projects next to the school. I then asked if he had any thoughts on specifically what went on inside the school rather than the neighborhood. He told me that it was a "a family environment," and that "there's no beef going on, and if there is, it's shut down quickly." When I asked how feuds got shut down, he responded by saying multiple people jump in to elevate the situation.

DuBose: How is it shut down?

Deangelo: There hasn't been a fight in our school, since, from what I remember, tenth grade. There's never anybody that gets to hit anybody, but it may be two people get mad, but then it's broken up by the way they're sat down in the office and they have to resolve it.

DuBose: And who usually facilitates that?

Deangelo: The dean, [Mistress Yellow?] or it could be the other deans, like Mr. Beau, Mr. Al, Julio, anybody like that.

DuBose: Teachers?

Deangelo: Teachers too, yeah. Any fights that happen, it's never really even a fight. The last fight that happened in class that I know of was ninth grade and the teacher broke it up and the kids left the class.

DuBose: It doesn't always necessarily have to be fights though, right? Jokes can be made and feelings can be hurt. We hear a lot of conversations around bullying and things like that . . . Do you think that, in that aspect . . .

Deangelo: We make jokes here and there, almost every day, but nobody takes it to offense because we all know that we're playing. I guess if somebody makes a joke to somebody that they're not that close with, it may come off as offensive, but those who are close to one another in our grade, we don't really take it to the heart.

Deangelo continued to say that he felt the young people in his school were all individuals, and everyone had his or her own different fashion. So if a student came into the school with Jordans or Flights, and one group of students said something negative about the shoes, they were not going to go directly to the person and violate them and make them feel bad. They may just do it among each other so as not to cause major conflict.

Day 3

On Day 3, I was starting to become friends with the staff at the coffee shop. I found myself chatting with the staff more so than before, and by doing that, I was able to request that they lowered the music when my study convened and they agreed. On this specific day, I was discussing with Deangelo about the media. I asked if he could tell me what his source of news was and what articles he looked for and read. He told me he did not read the news a lot, but he did watch it on TV. Sometimes he would watch CNN, Channel Seven, or maybe an online news video. He mentioned sometimes reading the *U.S. Daily News*, *The New York Times*, or *The Atlantic*. He also said he sometimes got his news from the app Snapchat. I continued our conversation by asking what his favorite movies and television series were.

DuBose: Tell me what some of your favorite movies are and why?

Deangelo: Favorite movies? I like, I mostly like comedy movies, so I like a movie called *Meet the Peeples*, that's funny. I like, it's a movie called *Disaster Movie*. It's like a little parody of Willy Wonka and all the other movies combined into one. I like that too. I like *John Wick*, it's like an action movie, and I like the storyline or plot about the . . .

DuBose: Okay. And what brought you to those specific movies?

Deangelo: I was just scrolling through TV or whatever website I used to watch it. It just popped up. I started reading; I read a description to see if I might like it, or it's interesting to me. Then I ended up liking it.

DuBose: So tell me about your favorite television shows.

Deangelo: I don't watch TV now, but before, I used to . . . Well, when I was a kid, let's say like 12, 13, I used to watch a lot of SpongeBob I guess, or whatever. If I were to watch TV now, I may watch either an NBA game, or there's a show called *Person of Interest*. It's basically like a CIA guy or whatever, and they fight different crimes with a machine. And there's a show called *Chicago Fire*, I think it's called. I forgot what it's about, but it has to do with a fire department, and different issues.

DuBose: You forgot what it's about, but you watch it?

Deangelo: I watch it, but I don't remember the whole storyline.

DuBose: So tell me some shows that you actually remember the storyline, that you remember the characters, that you can recite a verse, a line from the show. It doesn't have to be a new show; it can be an old show.

Deangelo: Let's say *Stranger Things*.

DuBose: *Stranger Things*, okay.

Deangelo: It's about basically a kid, his name is Will, he gets . . . You have the regular human world, and you have the upside down world, so it's basically a monster coming from that world, and it's trying to take over the Earth's world, right? So basically, Will, he gets somehow connected with that creature. I guess the creature eats him or mentally takes him over or something like that, and then his friends, his family, are basically trying to find a way to enter that world to get him out of the world, and to stop the world from trying to invade our world, basically.

DuBose: And so that's one of your favorite shows?

Deangelo: Yeah.

DuBose: And why do you think that it became one of your favorite shows?

Deangelo: I just feel like it's a lot of anticipation, so they do a good job of making you stick. So they might end it with a piece of the next show, and then it really catch your mind like damn, I really want to see what's gonna happen to them. It kind of makes you sort of addicted to it, make you try to watch the next episode to find out what's gonna happen.

DuBose: Right, right. So it's on Netflix, right?

Deangelo: Yeah.

DuBose: And were you able to watch it in one day?

Deangelo: I wanted to watch it in one day, but to make sure that I don't finish it too quickly and be bored, I spreaded it out.

DuBose: You spread it out. Just to give you enough. So how many episodes a day?

Deangelo: There's what? I think 11 or 12 episodes in Season 2 and Season 1. I would say about, I think, 10.

I continued to ask Deangelo about the images he saws. I wanted to know when he watched television, when he read articles from the news or read the books and watched movies, and what some of the images were that he was seeing of young Black men, specifically his age.

Deangelo: I feel like Black males, or minorities in general, they have more of a negative connotation when they're being reported about. So let's say you have a white man and you have a Black man. They've both committed the same crime. The white man, it will probably be like, "Oh, mentally ill White man shoots up school, sent to a mental facility." Whether if it was a Black man it would be like, "Oh, monstrous Black man decides to shoot up school and kill several thousands of children." So it's a bias towards the news source. You can tell there's a bias. They want to make the White man seem like oh, just because he had a mental illness, he didn't really mean to do it.

DuBose: So that's news. That's news. What are some other things you see in the news? Or read in the news?

Deangelo: I don't watch it too often, but when I do watch it and I see in stories of something like a major crime that happened with a Black or White man, and I can see the difference in how they report it.

DuBose: Okay. You feel like there's a difference?

Deangelo: Yeah.

DuBose: Do you believe that there's a difference?

Deangelo: I think so. If a White man and a Black man commits the same crime, they have the same motive, there should be no reason why the Black man has a different story title that makes him seem like a monster, so it's a negative connotation. While a White guy, oh, an elderly White man. They're gonna think of somebody old; he's elderly; he has mental issues; he didn't really mean to do it. It's not his fault. But then some Black guy . . . It makes it sound like he wanted to do evil, inherently.

DuBose: What do you think is the reason behind that?

Deangelo: Behind that, I feel like it's all systematic. So, if a crime happens in, let's say the Bronx, you're not gonna really hear about it on the major news sources if it's that big. Right? But if it happens, let's say in Manhattan, it's automatically on TV like this, like the minute and the second. So I feel like it's more so, they feel like we're not as important, and they want us to just stay on the bottom. And you have the whites that, they feel more inclined and more deserved to have that type of media and popularity, I guess.

DuBose: And when you say "they" who are they?

Deangelo: They, the White people, the system. Whoever is controlling from above.

DuBose: Controlling from above?

Deangelo: The system. So, you know how half the top one percent, the richest. And then they have ties into the big corporations, and then those corporations listen to what they say, and then that impacts everybody below.

DuBose: So when you're watching your television shows and movies, what do you see . . . What are the portrayals? And honestly, I'm familiar with some of the shows that you were talking about. And some of those shows don't have Black characters, or a lot of Black characters. And Black young men, specifically. And if they do . . . What are some of your thoughts?

Deangelo: For example, in *Stranger Things*, they only had the little Black kid, I forgot his name.

DuBose: It's okay if you don't remember his name.

Deangelo: All right, so basically, there was a scene where they were dressing up for Halloween, and they was like the little Ghostbuster costumes, right? So everybody chose a specific character, right? But then the Black kid, he chose one of the white characters, and nobody wanted to choose the Black guy, right? He said, "Oh, why do I have to be the Black character?" And they all looked at each other like, "Because you're Black." Right? So nobody wanted the role of the Black man, but everybody wanted, desired to be somebody who was White. So it sort of shows . . . It may not be that deep and serious, but it sort of shows a little hint into the system.

DuBose: Mm-hmm (affirmative). And why do you think that scene was in there?

Deangelo: It may not have been on purpose, probably. Maybe it was unconscious, but I feel like in some certain way, it may have some ties to actual societal issues.

Deangelo continued by saying that when he watched a show like *Blue Bloods*, which he tended to only watch with his mother, the storyline portrayed the victim as some sort of minority. "It's never a White person," he said, and the *Blue Bloods* storyline tried to make it seem as if the White person did not do it, but in actuality did. Then when the viewer found out, it made it worse on the White villain. So Deangelo believed that the show was trying to match the realities of what one sees now and how it is easier and more likely for a Black man to get arrested and have a crime forced upon him, even if he did not do it. He continued by saying:

> I feel like, it just makes it seem . . . if I was, let's say five years old, and I see that in the show *Blue Bloods*, a Black man that's always getting arrested, or a Spanish guy, or somebody of color, it's gonna make it seem like oh, maybe in society this actually happens. Maybe a Black guy is always guilty, or a minority is always guilty.

Day 4

When I last spoke with Deangelo on Day 3, we talked a lot about the media, but we were broader in our discussion. In this session, I wanted to be more specific and talk with him about social media. Social media applications are now popularly referred to as apps, and so I asked him what his favorite apps were.

DuBose: Can you tell me your top three apps that you use?

Deangelo: Instagram, Snapchat, and Facebook.

DuBose: Okay. And what are the top three, what are the order of them?

Deangelo: Instagram first, Snapchat second, and Facebook last.

DuBose: Okay. Can you tell me what you do on each app?

Deangelo: Instagram, I use it to communicate among friends, see like . . . this one's mainly for basketball too, so ESPN, NBA post, all of that stuff, and to meet other people. Snapchat is just mainly my friends and having streaks. So it's like you send photos back and forth for a certain amount of days and it builds up, so that's what I use it for. Facebook, I use it to text two people.

I raised an eyebrow when Deangelo said he used Facebook to only talk to two people. When I asked why, he said it was because Facebook is dying out. He did not go through his newsfeed anymore, he just used it to communicate with two friends. When I asked how many friends he had on his three favorite apps, he said that on Instagram, 3,150; on Facebook, 2,000; and on Snapchat, he was not sure. When I asked him what he believed the future of those apps was, he felt he would be able to use all three to branch out and connect with more people. As he got older, everyone will have old social media accounts to update everyone else on what they are doing if they had not done so already. When he goes to college, Deangelo will not know everyone, but if he asks them if they have an app like Instagram, he can connect with more people and get to know them if they are around the campus a lot. He found it a magnificent vessel to meet and communicate with girls.

Day 5

Day 5 of our interview took more of serious tone as our conversation focused on racism. I started our conversation by asking him to define racism. Deangelo responded by saying that racism is anything that degrades another race. For example, he said if a White man degrades a

Black man or the Black race, it has everything to do with shaming another race or making them feel like they are less than. He expanded on how racism affected him getting a job in Bronx. "You can see it a lot," he said. He explained that job hiring and job discrimination were his biggest realities. For him, it was so hard to get a job in the Bronx because the majority of fast-food restaurants have a lot of "Spanish" people. If a person is Black and cannot speak Spanish, they are not really going to consider that person for a job. He continued to say that jobs in general in New York City were hard to obtain and he could see it when he got on the train how people have an unconscious bias towards the way he looked.

I then asked Deangelo if he had ever personally experienced racism. He responded yes and I followed my question with a request for him to provide an example. He started his story by saying that he was taught how to handle such situations and such things as racism did not hurt him. He continued by saying that the day before our meeting, he went to Wall Street and was at a McDonalds with his friend. Some White customers were in there, and as soon as Deangelo and his friend walked into McDonalds, they all just started looking at them. While they were standing in line, a White guy came up behind them and tried to talk to them. Deangelo said that the White guy was talking to them like they were "dumb." I asked what did he say and he said that in a loud voice, the man asked, "Hey, you guys in line? He said it mad, like aggressive, and that was weird."

I asked did he think that racism would ever go away and he quickly responded with "no."

DuBose: Do you think that racism will ever go away?

Deangelo: I say no for the fact that it's so deeply bedded into like society and specifically United States, so no . . . Yeah it can't . . . It won't ever go away. It's like a pattern. If I was born in a White family and I'm only used to White people and I've been taught and I only hang out with the same group of people . . . Unless I branch out, go to college or meet different people, I'm going to already feel uncomfortable

talking to them. So it's gonna make it more harder for me to be accustomed to other people. So it will always be there.

DuBose: Tell me this: do you think that there are people in this country who have not experienced racism?

Deangelo: Yeah, I could say that. I would say for the most part, maybe White people, in a way. Because they say that Black people can't be racist to White people because White people have more power, so I feel that in a way that's partially true, I believe. If I'm a White man growing up in the best neighborhood, I'm at an advantage, so I'm automatically going to be looked at as fit for the job. I'm going to be looked at as more educated compared to another Black man. So I feel that in that sense that I don't experience racism. But if I were a Black young man, not the best neighborhood, I'm already at a disadvantage because of my skin color and what people have already assumed of me. I feel like White people don't really experience it as much as we do.

DuBose: Do you think that racism has ever limited you in any way? Do you feel like when you're applying for college or do you feel like when you're applying for jobs in the future, do you feel like racism is going to be a hurdle that's going to limit you?

Deangelo: Yeah, I think it is. When I was applying to some of my colleges, like say I'm writing my responses, I would sort of like think of how a White person would read it and how they would perceive what I'm writing. So I was skeptical about certain things I would write, and I would erase it and switch it to make it sound different.

DuBose: Really? Can you give me an example?

Deangelo: I went to University of Virginia, and I spent two days on their campus and I saw a lot of . . . It's a lot of White people, it's majority White people. So when they asked me to write a supplement about it, I didn't want to sound like I was so . . . I don't know how to put it. I tried to switch my words up to not sound smarter, but sound more proper in a way. So yeah. I changed my vocabulary.

DuBose: Really? And why did you do that?

Deangelo: I feel like there's already a perception that we might not be as smart, we don't have the proper grammar and stuff like that, so I made sure that all my writing, I made sure that it sounds right. And that it may catch their attention and they see such high vocabulary, and they'd be like, oh, I didn't know this person had this and this and he's from this low-income area.

DuBose: Hypothetically, if you see someone yelling out a racial slur—so using the n-word, and you see them acting very aggressive to someone who you love, someone who you care about. What do you do? In that hypothetical situation?

DeAngelo: Hypothetical situation . . . Violence is not the answer. So you know. Let's say . . . someone I know? I would approach the situation . . . You don't want to act like aggressive and fit like a stereotype people might already presume of you, so you go, you talk to them in a nice manner. Let's say that there's n-word, then I feel like you should go to the authorities. But the authorities is sometimes racist too, so if he was a white man maybe he won't be as penalized for what he was doing if it was another skin color. So either you talk to them appropriately, enlighten them to what they're actually saying, and make them understand what they're saying . . . And if that doesn't work, then go to the authorities.

DuBose: Okay. And if going to the authority doesn't work?

DeAngelo: I don't really know.

Day 6

On Day 6, Deangelo entered the coffee shop with a big smile on his face and took a seat. I asked him if he was ready and he responded, "I was born ready," so we began. "We are going to be talking a lot about like the justice system, policing and the law. And so my first question for you is: What is your definition of the criminal justice system?" Deangelo responded that he believed it to be the court, the school-to-prison pipeline, and the rate at which somebody went to jail. I followed that question by asking him when he thought of community policing, what would be his definition of what he believed the criminal justice system was in conjunction with the goals of the community policing.

Deangelo: I feel like the goals should be to like put those who commit a crime, like a, not like a petty crime like stealing a bag of chips from the store, but like an actual crime, so like killing somebody or robbery of like a higher standard. I feel like now a days people are just arrested for no reason. So it could be stuff like a bias because like I have on a hoodie, or I have on sweats with like sneakers or whatever, that I'm somehow a target. So I feel like now a days it's more so about like what you're wearing and how you look, and like the threat you may be instead of like what the person's actually doing.

DuBose: Okay. What kind of procedural and operational changes do you think that the police departments need to make to institute a community policing?

Deangelo: I feel like they need to like move the bias that they have because it's not just White people. It's some Black officers as well. But they have like the [inaudible] politics in a way, so I feel like you just have to, you have to act based on actions that are being done, not on what you think is going to happen, or what may occur, but based on like the situation I'm in.

DuBose: What kind of scales do you think that police and community leaders need to have to make community policing work?

Deangelo: There has to be a stable, like from a communication routine, to like the people in the community and the police. So, like right now, we have a lot of like back and forth. But it's not like, there's a dislike for cops, and people don't really trust the cops because of like what they do. I feel like it should be like sort of like common ground where people can like come together with the policing, and have a like effective plan to like to effectively police.

DuBose: You mentioned the fact that . . . so, what do you believe are the essential elements that can make community policing effective?

Deangelo: Communication, judging based off action, not off of like perception of what you think may happen. And of, like thinking of multiple ways to solve like a critical issue instead of having that one direct way, which is like pulling out a gun and something.

DuBose: What measures, what measures work best to promote a collaborative relationship between police departments in the communities that they serve?

Deangelo expressed that some communities have block parties which the police may sometimes attend. Sometimes the block parties may facilitate a basketball tournament and the entire community comes out and the police are there. He felt those were more effective because they showed the better side of the police: "'Cause not every like police is a bad person, you know what I'm saying," he said. He continued saying there were events where police and people came out and the community met the police in a different way and got to know them more. He emphasized, "I feel like that, that's like the best way."

Day 7

In this dissertation, the full transcript of Day 7 concludes each interview data sketch section. Day 7 was an important day for me as it concluded my data collection and illustrated the true growth and power of my participants in their final responses.

DuBose: All right Deangelo, you're back.

Deangelo: Yes, sir.
DuBose: How are you doing?

Deangelo: Feeling good today. How are you?

DuBose: Good. We've talked a lot about the future. We've talked about the past. We've talked about so many different things. But right now I just want to talk about you in this moment.

Deangelo: Yeah.

DuBose: My first question is, in this moment, are you happy?

Deangelo: Currently right now, right now?

DuBose: Yeah. In this moment in time, are you happy?

Deangelo: Yeah. I mean, I'm a happy person in general. I'm always happy, so yeah.

DuBose: Are you comfortable with the direction that your life is headed?

Deangelo: Yeah. I feel like I have a lot of opportunities that's going to open up in the future for me. I feel like there's a lot to look forward to, so yeah, I'm happy with it.

DuBose: Is there anything that you can improve about yourself, or that you would dramatically enhance about your life?

Deangelo: I could improve my time management, and not being perfunctory and waiting until the last minute to complete an assignment for school or something like that. I have to work on that. And, my efficiency. Being consistent with everything and not just doing good on one thing, then falling off, and then doing good on the next thing. Having a consistent . . . progress for everything. That's about it.

DuBose: What do you believe is possible for your life?

Deangelo: I feel like a lot of things. I don't want to limit myself to one answer, but I know I could do a variety of things. It depends on where my life takes me and where my interests take me. I feel like anything is possible.

DuBose: What do you value the most?

Deangelo: I value everything I have. Family, friendships, opportunities that I've gotten. Just the little things that people give me. It doesn't have to be a big deal, but anything small. I cherish everything that's given to me. Any experience I've been through. Anything that's made me who I am today.

DuBose: What do you want more than anything else in this moment in time?

Deangelo: More than anything, I want success. Not just for me, but success as a whole. Success with my family, my friends. Other people I know from other states and stuff like that. I feel like a lot of people, they want success for themselves but they don't want to see the upcoming of their peers either. I feel like unless you have a group of friends that you can support, you want everybody to make it, everything's a more positive vibe. Everybody brings more encouragement to you and yourself to help others get better, and yourself as well.

DuBose: What do you want more than anything else? Did I say that already? Did I ask that?

Deangelo: Yeah.

DuBose: All right. What motivates you?

DeAngelo: Anything, really. I'm easily motivated. I could wake up 7:00 in the morning. Let's say like a school day, I wake up. First thing I do when I wake up, I brush my teeth, turn on The Baller's Life, a small clip of a basketball video. That doesn't only motivate me for basketball, but just for like life in general, for getting ready to go to class. If you want to live the life of an athlete, you've got to perform in the classroom as well. So, just basketball motivates me and anything, honestly. Anything that I feel like inspires me is going to motivate me to do something better.

DuBose: What kinds of experiences are the most important to you right now?

Deangelo: The experiences, I feel like the ones that change you mentally and change your decisions, for example, like this I guess, I study, I consider this an impact because it changed me how I view certain things. It gave me insight to more things that I didn't really, wasn't like so sure about, but now I have a more firm understanding. So, anything that changes your mindset or gives you a deeper insight into a section of life that you didn't really know about.

DuBose: What do you appreciate the most about yourself?

Deangelo: I appreciate my ability to retrospect. So, the majority of people may do something or not, when you think about it until they see a bad result or any result in general, but I feel like as soon as I do something or before I do it, I retrospect on what happened before or how I could impact myself or fix myself to help myself make the next move.

DuBose: And, what are you most grateful for?

Deangelo: I'd say my family members. Without them, I wouldn't be near who I am today. I wouldn't have had the same rights that I have. I wouldn't have the support system that I have at home to make certain decisions and things like that. So, yeah.

Chapter V

JELLY PABLO

If they don't give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair.

― Shirley Chisholm

When Jelly Pablo smiles, it is as if in that very moment, he is the happiest teenager in world. He was warm, welcoming, and honest. His gift, in my opinion, is his resilience. Unlike Deangelo, Muhammed, and Abu, whose first language is English, Jelly's is Spanish. He struggled in the beginning of his educational experience because he did not understand some of the English language words that were conveyed in his classrooms. However, his struggle with the English language did not deter him from finding the inner strength to strive for greatness and allow his brilliance to shine through. His unremitting determination to find success, whether it is professional or academic, has become his greatest ally, even in the darkest moments of his life.

Physical Description

Jelly is about 5'7 in height, with a stocky build. He has dark brown eyes and when he speaks, he has a soulful and deep voice. His hair is brown and he has it cut into a high-top fade. His hair at the top is very curly, but he is versatile in its styling. He has lighter brown skin and wears braces on his teeth. Jelly wears mostly hoodies, jeans, sweatpants, and will wear basketball shoes or boots, depending on the weather. Jelly is only 17 but has a considerable amount of

facial hair that could possibly be perceived as he is older than he really is. He lets it grow in naturally but keeps up with it by periodically visiting the barbershop.

Background

Jelly was born on August 8, 2000. He has two siblings, an older sister and a little sister. He is exceptionally close to his parents who are married. His mother is a home attendant and takes care of senior citizens. His father is an engineer and works longer hours than his mother. His parents are originally from the Dominican Republic, but Jelly was born in New Jersey. He does not really know a lot about his specific ancestry because every time he asks his parents, they hesitate to tell him and he is still trying to understand why. He believes it is because they are confused about it themselves. When asked what he knows about his culture, he stated, “Dominicans do not like Haitians.” However, those are not his beliefs. He believes that both Dominicans and Haitians are a part of the human race and there is no point to the hate. He also expressed that based on his understanding from previous visits, he knows that the economy is really bad, and many people are losing their lives in the Dominican Republic. Compared to the Bronx, Jelly believed that the Bronx is 20 times safer than the Dominican Republic.

Interviews

Day 1

I started my interviews with Jelly by asking him how he racially identified. He responded by saying he felt like he could be Hispanic or Black; however, it did not matter because everyone has Black in them. He articulated there is no such thing as saying “Oh, you’re not Black”; he strongly identified as Blackness. “It don’t really matter what people call me, I’m gonna take it because I know who I am and I know where I stand,” he said. When I asked him about where he believed the confusion existed about being both Black and Latino, he said that was based in

power. If someone one can quickly identify anyone as either being Black or whatever race they may claim, there is a power dynamic at play. He conveyed that even though he identified as Black, when he hears the word "Black," his mind automatically assumes African American. When I asked about how his parent and grandparents identified, he only expressed that he educated them about the history of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. Both of his parents immigrated to the United States as did his grandmother who lives with him in his household. I then asked if they had ever shared stories about what their immigration experience was like, and he responded with "no"—and said he never planned on asking them.

I continued the conversation by asking him what some of his favorite past-times were. He answered that he loved learning about history and basketball.

> DuBose: So what would you say is your favorite past-time? What are some of your favorite interests?

> Jelly: So I'm interested in historical stuff. I'm interested in basketball, that's really my passion. I used to be interested in math, but then they started adding letters into it, so I was like, "What is this?" But I'm interested in historical stuff, like I wanna know how we got here. Like, why is it that we all different colors? All of that.

> DuBose: Why history?

> Jelly: I don't know, I feel like there's a lot that I don't know yet. I can't just grow up and be old, and then just talk without knowing what really happened. For example, like people talking about, "Oh yeah, Christopher Columbus was great. Yeah, he discovered America." But now that I know the history about it, he didn't discover no America, Natives was here first. He did something he wasn't supposed to do, taking people's rights. So then I was just like, "I need to know my history before jumping to conclusions."

> DuBose: Was there a certain moment that sparked your interest in history?

> Jelly: It was just my teachers, like the way they used to teach it. I used to just be wild interested, I was like, "Yeah, I wanna learn more."

> DuBose: Mm-hmm (affirmative). What about basketball? What is it about basketball that interests you?

Jelly: All right, so as you can see, I'm not that tall, so I take that and then I use this quote every single day, which is "Heart over height." All I do is play and prove people that height doesn't mean nothing. Then there was this teacher that made me turn into the person I am now, because he basically rejected me because of my height. So I was like, I'm gonna pick it up from here. I'm gonna just do what I have to do, to show people I can do it.

DuBose: So are you in the team at school?

Jelly: No.

DuBose: But you play a lot in the neighborhood?

Jelly: Yeah.

DuBose: Okay. What was it that drew your interest to basketball?

Jelly: One is there's not many Dominicans in the league, so I was like, "Let me break this. There's too many Dominican baseball players, let me break this. Let me do something." So I was like, try something new because I used to play baseball, but I didn't find it interesting no more because I was being forced to play, and it was just like I didn't wanna do it no more.

DuBose: Who was forcing you to play?

Jelly: My dad, because that was his dream. Then I sat down with him, I just told him I couldn't do this no more. It was boring. So then he just let me go, and he was like-

DuBose: Did you feel like you were good in baseball?

Jelly: Yeah. I worked really hard, every day practicing.

DuBose: So that was your dad's dream?

Jelly: Yeah.

DuBose: For himself, or for you?

Jelly: For him.

Jelly continued to express that his father could not pursue his dreams of baseball because of life situations, which came in conjunction with his grandfather's dreams of being deferred in his pursuit of baseball as well. He expressed that his grandparents never supported his father's

dreams, and so when he saw the talent in Jelly, he was going to be for his son every step of the way. "I can support you, we can make my dream and your dream possible," Jelly said his father expressed. However, his father and mother were supportive not only of his athletic pursuits, but his academic pursuits as well.

"I didn't really learn as much when I was in elementary or preschool," Jelly uttered. His first language was Spanish and he used to really struggle. The school that he was attending in his early years did not really help Jelly with his struggle either. When he came to school, the teacher would ask him a question and most of the students would know it right away, but he would always feel he never learned the material before. "Like, there would be some signs, equation or something, and then somebody would be like, 'Oh, I got this.' But my school never taught me nothing. It was just, my school was like babying us, like, 'Oh, yeah, it's okay,'" he stated. Jelly continued to feel this way until he was in the sixth grade. He was assigned a Latino advisor who would communicate with him in Spanish. She stayed with him after school, continuously talking to him to help him with his reading and writing comprehension. From there, he started developing his English language skills.

Jelly expressed that there are assumptions about why some students struggle with learning the English language, for example, because many use their first language in the home and it becomes confusing. However, this was not Jelly's situation.

> Jelly: I don't think this have to do with that, I feel like it's because of my past, like my elementary school. They didn't teach me the right things. Then I see it because my sister, instead of her going to the school I went to, they but her into the school named Sacred Heart, and she went into the . . .
>
> DuBose: Sacred Heart in New York City?
>
> Jelly: Yeah, yeah. She went into the third grade and she's just killing it with the reading levels. Like, every time she come up to me, "Oh, I'm in another level." Like, third grade I was still in the same level for a whole year.

DuBose: Okay, so you believe the issue was the school. So you said that you had an advisor in sixth grade, Colombian or Ecuadorian, and she was the one who was able to get you further in English. Just to clarify, she was your advisor, she wasn't your teacher?

Jelly: No.

DuBose: So what was it that she was doing to help you move forward?

Jelly: Well she started talking to my mom, because my mom, she knows English, she studied over here. My mom was like, "Okay, we're gonna sit down with him." She would just sit down with me and my advisor, and make sure that we would do it. Like she'll call my mom and then we'd just read, read and read, and my mom was just—

DuBose: In English?

Jelly: Yeah.

DuBose: Okay.

Jelly: She would just write words and I'd have to pronounce them. That's all I did.

DuBose: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Was there any transition or anything different in your sixth-grade classroom that you were getting differently from kindergarten to fifth grade?

Jelly: I was getting more attention in sixth grade, like more support, more help.

DuBose: Okay, and you think that was because of the advisor?

Jelly: And the teachers. The other teachers, because they saw me struggling. They say like, "Yo, this kid really need help, need to help him develop."

In the seventh grade, Jelly changed schools. When he started at his new school, he saw an immediate difference. He felt like his experience was "amazing" and he was able to get support from every teacher; the more support he received, the more they expected from him.

DuBose: Okay, so talk to me a little bit about your middle school experience. I know your middle and high school are merged, but middle school is sixth to eighth, so tell me about that.

Jelly: It was amazing. I got support from every teacher, every teacher expected more for me, pushed me, because I wasn't dumb. I knew what I was doing, I just couldn't explain it in English, but I liked it. I had fun, I learned a lot, I grew up.

DuBose: How'd you grow up?

Jelly: Just stronger, stronger. Like, started off from not knowing English, to, "Hey, I know a little bit," to, "Oh, now I can write an essay," to now, this year, I know exactly what I'm doing.

DuBose: Are you confident?

Jelly: Yeah.

When we arrived to the part of the conversation around high school, Jelly said that he has loved his high school experience. His teachers have pushed him not only in his English but in thinking critically. He feels like his strength of reading and writing in Spanish has been diminished due to the hyper-focus on English in his classes. However, he is hopeful that he will one day be able to make it more balanced. He communicated that he wants to be able to talk to a diverse range of people and the Spanish language is great way to do that.

As we began to close our first interview, Jelly asked if he could tell me one more story that was relevant to his educational trajectory.

Jelly: I do know that when I used to struggle in English, I used to really give up easily, like I'd be like, "Hell, I'm not doing this." Then, I think it was seventh grade or eighth grade, my teacher came and she just started spazzing, and just went hard, but she didn't do it because she didn't like. She did it because she expect way more. She wants me to develop and show people that I'm Hispanic and I could make it, and so she just started going hard and I was like, "Now it's time for me to get my stuff together." After that, like—

DuBose: What grade was this?

Jelly: I think it was eighth grade or seventh grade, I don't really remember.

DuBose: When you say "spaz," you mean like just yelling at you?

Jelly: Yeah, she was like, "You really think this is how you gonna get to high school, acting the way you acting?" I was like, "Wow, it's time for me to get my stuff together."

DuBose: What was her racial background?

Jelly: White.

DuBose: Okay. Do you feel like that was the turning point for you? What was your response to her?

Jelly: I was just in shock. I just sat down, I'm like, "I'm done." Then after that, I was like, "It's time for me to get my stuff together," and I just started moving away from negative energy. I was just like, "No, it's time for me to get my stuff together. I wanna make it somewhere in life."

DuBose: Mm-hmm (affirmative). So what would you say is that negative energy?

Jelly: Like, I only hang out with the wrong people, because they wasn't as motivated. They wouldn't do their work, so I was like, "No, I gotta change my way. I gotta change my circle," so I made my own circle. I just did what I had to do.

DuBose: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Tell me about some of the people in your circle?

Jelly: Well I have friends that would just cheat their way to the next grade, just don't care, just act up in class. I'll take that and be like, "This is not who my parents raised me to be." So I was like, "It's time for me to change."

DuBose: So who are the people who you hang out with now? Were those people who you were talking about, like who cheat their way through grades, are those people that you hang out with currently, or are those the people you left behind?

Jelly: Oh, I hang out with them, but it's not like I be with them all the time. It was like, "Yo, what's good?" So they can know, they still got a part of me, they still my brothers, but it's like, they don't got the same mindset as me. I can't just be all together like that, I wanna make it somewhere.

DuBose: Mm-hmm (affirmative). By, "making it," what does that mean?

Jelly stated that no one in his family ever went to college. He felt it was important to show his parents that even though they did not do it because of their sacrifices, he was going to make the dream of higher education a reality for all of them.

Day 2

The music is loud. When I come into this coffee shop, the music is so loud that sometimes it feels that if it goes any higher, it can be a party day. Today is cold and I am noticing a pattern that when it is colder outside, it is harder to get a seat at the table in the coffee shop. I have only been at this coffee shop three times and I am already noticing the same people coming here at the same time every Sunday. Was I becoming a regular? I always wanted that for my New York City experience—to be a regular somewhere, at a place where they knew my order and gave me coupons when something new was on the menu.

Jelly just entered. He had his hoodie over his head and looked as if he just woke up from a nap. Yes, he actually did wake up from a nap because he was late. I called him and he told me he overslept.

Jelly and I expanded on our conversation on education, but specifically on this day we honed in on the culture of his school. He explained that technically there are three schools in one building. He said everyone got along, although everyone knew what school and groups they belonged to. "It's calm, it's like family," he expressed. He believed that the family-like nature of the school allowed students to feel more comfortable with each other, but Jelly felt that in some ways he felt limited. When he expressed himself, whether with political views or social beliefs, no one disagreed with him. Jelly felt that it seemed that all of the students were almost all the same. Even if they all came from different backgrounds, there was a commonality in the culture that was still the same. "No one ever disagree with me. I don't know, it's like we all get along, we're just all family, because we all, we all understand each other," he said. When I asked if there was any type of culture of bullying at his school, he said, "I don't think our school has bullying." He expressed that he and his fellow peers followed a philosophy daily: "If we see

anything happening, some middle schoolers, we always there. We try to stop the situation before it gets any worse, because we been through that in middle school, we've been bullied."

Day 3

Day 3 of this study became unexpectedly interesting. Jelly and I had an in-depth conversation about media and Black men that expanded into a full-out dialogue about colorism. Jelly found that when watching different portrayals in the media, he saw a direct impact on his own life.

DuBose: So when you're consuming all these media entities, what images of young Black men your age do you see? And do you see it as being a positive or a negative?

Jelly: I think we've got a negative image. Wait, like in TV or just in general?

DuBose: What you're consuming? Anything that you consume. Anything that you consume within media.

Jelly: I think we get a negative energy and meaning because for example, yesterday . . . it was yesterday, I went to the store with one of my friends and I had people following me thinking I was going to steal because I had my hoodie on, so once I took it off, they moved away. So, I was like . . . nobody's got time to steal, so I was like to this day people view us differently just because we're colored. If it would've been someone that was White, it would've been like, "oh, okay." It's like we still got a negative view.

DuBose: Do you see any negative images when you watch TV or when you're consuming anything like articles or news, are you seeing any negative things?

Jelly: I actually did yesterday. I forgot what was it. We watched the video about a guy that got murdered, the headline was, 'A Monster,' but how is he a monster if he was under the influence of drugs or you don't know what he really did. It's like we still get viewed as bad people only because he was dark-skinned, so they put 'Monster' as the title.

As I listened to Jelly tell the story about the 'Monster' headline, I began to become fascinated with how he specified the man's complexion. It made me refer back to when Jelly made the comment about the word "Black." Even though he identified as Black, his automatic

assumption leant toward assuming one is referring to African American. So I continued the conversation and asked Jelly if he had witnessed any more personal examples.

> Jelly: I just see things in the street, man. Yesterday, going home from Saturday school with two of my friends, and we was in the bus and we saw how the cops stopped two dark skins for nothing and then they were just searching them.
>
> DuBose: Two dark skins?
>
> Jelly: Yeah, two colored. Colored.
>
> DuBose: Is there something with that? Is it like light skins and dark skins?
>
> Jelly: I don't know. I don't know. I don't really care about that.
>
> DuBose: No, I'm just asking.
>
> Jelly: No. It's the same thing. We're all the same thing.

Jelly tries to shut the questioning of the comment "dark skins," but I continued to press for more context. I wanted to understand what he meant and, in a way, I wanted him to understand himself in that moment and what was he truly trying to convey.

> DuBose: But I mean you said two dark skins. So I'm saying were they darker than you and I?
>
> Jelly: Yeah.
>
> DuBose: They were darker than us. They were like Mr. Keating's darker complexion.
>
> Jelly: Yeah.
>
> DuBose: Okay, so you reference them as dark skins. So, you would be a light skin?
>
> Jelly: Yeah.
>
> DuBose: Okay.
>
> Jelly: So they got stopped and then they just searched them and just let them go for nothing.
>
> DuBose: Okay. And that was when you were on the bus.

Jelly: Yeah.

DuBose: Okay. So that brings me to my next question. You identify as Dominican. And I know that they are references specifically in Dominican culture like the terms dark skins and light skins, do you see a pattern of what you look like as to being negative and positive? Like you might be Black, but you might be dark-skinned and this has a more negative images. Being our complexion (lighter-skinned), it may be seen as a positive thing than being kind of a darker complexion, because you're going to have more issues. Do you see that being played out a lot?

Jelly: No.

DuBose: No?

Jelly: If you are colored in general, you're going to be treated differently. It don't matter if you're dark or if you're light, it don't matter. If you're not white like America wants you to be, the way America wants you to act, dress, the whole nation stuff. They just don't treat you the same way, dark skins or light-skinned, whatever, if you're colored, you're going to be treated the same way.

DuBose: Okay, and what about within the culture though? So within the spectrum of race right or color right, do you feel like there's a treatment of dark and light within the race? So let's talk about specifically Dominicans right, so is there a difference of perception that a light-skinned Dominican would have than a dark-skinned Dominican of each other?

Jelly: Like going at each other?

DuBose: Not even going at each other, but just kind of like the understanding that, "Oh, because you're dark or because you're light, you're better or you're less than?"

Jelly: That's a hard question.

DuBose: Hmm, and do you think maybe it has a part in that understanding?

Jelly: The media part, I can say that, because of social media my culture thinks that way because see I know my culture is really racist, but I don't state like whatever they do because we're all Black like I said last time, so I don't listen to what they gotta say.

DuBose: Okay.

Jelly: But because of social media and how Black people are being viewed, the nigga be like, "Oh, if it wasn't for these Black dudes, we would all have freedom," but it's like we're all Black. Whatever they do influences, whatever we do. We're all united so it's like I don't know . . . social media makes us look . . . makes Black

people seem so bad at . . . like my people have hate towards Blacks, so it's like I don't respect it, I don't agree with that, but the other question you said, I don't know. It's a real tricky question.

DuBose: Do you think that media has a part in the understanding of what is Black and how Black people are treated?

Jelly: Yes, I do. Yeah, media does have a part in that.

DuBose: You think so?

Jelly: Yep.

DuBose: Why do you think that?

Jelly: As far as social media, that's where all the lies come. That's where you can change anything, you can add anything, just lie and be like, "Oh, this is dark skin" or "This is light skin" or people of color, they saying this and this and that's where everybody's at, so.

DuBose: So before social media, before let's say even go right before television, there was always something between Haiti and the Dominican Republic, right?

Jelly: Yeah.

DuBose: Right. So, where did that come from?

Jelly: I don't know my history.

In that moment, Jelly confronted his Blackness and biases. He knew he was Black, but he also knew what he was told all his life what was supposed to be Black. He knew he was Dominican and he knew that Dominicans have African roots, but as a defense he expressed that he did not know his history, as if to say he refused to frame an argument. Yet he knew enough history to reference the historical conflict between Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Haitians are visibly assumed to be darker-skinned and Dominicans are assumed to be lighter-skinned. Yet in a moment of clarity, Jelly refused to take it any step further because what he felt in his heart was not expressed verbally from his brain. Hate is taught, but you are born with a heart.

Day 4

On Day 4, Jelly returned but looked as if he had done something wrong. His energy was different this time and he had more of a serious demeanor. I knew it was because he was uncomfortable from our last interview. However, when one is the most uncomfortable, that is when one learned the most. Education is uncomfortable, learning new things about oneself is uncomfortable, and interrogating who one is is uncomfortable. However, just because one is uncomfortable does not mean that one stops being that person; one just simply allows the evolution to take precedence. I asked Jelly why he shut down on me in the last conversation, and he responded with "I don't know." I followed up: "I've never seen you like that before. Usually, you're really open and you just shut down. Why did you shut down last time?" Jelly responded, "I don't know. I didn't really have much to say." I reaffirmed to him that in this study there was no right or wrong answer and he should feel completely comfortable at all times. He responded that he was comfortable but felt he stumbled over his words. I told him that he did not stumble, he was honest, and that is how we as humans learn together—through honesty.

Jelly flashed a smile and I asked him if he was ready to begin. He responded with "yes.". We dove into the world of Jelly's social media usage. He told me that he used both Instagram and Snapchat, but had deleted his Facebook.

Jelly: Let me tell you something, Facebook, that social media account is used just to start problems. For example, all that beef stuff with gangs and all that is all on Facebook and I don't got time for none of that so I just deactivated it.

DuBose: Okay, what do you mean gangs?

Jelly: That's where like all the gang people's at and all the corny stuff so I just deleted it.

DuBose: So how does that kind of start? How does that formulate with what the gangs . . . well, on Facebook. Because you know when I think of gangs, you think of specifically the streets, everybody takes everything to the streets so, whatever. So

now that we are living in the social media era where people can kind of communicate through social media, how do beefs and everything start on Facebook specifically?

Jelly: I don't know, it depends.

DuBose: This is the first time I have heard this.

Jelly: It depends, sometimes you can comment under somebody's . . . so like, when you comment on the shorty's picture, or a female's picture, something like, someone always got to say something rude. So that's when all that beef stuff becomes something big, and then all that comment stuff.

DuBose: But when you comment on someone's picture on Instagram, that can start something too, right?

Jelly:: Yeah, but it's like, I don't know. I feel like Instagram is like . . . I don't know. I don't know how to explain it like. I feel like Instagram is more like just calm people. Facebook is like just big. Facebook's really big.

DuBose: So do you think that the people who are in gangs or people who are starting those type of things, do you think that they are only on Facebook? Do they have Instagram? Do they have Snapchat?

Jelly: Oh yeah, they have Instagram, Snapchat.

DuBose: Okay?

Jelly continued to say that because he felt Facebook was so big, it was simply unstoppable to avoid gang violence. He believed that an app like Instagram provided him with more protection, such as the option to block a gang member from accessing his page.

Day 5

Before our interview began on Day 5, I noticed that Jelly refused to take off his coat. It was very warm in the coffee shop and he kept moving up his collar, and I asked him why he kept doing that. I then proceeded to move his hand and he had red spots all over his neck, or as the kids say, "hicky." Hickies happen when someone kisses your neck but then basically sucks it like a vampire. Jelly then admitted he had a new girlfriend and he saw her the previous night. "Sorry

to change the tone of this very interesting story," I said, "but I'd like to dive into a conversation surrounding racism." Jelly then articulated that he believed racism was when you put a race down for just being who they were.

Jelly then shared a story of how he and his friends went to Boston for a field trip. He recalled a moment where they entered an elevator where a White couple was already inside. Before Jelly and his friends got on the elevator, the couple had pressed the fifth floor button, but when they noticed Jelly had pressed for the sixth floor, they pressed the third floor button and rushed off the elevator. Jelly continued with a story in which he was followed in a department store because he had a hoodie on. When I asked him if he thought racism would ever go away, he responded with a solid "No."

DuBose: Do you think that racism will ever go away?

Jelly: No. I don't think so. I feel like people are too hardheaded, they don't want to share. Like, we continue to protest, protest, protest. But there's still that one individual that just don't believe in that. Just don't continue to influence others. This is hard and we been trying for so long, . . . I think the only way for us to actually stop them, if we put the citizen or whatever, wife, through the situations we've been through, so they can understand this is what's going on.

By "them," Jelly was referring to White people. He believed that if White people endured systemic and institutional racism on a daily basis, they may be open to stop oppressing others. When I asked Jelly if he believed there were punishments for those who did racist acts, he said, "I don't think so."

DuBose: Okay. So tell me this, are there punishments for racism in this country?

Jelly: I don't think so. I don't think . . . but I think they should be punished. Not like, all beat or nothing, I feel like they should just be isolated. Like, for example . . . Like, let's say I say a racist comment to that person, I feel like we should be isolated in a room and talk it out. What's really going on? Well, I believe . . . I don't know if they should be. I don't really think that we should be punished, but I just feel like . . . Just talk it out, I feel like we just need to talk it out. I don't know about . . . Punishment.

DuBose: Name three feelings that come up when you hear the word "racism." When you hear the word "racism," what are three feelings that come up?

Jelly: Annoyed . . . like I'm just tired of hearing it. I just feel like . . . It's just corny now. We about to be in 2020 like. We've been doing this for a long time already, just going . . . Sometimes nervous. But not, not nervous, but like, scared. Because, for example I'm in a public school. I don't really get the same opportunities that other, white students or . . . because of racism I might be shut down . . . I don't know anymore. It's annoyed and scared.

Jelly continued to express his frustration about it, but made clear that he could not handle anyone being racist toward his mother. His mother did not get a chance to go to school, and so Jelly believed she may not understand certain things and he needed to protect her. He worried less about his friends regarding racism because he felt they had the tools and knowledge to navigate it. He did not believe his mother knows how to navigate so he will continue to protect his mother and his family always.

I concluded our conversation by asking Jelly if he believed there was overt racism now more than ever towards Spanish-speaking people.

DuBose: Do you think that there is more overt racism now towards Spanish-speaking people because of the times we're living in? Do you feel like there's more racism towards Spanish-speaking folks?

Jelly: Yes. I think that . . . I feel like they just putting most of the blame on us now . . . One of my questions for econ is: "Is deporting immigrants back to their own countries the solution to opening jobs for citizens?" Because citizens are complaining that we taking over everything, meanwhile we getting jobs that don't even give us money like that . . . What's the thing that's going on or Spanish or Black, minorities, minorities. I feel like know it's got more intense especially because of Trump.

DuBose: Does it make you afraid?

Jelly: Nah, not really. Like, sometimes but I'm not gonna let nothing come in my way. I know what I'm capable of, for example I wanna go to Plattsburgh, that's mainly White people up there. I wanna change that, I wanna be different because nobody's stopping me.

DuBose: Do you feel like there's gonna be a time where racism does get in your way of your success?

Jelly: Oh yeah, definitely, definitely. But, I need to find a way to just go through that, same way Martin Luther King did it, same way Obama did it, all those racist comments, I could do it to . . . We're all the same, we all humans.

Day 6

"Once you do something illegal, that's it you'll be considered a criminal," said Jelly when I asked him to define the criminal justice system on Day 6. When asked to continue his thoughts on this topic, he went directly into conveying his belief in the police.

Jelly: I think police should be less brutal. I feel like they should be more like, they should speak more instead of hurting us. I feel like they should speak to us more, like less crimes are happening then we would understand their point of view instead of just reacting in a negative way. I also feel like cops should be like, we should be like a family. Look out after each other and not like, "Oh, you're from the hood. We don't get along." We're still the same. Because at the end of the day, when you're done working, you probably live in the hood.

DuBose: What kinds of skills do you feel that policing community need leaders need to have to make community policing work?

Jelly: I think they need . . . I think a skill, I don't know. Just listen, instead of reacting negatively. Like listen to our point of view first. Get the facts straight instead of "Oh, you got a hood. Let's get em." You just got to listen first. Give us a chance to show that we're not all bad. We're all the same. We're just trying to survive in this environment.

DuBose: What essential elements of an effective . . . What are the essential elements of an effective community policing program?

Jelly: Like I said, cops just reacting in a negative way. In the environment where cops only react to like certain types. For example, there's like a little fight. They'll just look at it and then wait. After the fight's completely done then they'll go "what happened?" Little stuff like that. Like not caring. Sometimes, there'd be cops I'd be seeing in where I live where they just like, just stay there. There could be a fight in front of them, they'll just look at you. When the fight is over, then they go out. So those are the little things that mess up my mind. The cops just don't care.

When I asked Jelly if he felt if there was a way to promote better relationships between the police and the community, he responded that he had been trying since last summer to create a

bridge. He was able to get four cops to come play basketball at the neighborhood ball court and he felt that more events together like this could solve more of the issues and they would become an inclusive community. Jelly recalled on the day he invited the police officers to play, the entire group—both police officers and neighborhood teenagers—were having fun. He said in the summer of 2018, he wanted to find a way to have more programs or activities so the police would look forward to it and make the neighborhood more united.

However, Jelly claimed it would be more difficult than it sounded because of racism. He expressed that White police officers are afraid of Black people. “They really fear us and I feel like the only thing that’s making it like so hard to stop it and for our community to be like stable is because of racism and these White cops just don’t understand,” he said. “Their mindset is I’m a survivor, I’ma go home to my kids. They don’t care we’re Black, we have the same . . . You know, we all the same. I think it’s just racism that’s what’s really messing up White people, I mean the cops. It’s really messing them up,” he concluded. I then asked Jelly if he ever had any interactions with the police. He began to look down at the table. I leaned in. “Jelly,” I said, “have you ever had any interactions with the police?” “Yeah,” he responded.

Jelly: A long time ago.

DuBose: How old were you?

Jelly: I was like twelve. They stopped my dad and it was just crazy. They stopped him like “I’m gonna need the kid to get out.” It was really cold and then they had me . . . get me outside and my mom kept telling them that “Oh my kid is cold.” And they were like “Oh we don’t care.” And they just left me outside.

DuBose: How long were you outside?

Jelly: For like three hours.

DuBose: In the cold.

Jelly: Yeah.

DuBose: And where was your mom?

Jelly: She was crying and then she was like begging them to let me call my grandmother to pick us up but they was like no.

DuBose: And what about your dad?

Jelly: Well, they took him to the precinct.

DuBose: Why?

Jelly: They thought he had something, but all he really had was like . . . he had tools because he was a mechanic and they confused him with someone else.

DuBose: So he fitted the description with who they thought he was.

Jelly: Yeah.

DuBose: So they took your dad to the precinct and then they left you . . . they made you and your mom . . .

Jelly: Yeah, stay outside so there was not anybody in the back. I mean they put us in a pod for three hours and I was like "I'm so sorry."

DuBose: And so how did that affect you?

Jelly: Like sometimes when I see cops, I have so much hate for them but I gotta understand too that some cops are clean but that's not going to change my mind.

DuBose: So what was the car ride back like?

Jelly: I was just quiet. After that day and after that when they hit me, I was like I'm never going to be a cop. This is just disrespectful.

DuBose: Have you ever had any other interactions with the cops?

Jelly: Yeah for summer time I was just playing basketball, last summer my mind started to change a little bit . . . but still I just can't get over that. Still have some hate.

I asked Jelly if he felt protected under the law and he responded with "sometimes." He believed that the law, whether it be the criminal justice system or the police, will not always support him even if they are put in place to do just that. He gave the example that if he called 911, they may or may not come, but if they do come, it will probably take 30 minutes to an hour

because the value of his life does not matter as much as someone else in another zip code. “They’re there but not really. I have no problem. I just don’t feel safe,” he said. “I don’t really think about it ‘cause at the end of the day, I know that this is me and I just gotta look out for my brothers and sisters. Trying my best to survive in this environment,” he concluded.

Day 7

In this dissertation, the full transcript of Day 7 concludes each interview data sketch section. Day 7 was an important day for me as it concluded my data collection as well as illustrated the true growth and power in my participants in their final responses.

DuBose: Jelly, we’re back one more time.

Jelly: What’s up?

DuBose: We’ve talked a lot about the future. We’ve talked a lot about the past. We’ve talked about a lot of different things throughout this study. But right now I want to talk about this moment in time. And I want to ask you, in this moment, are you happy?

Jelly: Yeah.

DuBose: Why?

Jelly: Because I got everything I need. I feel like I’ve accomplished so much stuff that I didn’t know I could be able to accomplish.

DuBose: Are you comfortable with the direction your life is headed?

Jelly: Yeah.

DuBose: Why?

Jelly: Because I’m heading a direction that my parents never had before. I’m actually about to go to college and nobody in my family has been to college.

DuBose: Is there anything that you can improve on about yourself, or that you would dramatically enhance about your life?

Jelly: I feel like I have to be more independent and more quiet, like move my way. I mean, just keep my stuff to myself. Pop out later. Show people that I did it, me, by myself.

DuBose: What do you believe is possible for your life? What do you believe is possible for your life?

Jelly: Like what I believe I could do?

DuBose: What do you believe is possible?

Jelly: I don't know. I think I'm able to do anything. I just need to shut my mouth. I know it sounds corny, but you shut your mouth, you got it. I never thought I was going to do good. And throughout my whole high school years, I've always got a chance to keep my average to a 86.

DuBose: What do you value the most?

Jelly: Like in school general?

DuBose: In general. Completely general. What do you value the most in your life right now?

Jelly: It has to be one thing or it could be . . . ?

DuBose: Can be as many things as you want.

Jelly: My teachers and my family, because if it wasn't for my teachers staying with me after school, pushing me, I would have been gave up. And if it wasn't for my parents telling me what's right or wrong and keeping me away from the streets, I would have never been who I am now.

DuBose: What do you want more than anything else out of your life?

Jelly: I want to be able to just help others. My dream since I was little was to always help out the poor because I just don't like seeing people suffer. I know that before time, it was hard for people to be in school, but now supposedly we're all equal. I get a chance to actually help them out because they never got this experience that I'm getting.

DuBose: What motivates you?

Jelly: My little sister because my older sister, we don't really have a close relationship, we don't really talk. I've never had a role model, like someone older than me just keep pushing me. My little sister, she's just 10 and she's now learning. I want to

make sure she knows everything before going up to that level. Like she's already warned what not to do, how school's really going to be.

DuBose: What kinds of experiences are most important to you?

Jelly: The ones with my teachers. Like when they talk to me and explain to me stuff and break down to me how much they expect from me. I don't know, every time with teachers, I'm proud. I never thought I was going to be as close with my teachers. I never thought I was going to be that known in my school. At one point, I thought I was just going to give up.

DuBose: What do you appreciate most about yourself?

Jelly: Not taking the wrong path. Making sure that, even though I know a lot of friends is like gang members, I never found it interesting. I'm proud that I stayed in my own path, even though there's been time people try to influence me to go in. I've never found it interesting. I've been clean.

DuBose: And what are you most grateful for?

Jelly: Like I said, my family and teachers. If it wasn't for them I wouldn't be who I am now at all. I say it every day, I'm thankful. I say that to them every day because I thought I was going to take a wrong path a long time ago.

Chapter VI

MUHAMMED USTAFAH

> I had to confront my fears and master my every demonic thought about inferiority, insecurity, or the fear of being Black, young, and gifted in this Western culture.
>
> — Lauryn Hill

Muhammed is a quiet force. When one first meets him, he presents himself as shy and almost reclusive. However, when one actually gets to know him, it is easier to understand this as a premeditated protective guard that he wants someone to believe. Muhammed is not only guarded, but he will not open his persona up to anyone without first completely understanding who that person is. He cares less about professional titles and more about the soul of the person. Who Muhammed really is is a comfortable, confident, and competent young man who supports his family on a constant basis. His general work ethic and his willingness to support his family continuously made him stand out among his peers. He demonstrated that even at a young age, he can handle enormous responsibility, but can still be a teenager trying to find his way to adulthood. He has aspirations to go to college, and at the time this study concluded, he had been accepted into numerous city colleges in New York City.

Physical Description

Muhammed is somewhere around 6 feet tall and 150 pounds. He has chestnut brown skin and dark brown eyes. His hair, like his peers, is cut into a high-top fade; however, he is probably the most versatile with style of hair. Sometimes he will wear it in individual braids, and then he will style it in cornrows or just a natural bush. Muhammed is very stylish. He is also a fan of

athleisure but has more expensive taste. His shoes always as if they just came out of the store, even if I know otherwise.

Background

Muhammed was born on January 29, 2000. He was raised in Harlem and has four sisters, ranging from 7 to 10 years in age. As the oldest and the only male, he takes his big brother role seriously. His parents divorced and he splits his time between both households. His mother works for the Board of Education as an administrator. His father works on the corporate side of the New York City MTA. When asked about his ancestry, he knew that he was of Puerto Rican, African American, and African descent, but solely identified as African American. His favorite past-times included cooking, photography for film use, and performing arts in theater and music. He expressed that he was very in tune with music. He felt that music expressed the emotions he cannot express at times. At times, Muhammed allows music to dictate his moods when necessary. When he is sad or mad, he listens to the lyrics of whatever song is playing at that time to shift his mood. When he cooks, it is mostly with his mother who assists him in the kitchen. They love to cook pastas, steak, and lamb. When he gets a chance to cook by himself, his go-to dishes consist of chicken and ground beef. However, he said he did not like fried chicken but prefers it baked.

Interviews

Day 1

On the first day I sat down with Muhammed, he began to speak in a low-toned mumble. I asked him if he was okay and he told me he was fine. I was concerned because I wanted to make sure he was comfortable. “Are you uncomfortable?” I asked. He responded, “No, I am fine, and this is just the way I talk.” “Understood,” I said. We then started our conversation discussing his

background and found our way into his educational experiences. When I asked what his kindergarten to sixth grade experience was like, he said, “I was a reckless kid.” He continued saying that from prekindergarten to sixth grade, he would not label himself as one of the youth that prefers bad behavior but always had too much energy. His energy then seemingly began to become an issue for his teachers because he loved to joke a lot.

Muhammed expressed that he was a student who liked learning, but his teachers during that timeframe were very hard on him. His favorite subjects were math, science, and history. Also at that time, he developed a love for global studies, which enhanced his desire to visit other places outside of New York and experience other cultures. Since he struggled with the relationships he had with his teachers, he found himself having stronger bonds with his classmates. The school itself was a private school located in the Upper West Side neighborhood of Manhattan, with a predominately all-White teaching staff, administration, and student body. His parents noticed that he needed to be taken out of the school, so he transferred to another private school. He found it to be a better fit academically, but he was missing the social piece he left behind at his other school. He acknowledged that he noticed he was able to learn at a faster pace than the other students in his class.

Muhammed transferred again and now started at a public high school in the Bronx. He did not find himself in the culture because of race, but it was an adjustment to the school culture, especially when trying to make friends.

DuBose: Tell me about some of your classmates and friends at the school.

Muhammed: Friends at the school, it was a lot of Hispanics. My school’s predominately Hispanic, so when I first got there I was like I’m a Black dude getting picked on. Like “Yo, nappy head.”

DuBose: Really?

Muhammed: Yeah. Even just playing around. After a while I had to embrace it's not just a Black thing. Try to have friends from other cultures as well so I could fit in. After actually connecting with people that was more better part.

DuBose: So you're saying the Hispanic kids would pick on you when you first got there?

Muhammed: Yeah. It was at first picked on, but now . . . It wasn't like a Hispanic I'm better than you think. But we're just picking on you—

DuBose: Just like what they did with the new kids?

Muhammed: Yeah, new kid.

DuBose: New kid. Got it.

Muhammed: I got punched a few times.

DuBose: So when did that stop?

Muhammed: It wasn't a bullying thing but it was like, yo, you're going to see where you at. You want to be one of the, oh we can hang out with you, you're going to take this joke for real? I didn't really take the jokes, because I joke myself, so I was like, me being serious, aye we're just friends. I was like you know what? We're just playing around.

DuBose: So how that been navigating school space? How have you been able to make friends?

Muhammed: Yeah. At school I do have a collective amount of friends. I don't try to be a social dude, social with everybody, but I do have mutual grounds with everybody. I feel like I say hi, hello, whatnot. I do have friends like that, but if I want to go, like my personal friends I go on trips with who help me in my interests and I help them in theirs. Those types of friends. It's not just a school thing. We're close. We see them outside of school like extracurricular activities. Just not always in class, in school bonding.

DuBose: So you said most of your friends are from your elementary school days?

Muhammed: No, I have more high school friends now, but if I were to like have a good time with an old-time friend, I always have friends I can call up from K to sixth.

As the conversation continued, I asked Muhammed if he could reference the best experience he ever had at school. "Going to Black Rock Forest," he said. Every year as the

summer came to a close and a new school year was about to begin, Muhammed and his classmates took part in a trip into the forest. They spent one night, with teacher supervision in the forest. The only catch was they were not allowed to have cell phones. “It’s just your classmates. That also inspired me to go outdoors a lot because outdoors is fun. Just being outdoors with friends,” Muhammed said. Starting this tradition in seventh grade made him venture into joining a program entitled “Summer Sleeps,” a program focused on traveling in which a mentor accompanies each student participant.

Expressing his love for the outdoors, Muhammed led me to ask him about what was culturally relevant for him and was it being used or talked about in his classrooms. His love for music became a center focus in his response. “My favorite rapper is Kendrick Lamar,” Muhammed stated. He later went on to say that a few teachers can talk about the music that he loves “bar to bar,” and actually have a conversation about who is the best rapper out. He referenced a former music teacher who loved to talk about music composition and classical music, but in the same vein could have an in-depth conversation about the music that was relevant to Muhammed. In conjunction with music, Muhammed found a love for history. He enjoys learning about global and U.S. history. In his previous school, he claimed he was only learning about how Europeans are. “At first it was about learning how all these European societies, like Greek societies, but I never heard anything Black-related at first,” he said. Until he started at his current school and took a U.S. history course with Mr. Keating did he start seeing images of himself in history. They discussed time periods such as the Harlem Renaissance and connected it to current times. “Learning about Black cultures and having diverse projects, I’m more engaged to it. I feel like it’s the best class experience,” he concluded.

Day 2

On Day 2 of our interviews, I wanted to expand on Muhammed's favorite subject. In our previous conversation, Muhammed expressed his love for history and how teachers have worked hard to teach their students about their history. This conversation built on that idea but also conveyed his mixed feelings for science.

> Muhammed: In high school, it has to be history as my favorite subject because the teachers were easy to connect with, and I like learning about other places and other daily life and daily activities and how they survived. Learning how Black people . . . how we thrive with certain things, or how we need to have like a merchant garden in the city and they needed a camel or horse where they need to go, and irrigation systems by the water to function a whole society. It's pretty interesting.
>
> My least favorite? Somewhat science. I liked science, a lot. Now I'm more open to science. But when I first started with living environment, it just felt like a little hassle. I was catching on a little bit slower and learning all that information and it wasn't interesting at first until I got to Earth science. You learn about soil and minerals and different types of rocks and what not. So that was more interesting than before, learning the body and the skeletal system and the function in your body—I didn't find that a lot interesting. That's pretty much it.
>
> DuBose: So it was more of an interest, it wasn't necessarily that you were bad at it or you felt like you were bad at it—it was just like you really weren't interested in it?
>
> Muhammed: Yeah. When I'm more interested in something, it's more than just grabs your attention, you get more engaged. You're just more engaged because you find something that you like within a subject that you thought you wouldn't like. So your personal likes with something that you're being taught. So, I feel like that's always good in general, when you're doing something and you have someone who uses what you like and don't like and they use it to help you learn that you actually do, because I feel like it works smoothly, general statement.

Muhmmed continued to explain that his favorite subject came in conjunction with his favorite teachers. His "best" years in school were because the teachers were "overly" engaged and cared more about how he and his classmates learned. He explained that he could tell when a teacher was focused on whether or not he and his classmates excelled. When his teachers broke down the information in a way that was inclusive and allowed for all of their students to

understand, it mattered. When Muhammed knew his teachers really cared about him, he felt he should equally, if not more so, care about doing well in his classes.

Day 3

The music in the coffee shop was lowered. I was so happy to have the music lowered. Once Muhammed came in, even he noticed that music was much lower than what it usually was. We were only on Day 3 of our interviews, but one thing I noticed about Muhammed was that he, more than his peers, was really into his cell phone. His demeanor might have been reserved and quiet, but something would happen when he looked into his cell phone: There was a light.

When I started our conversation, I asked if he could name his favorite news sources and, not to my surprise, he said, "My phone." Muhammed articulated that whenever he wants to know anything, he goes to his phone as a resource. His phone allows him to go on Google and CNN to search for news information he wanted to know. "I always like to read stuff. Read on what's going on, like what the president said, or what's going on in the Senate and whatnot," he said. Muhammed expanded on his understanding of news as well. He felt that when most people hear the word "news," they automatically assume it is coming from a newspaper or cable news show. Muhammed believed all information is news.

DuBose: You mentioned CNN, you mentioned Complex. When you think of news, do you think of everything?

Muhammad: I think of everything because the news is everything, it's something like information being everywhere being told to you. I feel it's not just one place because news can always broadcasted, and it's worldwide. You get the breaking news events; something happened in a whole another continent. It's still the news. I generally feel the news is worldwide. It's open. It's an open thing. Shouldn't be hidden. It shouldn't be put into categories the news of New York. It's the news of everything.

DuBose: Right, news of everywhere?

Muhammad: Yeah.

DuBose: Is your go to for news, Facebook?

Muhammad: Not so . . . I mean, yeah, some, most part. I have follow to some news sources. It's not inaccurate sources I'm getting from because Facebook doesn't always give credible sources. If I know that it's from a credible page, and I'm like, all right, maybe they edited it and I know it's the news, I'll believe it. Sometimes people can give fake news and that's a big thing. I can't believe everything I'm looking at.

DuBose: You're always questioning it?

Muhammad: Yeah. Sometimes I question things.

Since Muhammed viewed all information as news, we started to talk about what books he was currently reading. "*The Brief Wondourous Life of Oscar Wao*," he said. In detail, Muhammed contextualized the entire book, articulating that the theme of the book was love and how love could be interpreted. In many ways, he believed the book could show how love can be a blessing or a curse to families. Muhammed concluded:

> They said that, basically the de Leon family, they're cursed for love because the mother, Beli, her mother, La Inca, there's her husband. Her husband, their granddad, he died but he was basically a writer, as well. He wrote . . . They said he wrote a book about Trujillo and they didn't like it. I think Trujillo put a curse on the family and killed the granddad.

I had never read the book but was fascinated by how relevant it was to him. The book was assigned to him at school, but when I asked him if he liked the teacher who had assigned him the book, he said yes. However, Muhammed expressed that really being into the book did not mean he was going to ignore the realities of the world.

Muhammed: When I'm watching the news, I feel like it's more a negative connotation. It's more like, a death, or something or they like a crime bust, drug-related or some craziness. Like someone got stabbed in the building or like a shooting. Seeing sometimes your ethnicity's mostly portrayed in that way. Not one to watch all the time. I don't really want to watch that every day, hearing about negativity about our culture when, for the most part, I feel like we talk about . . .

There's positive things in the news that they don't talk about versus the negative thing that they cover. I feel more things could be done to cover positive

things and local things, as well. Not more so, the biggest thing that happened, in that a Black person was involved so we have to put it in the news.

It could be a local thing like how you helping the community and you made a big difference, you fed a hundred people. You could put that on the news and stuff like that. More local to the community.

Day 4

On Day 4, Muhammed and I discussed social media. His top-three social media applications were Instagram, Facebook, and Snapchat. When I asked why he liked those particular apps, he explained that each app had its own strength. For Instagram, he loved the visuals; anything that has to do with art or capturing images he thinks is “pretty dope.” If he wants to be inspired or look at something visually inspiring, he goes to Instagram. He expressed that one can find anything in the world on Instagram, and because he loves photos so much, the images speak for themselves. “You don’t need a caption or any special effects, I don’t know, it’s just a picture, you know,” he explained. He now only uses Facebook the most for watching videos and keeping in touch with close friends he does not see often. However, the app he likes the most is Snapchat and uses it whenever he goes out to party with friends or just check in to see how someone’s day is going.

Even though each app is used for building community, Muhammed believed it was “tacky” to have to many followers.

DuBose: My next question is, do you have a lot of friends on your social media apps? How many would you say you have? On each app.

Muhammed: Instagram is probably like, 350 followers. Facebook is like 1,000. Snapchat is like 150. I know Facebook is I more like I like more people on my Facebook than other social medias because like I don’t know like too many friends on Instagram is like pretty tacky. I don’t want to have 12.1K friends and only be talking to 30 of them. Instagram is more like my peoples. You know? Like my friends I know that go out and check up on you guys and like your stuff. I know my Facebook has random people, not random people, but people I know longer talk to. I see it and I’m like, okay. Instagram is like you see them more as . . . I

don’t know. I’d rather have Facebook more public and Instagram as more like what I like to do, like my more craft or what not.

In the current digital age, Muhammed felt that most of his friends have met him in person, but within a first interaction, someone always makes a request and says, “Yo, give me your Facebook,” he said. He made it sound as if it is in no way like someone goes up to another person and says they found the that person online. In his personal experience, Muhammed felt that when it comes to friends on Facebook and social media, it is better to know and meet the person first. He finds that random adds on Facebook can be strange and make him wonder why are they adding someone, which then can cause speculation. Above all, Muhammed believed that the future main purpose of social media will always be to “stunt on the haters.”

DuBose: So what would you say is going to be the main purpose of you using these three apps in the future?

Muhammed: The main purpose of using Snapchat and social media is to stunt on the haters, you feel me?

DuBose: To what?

Muhammed: To stunt on the haters.

DuBose: To stunt on the haters. Okay.

Muhammed: I don’t want to do that.

DuBose: That’s fine. To stunt on the haters in what way?

Muhammed: To show my lifestyle and always be positive. I don’t want to do too many negative things because that’s not what it’s about. Sometimes people need that positive energy to lighten up their day. They like a funny video and they start laughing and you know. Just to make people not feel uncomfortable. When it comes to Facebook and the feature, mostly friends I am using it for, happy birthdays, going on Facebook all the time, watching videos. Instagram. I feel like I’m going to be using that to more exposure, more of as like a portfolio. That’s what I am like already doing. It is going to be more like heavily a portfolio.

DuBose: A portfolio of what?

Muhammed: Photography. Just like photos.

Day 5

"Racism to me is if a person discriminates . . . if they discriminate or talk about a race," Muhammed stated. "I guess by individual, not by race. I feel like it's by individuals because they choose to say it, you know. They go past their boundaries, so that's what racism is to me. If they choose to offend a race or gender or religion, belief. So that's how I see racism," he claimed. Muhammed was stern with his position when I asked him about racism on Day 5 of our interviews. He almost found the question to be as ridiculous as he saw racism to be. For him, 2018 meant that we should not be having the same conversations our grandparents were having. However, Muhammed felt that racism happened frequently enough that he couldn't escape it.

> I feel like it's frequent," he said. "Racism. It's not as strong as like the 1960s, but it's still . . . it occurs. It's something that's a problem. You look like . . . How you put it? I don't know how to say it. As in an analogy for it. It's a situation you don't talk about because it might die down, but then it really doesn't. So it still reoccurs. That's how I feel about it.

Muhammed alleged that if people were truly more equal, racism would not be the center focus of today's conversations. He emphasized the importance of respecting someone as an individual and a human being. He also explained it was important to give everyone equal respect. "I feel like we can achieve that, because if you give everybody an equal respect, you could still do what you want to do, but you're just giving somebody the same respect that you wanna be given," he said. Muhammed set his statement in the context of a professional setting: "Like in a business, you wouldn't want to have . . . Let's say you need a certain type of race you want to attract to your company or brand, and you're a racist person. So you can't. You're just limiting yourself,

you know." Muhammed explained his reasoning was based on a personal experience that he faced last year when he was at a department store in Manhattan.

DuBose: Have you ever been hurt by racism in any type of way?

Muhammed: Yeah. I have encountered racism.

DuBose: Can you give me an example?

Muhammed: Like when I was working downtown at my job, I used to work at Fairway Supermarket.

DuBose: Where?

Muhammed: At my job that's located on East 34th. When I was working there, just sometimes I was uncomfortable. Sometimes I was uncomfortable because you're working at certain stores and whatnot, you may have money and have a job, people still look at you the same way. Or they may still perceive you as being a thief. You walk around the store, people are like . . .

In the store, the one security guard, I remember he stopped me and he was like, "I got to check your bag." I'm like, "What you got to check my bag for? I'm an employee." He was like, "Well, we're the last few to leave and we don't know who else is in the building. So we just want to check to see if you have anything." And checked my receipts and stuff. I paid everything. So little things like that. I pay no mind to it, but I feel like it doesn't happen a lot, but it's still . . . it still happens like once in a blue.

DuBose: Do you think that racism will ever go away?

Muhammed: I feel like if we put a good foot forward to it, we may be able to not end it . . . not totally end it worldwide. But I feel like maybe in the United States, in the next few years, we could probably at least end it. Just have less racism and less hatefulness.

Muhammed continued to say that he felt there were no strong punishments when it came to racism, but he felt that if it is brought to a wide enough audience or broader attention, those in power may feel they have to do something about it or speak on it. Muhammed believed it was important to speak on racism every single day: If it not spoken about, it is like pretending it does not exist. He brought up the recent school shooting in Parkland, Florida for how signs were

constantly ignored, even with prior knowledge. Ignoring the problem does not mean it will go away, just like Parkland, he said.

Day 6

Muhammed had a hard compilation of past weeks. I had set up an appointment for him to go to the Genius Studios for him to meet one of the lead anchors at the company and he had to cancel at the last minute. Genius is a music news media corporation and Muhammed had expressed he was really interested in the videos they produce. I told him that one of my friends worked there, and Muhammed said he would be interested going to visit. Unfortunately, the day he was supposed to go, one of his sisters sliced her hand and he had to go support her. Following that week, he expressed that his grandmother had passed away. Since our conversation happened biweekly, the funeral happened to fall on a day we were not meeting. On Day 6, I asked Muhammed if he was feeling up to doing the interview. He said he was fine and his grandmother had lived a good life. “She was 88,” he said. In that moment, I could not help but think about my own grandmother who passed away when I was 19. “My grandmother was 88 too when she passed, and I was only one year older than you,” I responded. My life changed drastically when my grandmother passed away. “Hey baby,” my grandmother used to say; it was phrase I would love to hear again, if it was humanly possible. I never felt like I could be truly a child. I felt that in many ways, I had to always be much more mature than I actually was, but with my Nana, as I called her, I felt I truly was forever her baby. When she passed away, that was gone. I wondered if that was how Muhammed felt, but I did not want to pry into a possible open wound to make it even wider in the name of research. My humanity would not allow me to do that. So in that moment, I asked my first question: “Can you give me a definition of the criminal justice system in your personal opinion?”

Muhammed: My definition would be just like a facility, a system where people are convicted. I guess like they have to stay there, be convicted and yeah.

DuBose: What do you think the goals are of community policing?

Muhammed: Just to keep the community safe. I feel like that's like their main job. I feel like there's more situations and whatnot . . . I feel like certain cops . . . Are you talking about New York cops?

DuBose: Whatever your perception.

Muhammed: So for New York cops, even though they feel like they may have a light task to be guards, to make sure this area is safe this district, like near this precinct. It's like the environment is nice and then certain situations then they pop up. You know there's certain situations and real-life scenarios that pop up, but it's just that you have one job. You don't know what could happen, you know? Like at any moment, like, like something could snap off and, you know, you're like now you're putting like a light through, right? But that situation like you shoot the person . . . so.

DuBose: What kind kinds of procedural and operational changes do you think that police departments may have to make to institute community policing?

Muhammed: When like, when it comes to minorities it shouldn't be so like hard on it, you know like treating Black kids like treating them like they are adults. You know not like treating them like they are criminals you know whatnot and when it comes to like . . . I've seen my own friend talk to me, tell me like "Yo, I got stopped by the cops" and like crazy things, crazy stories. I'd just like to know like being eighteen with no criminal cases or anything, they're like make you feel like I should be afraid to walk down the block because if the cops stop me and I have like a warrant on me, then at any moment I can like, you know . . .

DuBose: What skills do the police and community leaders need to have to make community policing work?

Muhammed: I feel like, there's like, communication skills knowing that like, I know like every situation with a cop they feel like they shouldn't have to listen to the perp or the suspect because they're the person who controls the situation. I feel like they're told that, like you gotta be the top dog, the macho man. So I feel like the communication is like more lowered because of certain situations you know.

You may want to tell them something but at that moment you can't tell them because they feel like they have to do that because it's their job to not let you speak and if you do speak they can use it against you in a court if law so you wonder like if the communication was stronger maybe less situations would be like invoked and you would know how to like simply say "Okay, here's your

> warning," or like instead of arresting a person and bringing them to a precinct so your sergeant can tell you, "Tell them, okay, this is best top like it's not enough the bigger person so like as long as I arrest him it's like boom rushed in the car and you know, so . . .

Muhammed continued to say that the most important thing to remember is to make policing about safety first, and remember that police are there to serve the communities. He felt police cannot go into communities assuming that the people there are all criminals. Criminals are everywhere, as are civilians, many who are just looking for their protection. The people they serve can range from businesses owners to property managers, and they matter too. Muhammed continued to say that police officers have a lot of responsibility and ultimately know everyone in the communities they serve want to know all is done respectfully and legitimately because they are trained to do the work. However, Muhammed concluded that he understood everything comes with barriers as well.

> DuBose: What are some of the barriers to good police community relationships and what steps can be taken to eliminate them. So what are some of the barriers that the police relations have that you feel?
>
> Muhammed: Ummm
>
> DuBose: Some barriers that good police communities have with their people. Like what is some barriers like maybe a perception or an idea of what police are. Like what are some of the barriers that they face?
>
> Muhammed: Some barriers are like some barriers, like um, some barriers that the females . . . um some . . . let's see . . . some barriers we've had are like um, there is such as something like no like at a young age you're probably told like at the police, at the police, at the police, you know you just like repeat like brainwash and like brainwashing kids. Like you mold one, you've got one. Boom. And then now you got some kid who looks at a cop like disrespectfully so there's not a whole lot of perception, you know, so you gotta um that's something important, you know. Sometimes they really aren't the bad guys and they just have a job. And if you are in the wrong you have to realize that sometimes people are wrong and they don't know it but it's like also going with accountability, so you know you're not accountable for your actions or whatnot and if you're like "Oh, I'm right because I said I'm right" but you know you actually did something wrong, so . . .

Day 7

In this dissertation, the full transcript of Day 7 concludes each interview data sketch section. Day 7 was an important day for me as it concluded my data collection and illustrated the true growth and power of my participants in their final responses.

DuBose: Al right, and we're back. So for this last set of questions, I want to talk to you about, I want to really kind of focus on the present, who you are right now. We talked about the past, we talked about the future, but I want to talk about who you are in this very moment. And so in this moment, are you happy?

Muhammed: Yeah, I'm pretty happy. I feel pretty blessed, a lot of opportunities coming and I feel like it's a perfect time where I can see myself doing something responsible for me, I can say all right, I can do it because I'm independent.

DuBose: Would you say that you're comfortable in the direction that your life is headed?

Muhammed: Yeah, I feel like I just continue to strive for greatness and you achieve what you seek out for, and I'm seeking out to do great things. So hopefully they'll come to me, or I go to it.

DuBose: Is there anything that you feel that you can improve about yourself that would dramatically enhance your life?

Muhammed: I feel like if I gave the same amount of effort that I put into working out and stuff, I feel like when it comes to doing certain things and it comes a mental thing, I feel like I'm a beast at it, certain things that push me. And you give a hundred and ten percent here, but you give fifty percent here, I feel like that was with school. I know I'm intelligent but then I don't got to give a hundred and ten percent in school. But just using the same will power that you use in one thing, you use it in all elements.

DuBose: What do you believe is possible for your life?

Muhammed: Greatness, whenever I see a lot of ideas and concepts that I have, I could bring them to life.

DuBose: What do you value the most in this moment?

Muhammed: In this vast moment of life I value word, word is bond you know, or relationships, friendships, goodness, relationships, everything. Anything in life, your word is your bond. Once you lose your word, I know I was talking to, I had one close friend of me, he was on and off relationship-wise and then he told me if you word isn't your bond, then whatever you say to me, you could throw all your

cards on the table, split the whole five, the whole nine but if your word is untrustworthy, it's hard for people to still say okay, you can be my friend.

DuBose: What do you value the most?

Muhammed: I value family, I value coming together. Everybody needs somebody to make someone's day, friends coming together for a [inaudible] workshop. Something that, you see somebody's face and you have a moment with somebody 'cause you cherish them for a long time.

DuBose: What do you want more than anything in this moment?

Muhammed: Some money. Also just to see my circle, my group be successful, that we all, we're a good bunch of us and I feel like, when it was certain situations, 'cause there's situations in our group that could have turned for worse, that could have ended, some of us could have prosecuted, in reality, we have friends that would be prosecuted, turn around and go to drugs and gang violence. But you have a bunch of us, we can all push each other, like let's play some ball or let's crack some jokes to ease the pain real quick. I know you may be going through something but [inaudible].

DuBose: What motivates you?

Muhammed: What motivates me is my family members, I feel like they want the best for me, that's how it happens. They had certain achievements and their achieved their goals and they want to see their family members achieve there, I want to take that with me and when it comes to working hard for something, just be good at it. Also motivation is certain basketball players, you have to work hard to get something you achieve, that feeling, you can achieve anything whether it's making it to the A or playing college ball, whatever you do, whatever you're passionate about, that's what motivates me. Music too, music motivates me too with working out or whatever. You got the right song on, music in general is something that empowers you.

DuBose: What kinds of experiences are most important to you?

Muhammed: The experience you have with friends and family and just experiences, can be life changing or, an experience that could bring you out of your comfort zone, you have to work at not your own comfortability and you got to be on the ball and on point, on your ace.

DuBose: What do you appreciate most about yourself?

Muhammed: I appreciate that I'm creative, I can bring something together. Yeah, creativity. I also appreciate that about myself, just the way I take in certain things, I don't fall into stereotypes, I can see myself making it and I could go longer, you

don't have to see yourself in that bad situation, you can see yourself in better things, it gives you a privilege, but they don't got to worry about being with minorities and stuff. They can worry about getting a penthouse or they could worry about owning a Fortune 500 or something, being the CEO of this and this, you just elevate where you can see yourself, elevate your mantra.

DuBose: What are you most grateful for?

Muhammed: I'm grateful for my family and also a lot of our programs and African American initiatives that I've been in. When I was younger, I was in programs like the Brotherhood programs at a young age where you bring a group of young kids together and you go on retreats and what not, you play ball, take you do Madison Square Garden, you just connect with them. You're a mentor at a young age, and I didn't really know what it was like but I have some guys say, check him in, there's a small circle, we're in Columbia University, I was young when I was in this program but it was pretty dope 'cause I could have been doing anything else. When I wasn't in the program, sometimes I was outside, non-productive, outside on the block, every day, you see the same people, this is getting boring. The same thing popping off, something gonna pop off maybe, but you don't really know for sure.

I'm going to continue to look for well-rounded places, having a whole schedule going on, you got things you can do, the point is you're in a safe haven, you can be yourself, you don't got to look over your shoulder, 'cause you're good.

DuBose: Thank you. I'm proud of you.

Muhammed: Thank you so much.

Chapter VII

ABU BACAR X

> For Africa to me . . . is more than a glamorous fact. It is a historical truth. No man can know where he is going unless he knows exactly where he has been and exactly how he arrived at his present place.
>
> — Maya Angelou

Abu has the confidence of a president. Every time he walked into the coffee shop, it was as if he was the man in charge. At only 17, many teenagers I am sure would pay to have as much confidence that Abu has. When he speaks, he commands your attention. Many might say one day he will easily be a lawyer because he is so well-spoken; others could argue that he might become a politician simply because he speaks to his visions. Whenever I asked him a question, he responded quickly and thoroughly but knew when he needed to pause to re-gather his thoughts. Everything he said was intentional and thoughtful, but one thing that Abu made so evidently clear was that he is proud of the young man he is today.

Physical Description

Abu is very tall, at about 6 feet, 5 inches. He has dark brown skin and wears his hair like his peers with a high-top fade. During all of our interviews, he kept it the same, even though he said he was considering styling it differently. Abu is also a fan of athleisure. He loves to wear jogging pants and a hoodie whenever he gets the chance.

Background

Abu was born on January 10, 2000. His parents are both from Africa. His mother is from the country of Ghana and has ancestry rooting in the country of Nigeria. His father is from Ghana as well, but has roots stemming from Burkina Faso and Guinea. His maternal grandfather came to the United States in the 1960s, and he brought Abu's mother when she was in her teens. Her father remarried a Panamanian woman who raised Abu's mother in the borough of Brooklyn. His mother assisted in bringing his father to the United States from Africa in the 1990s when they got married and had two children, Abu and his younger sister. In the early years of his life, Abu was in foster care from ages 3-5 and his father became absent from his life when he divorced Abu's mother. Abu, his mother, and sister moved to the Bronx and lost contact with his father. He says now at 17, he has reconnected with him and can call him at any time. His mother now works with New York City charter schools in a nonprofit organization to assist with having the government give more funding to charter schools and defend their purpose. He values the relationship with his step-grandmother, who he says taught him how to play the piano and brings a lot of joy to the family during the holidays.

Interviews

Day 1

On Day 1 of this study, Abu came in ready. He knew he had some things to say and this study was the outlet for him to say so many things he had never been able to say. We started our conversation discussing Abu's identity. He explained that as a child, he never really got a chance to have a connection to his African roots. He was African by blood, but because he was born in America, he felt there was a disconnect: "I never jacked it a lot," he said. "Jacked" is a word that means to represent, and Abu felt he could not represent his identity truthfully because children at

his school were not kind. He felt that if a person was not African American, then he or she was made fun of for being different. It was not until Abu was in middle school that he really started to own his African identity. School was hard for him socially, and in the third grade everything went into a downward spiral when the entire school body found out his true identity. He said he was not trying to hide his identity, he just did not think about it. All of his classmates looked like him. Because they are Black, it did not make much difference to examine bloodlines.

One day his mother made a surprise visit to Abu's school. She was wearing traditional African attire and the students asked him about and he admitted that he was. On that very day, school became a social nightmare for Abu. His classmates continuously called him names every day and it became a burden he had to carry. By the time he arrived at middle school, his experience improved because he found a group of friends who shared mutual experiences of bullying. They knew he was African, and even if they made a couple of jokes from time to time, it did not bother him because he knew they were really his friends. By the time he arrived at high school, Abu was no longer "the African kid," but just Abu. He met other students who were of Ghanaian descent for the first time and began to see a shift in how his classmates focused on the content of his character rather that if he were African or not. On Day 1, he concluded our conversation by saying he now focused on school, but despite everything he went through socially, his favorite subject was music and his least favorite was math.

DuBose: My next question is, can you tell me in grades one through eight, what was your favorite subject, and why, if there was a favorite subject? And could you tell me what your least favorite subject was?

Abu: All right, one through eight, my favorite subject was, I would honestly say music because I always enjoyed learning about music and learning about major figures in jazz, reggae, hip-hop, even African dramas, like Afro-beats and all of that. It was always interesting to learn things like that. Music was a big thing in my family. On my father's side of the family, he had family in Africa that were drummers.

My least favorite had to be, even though right now I love my math teacher . . . I hope she don't hear this, my AP calculus math teacher, I love her with all my heart. Math was just bad for me. It had to be due to the fact that I had atrocious math teachers.

In ninth grade, I had some new teacher who didn't know how to control the class and there would always be random outbursts, and instead of taking charge and doing what he had to do, he would always stand to the side and be like, "I'll wait for you to be silent." He would waste up to fifteen minutes just standing to the side and literally not controlling the class, let us do whatever we want. And it hit everybody really hard during the ninth grade regions where everybody failed. And, even though, yeah, they had a choice to quiet down and all of that, it's also the teacher's, as the authority figure in the class, it should have been your job to make sure that they were kept in place. And he didn't do his job.

DuBose: Is he still there?

Abu: Oh no, he got fired the same year. He got fired the same year.

DuBose: Okay.

Abu continued to say he had some really great teachers that he will always think of—specifically Miss Vateri and Miss Feliz, his eighth grade math teachers. He said they both had similar personalities and he thought that was why they became his favorite teachers. They nurtured him at times but also knew when and how to get the job done in their classrooms. They knew when they had to put their foot down and encourage their students to do their work. They never nurtured to the point of babying the students. At times they would say to Abu, "You gotta do this right now and I ain't playing with you"—and so that is why they really became his favorite teachers. They were really good teachers who would meet Abu halfway and teach him how to do it but expect him to do the work.

Day 2

On Day 2 of our interviews, we discussed in depth if Abu felt safe in his school environment. "Yes, it honestly is," in response to answering if he felt his school was safe. Abu expanded and said that his school has no metal detectors. They are located in the poorest

congressional district in the country but that still has not stopped students from coming to school, doing what they had to do, with no fights or major issues. But in no way was it a perfect school nor were the students perfect. He said a couple of fights happened in the school, but he believed that given the condition the school was left in, he believed the school was a safe place and he could walk in his school every day and not fear for his life.

"Yeah, but outside my school's a different thing," he said. Even though Abu felt the neighborhood was not as bad as it used to be, there was a time where his school heavily recommended against staying in the neighborhood in the dark because they were located in gang-infested territory. "There was a gang on Fulton, there was another one on Washington, and then One Seven O, and you're in between all of that mess," he said, referring to the streets. Abu stated there was actually a time where somebody was shot at the corner store next to his school, and the entire school had to do a soft lockdown. At times, outside of his school, he would tell any stranger visiting, "Don't be there after dark, don't stand there, you will get jumped if they feel like you're in the wrong neighborhood." However, now in this very moment, he feels the outside environment has calmed down.

Abu acknowledged that he could understand if others felt differently because of the way he looked and was perceived.

> Abu: I feel like it could be possibly due to the fact that I'm six-five, six-six, and when I have my hoodie on I look sorta bulky. So, it's like people don't wanna approach that type of dude. But, I also feel like it's the fact that everybody is sorta pushing away from that gang culture and it's not really as big. I mean, it's still big in the Bronx, don't get me wrong, but it's not as big as it used to be.
>
> DuBose: Why is that?
>
> Abu: A lot of them got locked up, and the ones that are not locked up are focused on getting money, or they afraid to get locked up, so they focus on different things. So, even though there's still neighborhoods I still wouldn't recommend you stay in after dark, I feel like overall the Bronx is becoming a safer place to be, and

that's even more evident with gentrification. I see a lot of white people are moving into the Bronx now, so I feel like maybe, who knows, gentrification could be another factor, another reason why the Bronx is becoming safer. Maybe the cops are doing their job more. I don't know. All I just know is that the Bronx is really becoming safer.

DuBose: So, when you talk about a safe environment in school, right, you talk specifically about fights and the neighborhood, but as far as the culture, bullying and name calling and all those different things can play a factor in what you can include to be a safe environment. So, do you feel like in that regard . . . you've talked a little bit about your earlier years in school, having to navigate being African in your school space. So, being a twelfth grader who's six-five and who is African and Black, do you feel like it's a safer environment for you to kind of flourish in now?

Abu: Yeah, I do believe so, because I feel like bullying is not a big thing in my school. Even though there are incidences where two people might have a altercation, I feel like they're able to pick up from it very easily, and I think that a lot of people can agree. The boys in my grade specifically are very close and we're like a family. We might make a couple of jokes here and there, like, "Oh, look at you." Or, "You're ugly," this and that. But, at the end of the day we get along like family and if one of us were to be in trouble, there would be a whole group of other boys willing to have his back, like, "Nah, that's my classmate. That's my brother. That's my friend. You can't do that."

As for more on the bullying part, my school is a uniform school and part of the reason why it's a uniform school is because we're located in the poorest congressional district in the country and a lot of people are below the poverty line. So, you don't want students . . . And I actually talked to my assistant principal about this, because I'm not a big fan of uniforms. I like to express myself. Even though, sometimes I do wanna wear uniforms. I like wearing uniforms, but sometimes I wanna express myself, so I asked the assistant principal, "Why do we have uniforms?" And she was honest with me, saying that as a school in the poorest congressional district in the country, we can't have no uniform policy. And, there's students who might wear brands that are not as expensive as others, or they might wear the same clothes over and over again, and that would create a culture of bullying.

And so, my school takes measures to avoid bullying, and even kids who are having a hard time would go to a counselor, talk it out. We have supportive students, staff, and teachers. That's one thing my school does well. Everybody's really supportive and we try to take care of the issue before it becomes a big thing.

Abu continued to say that he perceived his school to be 70% Hispanic, and there were a lot of differing and different types of people. He also acknowledged that his school had an LGBT community: “I know there’s three gay boys in my grade, and people let them be. They do their thing, you know. I have classes with them, they . . . how should I put this? People are allowed to express themself freely in my school basically,” he said. He explained that he felt the connection they built with each other allowed for peace. Even when there was a problem at his school, they were not very confrontational about it. Abu concluded that in his group of friends, he was probably one of the only Africans in his group. However, he had Latino friends and Black friends who all expressed themselves: “You got Black people getting jiggy to the Hispanic music, and then I get jiggy to my hip-hop or African music, and we express ourselves, and there’s no problem.”

Day 3

On Day 3, we started our conversation surrounding media. “When I usually read articles, nowadays, I’m not gonna lie, it usually comes from the *New York Post*, *The Atlantic*, and the Bronx, and that’s like you know they assign you articles at school, which they do, I don’t always keep track of the sources sometimes it’s PBS, sometimes it’s different websites,” he said. Abu said most of the articles he read were assigned to him or came from alerts on his phone that he found interesting. We transitioned the conversation and started to discuss his favorite television show and movies.

Abu: Yeah, I usually watch, quote unquote, Black shows. *Howard*, *Black-ish*, Bill Cosby, *The Cosby Show*, *Family Matters*, *Different World*, all the . . . because when you grow up in Brooklyn, everybody’s watching it, and you sort of turn on the television, and that’s what you see in the morning and at night.

DuBose: Okay. Can you tell me about some of your favorite movies?

Abu: So my all-time favorite movie of all time. It's one of the most underrated movies ever. *Paid in Full*. And I actually . . . me and what's that guy's real name?

DuBose: With Mekhi Phifer.

Abu: Yeah, me and one of my teachers, Keating, was actually talking about this. When I get off topic, I was sort of doing like a monologue from the movie. And it was a part where, if anybody watch the movie, like Muddy Mitchell's in the car, and then he was talking about how he was lost without his little brother. And he was talking about, he was going through life. I mean, I think the real reason why I like this movie so much is because it's about . . . it relates so much to . . . how do I put this. The reason why I love this movie so much is because it's so relatable. And little things, little movie trophs, like y'all probably didn't notice but, A Boogie got his name from that film. Because there's a character in that movie that has the name Ace Boogie. Hence, A Boogie. Ace Boogie. And they say words like skeezers, and that's how Skeezer became a pen. And they say things like B. Even though B was a big thing in New York already, but you know how somebody's like "What's up with you, B?" That movie also embodies New York culture a little. So that's why I love the movie so much.

DuBose: What else?

Abu: Juice. I'm also . . . Juice, I'm also a big fan of. I'm a big fan of Juice. I watched a lot of movies in my life. There was this one movie, *Finding Nemo*. I love that movie. Little kid, watching it.

Abu continued to expand on the importance of watching shows and movies that had predominately Black casts. Watching sitcoms, dramas, and movies takes him away from all the negativity that haunts the identity of Black males. When he watches the news, he said it appears they no longer want to seem racist so they are changing their image, showing Black success and outcomes. Abu said that when he thought back a couple of years ago, there was definitely an overwhelming negativity towards Black teens. He felt after there was public outrage, one could search "three Back teenagers" on Google and the results would be three criminals' mug shots. "That became a really big thing," he said, "Google noticed it and they started changing it." However, Abu said that this can still be seen with a search of "three Black teenagers" and then compare it to "three White teenagers." He said when he takes the time to watch the news, he

does not see much positivity going on with Black men, but there was more so before. For example, before he saw a Nigerian kid make national news for solving a 30-year-old equation, but it was still mixed in with the bad and more negative than positive.

What struck Abu the most about the news was how the shooting of Black unarmed teenagers has been "The first thing . . . the first thing news tends to point out are, they are trying to justify the reason he was shot," he said. "I remember when Trayvon Martin was shot, they started showing, a couple months after he got shot, some news channels started showing pictures of him lifting up gang signs. They were like, 'Oh, but Trayvon Martin was a gangster' and he was probably doing something, and that's why George Zimmerman shoot at him!" he exclaimed. Visibly frustrated, Abu said that Trayvon Martin was 16 years old, a child with no weapon on him, and Zimmerman was a grown man with a gun. "I don't know why he had to be killed. I don't know why he had to portrayed as this teenager as a thug. So it gets to me," he concluded.

When I asked Abu who were his Black heroes, he exclaimed he was not going to say Barack Obama. He noted that the people who always say Barack Obama are older than he is and grew up in a different time.

> Abu: Not really. Even though . . . because I was really young when Obama got elected. I was eight years old. So I didn't really . . . it didn't really get to me until I turned older, then I realized that "Oh yeah, he's the first Black president," but you know . . . when I started growing up, I started seeing a lot of Black people in power, but it never really influenced my success, because I feel like me, as an individual, like if I set my mind to it, I can really succeed on that. So . . .
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> DuBose: Who told you that?
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> Abu: Huh?
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> DuBose: Who told you that if you set your mind to it, you can really succeed in life?
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> Abu: My moms. My mother, she always encouraged me and it stuck with me. So I pushed myself to. Because even though that . . . there's times where I feel put down, or soci—I look at the news, and I say Damn, it's crazy out here. Sometimes

I just think that if I use my brain or if I just use my capabilities, I could make something of myself. It doesn't need to . . . I don't need to become a, quote-unquote, statistic or anything.

DuBose: Okay. Who are some of your Black heroes?

Abu: Kwame Nkrumah.

DuBose: Who is that?

Abu: He's the person . . . he's the person that gave Ghana . . . he's the one that went to Queen Elizabeth in Britain and got Ghana's independence. And he became a really big activist. And he became a really big activist and motivation for other African countries to gain freedom. And he was also Martin Luther King's . . . one of Martin Luther King's biggest inspirations. He even quoted on him.

DuBose: Okay.

Abu: So, I'm going to say Nelson Mandela. I want to say, I want to say Oprah. And I want to say . . . yeah, those are my top three, to be honest. Oprah, Nkrumah, and Mandela.

DuBose: And why Oprah and Mandela?

Abu: Because they came . . . well, Mandela because I feel like Mandela . . . he was fighting the time . . . he was fighting the country where his people were taken over, and he went through a lot to get it back. Mandela, I just always thought he was a cool person. And what he did. He was willing to go to the extremes, even though it's never been confirmed that he was a terrorist, but how much he was willing to go for what he believed in, and the fact that he was a Black man. The majority of White controlled the environment. And he never got put down, even after spending twenty years in jail, he still came out strong as ever. His ambitions never got broken. That made him a really big figure to me. He really persevered through a lot. And at the end of the day, he freed South Africa and became the first Black president of South Africa. That was a really big accomplishment.

DuBose: And Oprah?

Abu: Oprah, similar narrative. Oprah had . . . she had one of the toughest lives I've ever heard. Raped as a little kid, got pregnant, miscarriage, she went through the low poverty level conditions. To the point where, I feel like any person would have cracked. Any person would have broken, given up. It's so easy to give up when you're that low in life. But she never gave up. She went through . . . she became a journalist, then she set out to really make something of herself. And I relate to her because she proves that . . . she came from, I don't want to say some of the conditions because even though I know my life, I'm not as privileged as others.

> But, I'm not as privileged as others, I'm sort of in between. So she sort of became an inspiration to me. Came from those . . . coming from being a poor Black woman, living like that, to really becoming . . . making something of herself, she was so disadvantaged. She sort of really grew on me.

Day 4

On Day 4 of our interviews, I asked Abu about his social media usage. He said his top-three applications that he used were Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat. He ranked Snapchat as his favorite, Instagram in second place, and Facebook as last. He explained that with Facebook, he would not even consider being on the list anymore because he deactivated it. When he wants to see something on Facebook, he goes on a friend's account, but said there is too much "nonsense." In his neighborhood of the Uptown Bronx, every one really knows each other and anyone a person has on Facebook already knows who they are. Abu said the "nonsense" was the observations of seeing who was fighting with each other. After a while, he just realized it was never anything so important that he needed to see it every day.

Abu stopped taking Instagram seriously: "I had what's called a Finsta. You know what a Finsta is? It's a Instagram where you basically just post . . . you just spam post memes and all of that. So I like to get foolish with it. I had like what, a hundred followers on there," he said. Abu explained he did not really care about Instagram because it appeared completely irrelevant to his everyday life. When I asked if he could give me an example of the type of thing he posted on Instagram, he replied, "This one is mad corny and you probably heard this before. 'Can a Crip have blood cells?' It's stupid, but it's funny. It's just . . . It's stupid. I don't know. So memes like that, I just post. Or it's just funny memes that relate to the real world."

As for Snapchat, Abu said he used it for comedy as well. Living in New York City, Abu said that anything and everything could be funny to someone following him on Snapchat. I asked what examples he could give me of something funny he did on Snapchat. He began to tell a story

of how he was in Brooklyn the other day with Deangelo and he had a hilarious Snapchat-worthy moment.

Abu: I was in Brooklyn the other day, and we was just in the car and I just saw . . . Deangelo was just jamming to music. But like . . . he don't like my type of music because I'm into Gangsta rap, Drill music. Deangelo's more into trippy hype music so when I put on my Drill music or my Gangsta music, he just . . . he's doing this little hand motion, like a very nerdy type of thing. Like a person who grew up in the suburbs listens to Hood music for the first time? "Yeah, it's cool." He was acting like that. So basically I just recorded and put it on Snap. Followers say it is mad funny. I don't know how to explain it, you know what I mean? Funny things you just see in the real world. I just put on Snap.

DuBose: Okay. Okay. So it's like, you highlight the moments of your day.

Abu: Basically.

DuBose: And sometimes they can be really, really funny.

Abu: Yeah.

Abu stated in years to come, he will evolve and mature with his social media usage. "Hopefully to promote my content, my business. Because in the future . . . Right now when I go to college, I wanna study in business," he stated. Abu claimed he did not expect to become an entrepreneur off the bat. He wanted to go the traditional route and join a company because he did not know exactly what he wanted to do within entrepreneurship. However, he said that he had an idea in mind that by the time he was 40, he wanted to launch his own business and use social media to promote it.

Day 5

Missy Elliot's "I Can't Stand the Rain" was playing as I looked out to see nothing but rain pouring from the skies. I love when coincidences like that happen. The song, the rain, it was perfect. I saw a Black Toyota Camry pull up in front of the coffee shop and out came Abu, running into the coffee shop as if he were wearing red in front of a bull in Spain. Out of breath,

he immediately took the seat I had I reserved for him. The coffee shop was packed and usually Mr. Keating and I arrived an hour early before the start time to save seats. We called it a colonizing methodology.

DuBose: Abu, welcome back and Day Five of Month Three of this study. How are you doing?

Abu: I'm doing great.

DuBose: You doing good? It's a little rainy today.

Abu: It is, nah, I got soaked a little bit, brother.

DuBose: You did?

Abu: I'm good, yeah.

DuBose: You okay?

Abu: Yeah, I'm good though.

DuBose: Did it scare you off?

Abu: No, I usually love the rain.

DuBose: Oh, you do?

Abu: Yeah, but like today was just too much.

I began our conversation by asking Abu what his definition of racism was. He said racism was a prejudice against a group of people, and a person outwardly lets one's prejudice affect the way how to act towards those people. He also said racism be feeling superior to somebody else because of race. Abu stated that because the United States was built on racism, many of the systems we have today are in place because of racism. He referenced the ghettos, another word for public housing, as an example, and said that racism still exists today even when people try to adjust it. They fail to see that the reason there are many problems is because of racism. In conjunction with the United States, Abu used Ghana as example of how problematic racism can

be. He said that Ghana was colonized by the British since the 19th century, and he knew much racism went on because the British came to Ghana, enslaved the Ghanaians, and used their resources. They took gold and numerous resources that were needed at the time for survival. Even after the British left, it was popular for Ghanaians to bleach their skin; they became obsessed with lighter skin, European features, perming their hair. Abu said it was sad to see, especially when many Ghanians were trying to embrace their natural beauty. "Racism has affected us, but I feel like we're rising above it," he said.

I asked Abu if he could recall a moment when he was directly affected by racism. He looked at me and said "not directly," but then paused and said, "I mean I guess you could say so."

> Abu: So, when I go downtown I do find myself acting differently, and even my moms tells me to act differently, and I notice when I step in the train, or I'm stepping in an environment where a lot of the people are white, I find myself changing the way I act, because I don't want them to think wrongly of me, because it's very easy for them to put a bad first impression of you, like he's loud or he's listens to hip hop music, and I really never . . . I don't know, I just act differently around White people.
>
> And, it really got to the point like, one time I remember, it was me and one of my friends we were down in SoHo, and we went to McDonald's, and my friend, I'm not gonna lie, he could be a little bit loud and over the top, and he don't really care what people think. So we were upstairs, and then this lady was whispering to her husband, and her husband just looked at us, and he then just sucked his teeth and kept on looking at us, but we weren't really doing nothing, we were just standing there 'cause one of our other friends went to use the bathroom. And at that moment, it wasn't directly said but you could really infer that what he was thinking, like oh, they obviously bringing bad vibes or something so.
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> DuBose: What do you think he was thinking?
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> Abu: I don't know, maybe these teenagers . . . I mean, it could've been, I'm not gonna say it's racism cause like, but I don't know in that moment I felt like it was, but it could've been like oh, he's just, like he just sees a bunch of rowdy teenagers that he wants out, but I feel like race could have been a component too. But it's just little things like that throughout my life that really affected me, but I haven't

really been slapped in the face with racism before. But it's just little things in my life that have added up, I see as racism, and I gotta navigate through it.

DuBose: Do you think that racism will ever go away?

Abu: No. I feel like it's not because, as long as it's gonna be different types of people in the world, then people are gonna have their own different opinions about . . . Like that's how I feel. I feel like, sometimes, in order to stop racism, you gotta make sure that everybody accepts each other's differences, and I don't feel like everybody can do that, to be honest. There's too many people in this world, too many ways of thinking, and it's sad. We try to do it, we thought we were over it in 2018, but obviously we've got a president who's out here disrespecting illegal immigrants, and all these separate things, and it's never gonna stop. And he got like almost fifty percent of the country to back him with his racist ideals, so it makes you really think that we are far from fixing racism, and I don't think that we could ever eliminate it completely. We might be able to downsize it, but never eliminate it completely.

"When you hear the word racism, what are three feelings that come to mind when you hear it?" I asked. He responded, "White supremacy, being inferior, and being Black in America, or being a minority in America." "Elaborate on that," I quickly responded. Abu explained that White people have so much power in the United States they have been able to paint the narrative on almost everything people think in today's society. He specified with the news and how it paints Muslims as terrorists, depicts impoverished communities like ghettos, and shows different types of criminals. After Abu finished his response, he looked visibly flustered. I asked him if he wanted to take a break but he said no. I then asked him if he thought some people in the United States had not experienced racism.

Abu: Yeah, I think so. . . . I feel like, I really sound bad when I say this, but it's the truth, if you rich and White, I don't think you could really experience racism because you already have the wealth and the power and you just have the status just to go through life so easily and not be bothered. Even if you're a minority and you're rich, you can still face daily struggles like I remember one of my, I think I told you this at one of our other sessions, like Black artist named Black Youngster went into a Walmart and got accused of stealing, but they didn't know he was a musical artist and he's worth millions of dollars. But because they thought that he was stealing, the Walmart just started trippin' and it got to the point where when they found out he was millionaire, they sent their apologies and all of that. There

was another one about some athletes in a jewelry store and they bought, like they were all rich, if you get my drift, what I'm saying is when you're a minority and you have money, it's still different to being White and you have money. Cause you just get treated differently solely on your race or solely because they view you a certain type of way. I feel like white rich people haven't really suffered from racism.

DuBose: So you specify saying White rich people. Do you think that White poor people have experienced racism in some way?

Abu: Yeah, I, there was racism against Whites too back in the day, certain types of Whites. Cause I remember there was a time when only the Nordic race which was Western Europeans were considered the most superior and if you were Slavic, Middle Eastern, or any other type of White, you were considered inferior. So I felt like maybe Eastern European back in the day or Southern European or even Middle Eastern type of White, you still suffered the wrath of racism. Irish, I don't know about Irish, but I know Eastern Europeans weren't even considered White until the 1970s, 1980s. So, I feel like if you were poor and you were not Nordic type of White, then you definitely experienced some type of racism. Your ancestors experienced racism.

DuBose: I want to move away from the White focus. You mentioned a couple of weeks ago how when students first found out that you were African because of the clothes that your mother was wearing that's when things changed. So when everybody just thought that you were I guess, stereotypically African American it was fine, but then when they found out that you were of African descent directly, it completely changed. Black students treated you a certain way, and other minority groups treated you a certain way. So do you feel like there's not only racism from White people, but bias from other groups, too, as well?

Abu: Yeah definitely. Now I'm really thinking about it, I know it's terrible to say but I've experienced more racism from my own kind than a white person. Especially when I was younger, like direct racism and I feel like racism within the Black community is their being racist to other Black groups and it was definitely prevalent against Africans, against Haitians, and I know there was this one student in a class who was scared to say she was Jamaican 'cause she felt like she would get bullied because of there and I never really understood why, like everybody else is Black and that's what really, I couldn't wrap my head around it cause at the end of the day we all Black. White people not really gonna see a difference whether you from Jamaica, or Africa, or just regular African American. Yeah, I definitely do feel like there's racism in the Black community against each other. And that's something that goes on a lot. I think that we breaking out of it, especially like with this new *Black Panther* movie coming out and a lot of people quote end quote embracing they African roots, I feel like they're breaking down walls and a lot of Haitian/Americans are proud to be Haitian/American and a lot of people just embracing their Black identities. So I feel like it's not as serious as

it was before and I feel like there's people trying to end that and just trying to create unity among the Black people. There definitely is that sense of racism in the Black community.

DuBose: Do you feel like it still hurts you to this day from some of the things that people have said to you? Some of the things that have stuck with you that are really kind of painful that people have said to you over the years?

Abu: I feel like it wasn't things they said to me to get at me, but it was just things to get at the continent of Africa that really got to me. And their perception of it and the ignorance that they showed towards Africa period. They feel like Africa is all slums, all poverty or AIDS. They can call me African booty scratcher, I've gotten used to them just [inaudible] but when you just come at Africa as a whole, when you just start a group us and I feel like that's what really got to me and it stick with me to this day. Even when I hear people say, oh, you from Africa, don't you see this or that, it really gets to me 'cause they really just have this image of Africa being so broken down and they have no knowledge of it and it just gets to me when people [inaudible] to this day. I feel like it was there because of what I went through in elementary school and to this day it really affects me.

DuBose: So how does that affect the way you look at people of color and specifically Black people and those people who said those things to you?

Abu: I really don't let it affect me at all because at the end of the day I'm Black myself, so I can't just say, oh, all. I'm going to interact with is Africans now, I can't block out the entire Black community because there were a couple of racist people. A lot of my friends to this day are Afro/Latino and African/American themselves or Caribbean so I don't let it affect me. I'm cool with everybody. What I went through in my past, I'm not gonna let it affect the way I interact with people now. If you're still ignorant though, if you're ignorant towards the African culture and the African community, I'm still gonna keep my distance from you, but I'm not gonna let it affect the way I interact with the entire African American race or entire Caribbean race.

Day 6

On Day 6 of my interviews with Abu, I was still thinking about Day 5. I identified with so much of what Abu said on that day related to not letting others dictate a person's interactions with a race of people. When I thought back and remembered who treated me the worst throughout my years in high school, it was people who looked like me, Black-identified classmates. There were many factors for why this happened, but in that very moment of Abu

expressing his truth, I saw he was rising above his painful experiences and making an inclusive path toward the future. I realized that it was around his age that I did the same thing—to not be burdened with the bullshit. I gathered my thoughts and asked Abu what his definition of the criminal justice system was.

> Abu: I feel like the criminal justice system is a system used to lock up people who are accused or are, who are accused of a crime basically. I feel like it was meant to be sort of like a reform program to turn criminals into productive members of society most of the time, but it's turned into something else nowadays. It's a place to just dump that society doesn't want to deal with no more.
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> DuBose: Okay. And so when you think of your definition of the criminal justice system, what do you think the goals of community policing are?
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> Abu: It's definitely to clean up neighborhoods they deem that are bad. I feel like that's what it is, because I feel like every time, especially in New York because I read up somewhere that New York has the largest police department in the country. And because of that, our crime rates went from being so high, to they're lower than they've ever been ever in the last thirty years. Community policing is to keep us under control, basically. Or keep the hoods under control.
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> DuBose: Okay. So what kind of procedural and operational changes do you think that police departments have to make to institute community policing?
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> Abu: I feel like they need to decriminalize certain charges. They need to decriminalize weed charges. I think they already did in New York, I'm not sure. But they need to decriminalize a lot of things that would get people locked up. And start giving fairer sentences. I feel like that's the main issue with police nowadays. When a person gets caught with weed in the hood, we get weed is a drug or whatever, but the way they would ruin somebody's life for an ounce of weed when there's so many other things they could be doing with their time. It makes you wonder. Somebody's life could be ruined because they had an ounce of weed on them. I don't believe that is just.

Abu also insisted that the police needed charisma and adaptability. He felt a lot of police do not reflect the communities they serve, and when they do, they are usually "brainwashed" individuals. Abu created a hypothetical scenario in which putting Black police in a majority Black neighborhood will not change anything. He continued to say that when he was in his honors English class in school, a friend told him about a situation in which he and a group of

boys went to a panel where they were speaking with the police. When a young man in the audience asked, “What can I do as a young Black man to avoid getting harassed or getting stopped by the cops?” the police officer—a Black man himself—responded, “Y’all could start by always keeping your pants to your waist and not sagging.” Everyone in the crowd was visibly shocked. Abu explained that he felt that police who do not understand the culture are so disconnected from their communities and will always have a mindset that everyone is a criminal. Abu concluded that they cannot have that mindset when they go into the “hood,” but when they do, it has ruined lives.

I asked Abu to be more specific when he brought up the point of ruining lives, so I presented a few national scenarios and asked him what he thought.

DuBose: Tell me this. Some say that police killings of unarmed Black men in Ferguson, Missouri and New York City are isolated incidents that are given traction by media coverage. Others say this is a sign of a broader problem in the treatment of people of color by the police. What do you think?

Abu: I believe that those are the biggest cases, but it definitely happens on the daily. Just because we don’t see everything that happens, doesn’t mean that it doesn’t happen. Be a lot of cases, I have friends that have gotten harassed by police officers in their buildings for doing nothing but simply just going outside. But that never made media coverages. There’s a lot of stories out there about people of color, people in the hood getting harassed by cops all the time. And they’re literally minding their business. But that never makes news coverage. So I think that bullshit excuse being like oh, it’s only a few cases that are happening across the country, it’s bullshit. I feel like it happens all the time, it’s just that we never hear about all the situations. Or if they’re not as severe as somebody getting killed or something like that, you know what I mean? So I think that’s what it is.

But definitely, these are not isolated incidents. These are things that happen every single day, and they just build up to the point where it finally explodes when somebody gets killed. Because this has been going on for a minute now. It’s not like police brutality just became new in 2018, 2016, 2015. This has been going since Rodney King, even before Rodney King. It’s been going on for a long time now so I feel like it is what it is. Rodney King [inaudible]. Everybody just thought oh, that’s just one time. Rodney King was just one time. And you had that dude that got shot in the police station, he was handcuffed and the police shot

> him in the back three times in that train station. And I was like oh, this is something that's been going on for decades now.
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> And so somebody saying these are isolated incidents is not watching the news properly. Because these situations have been going on for a minute now. And to say that is just ignorance, in my opinion.

Abu recalled his own run-ins with the police, including a time he was caught hopping the turnstyle in the subway. At 16 and on a school night, he hopped the turnstyle and walked up the escalators. He thought he was in the clear and about to catch his train when a man stopped him. He gripped his arm and Abu asked why he was grabbing him. When he pulled out a badge, Abu realized he was an undercover policeman and knew he had been caught. When the officer stopped and asked if he knew how serious an offense it was, Abu responded he did. The officer then asked if he went to school and Abu responded he did. "It was obvious, I had my school uniform and I had my book bag on. Everything. It was obvious I'm a student," he said. The officer asked if Abu could provide him with proof of ID, but Abu said he did not have it. The officer then said if he had no ID, he needed proof he was student.

Abu gave him some school work from his book bag. "He's like I'm still not completely convinced. He asked me a couple of questions and then he was like I'm still not convinced you're a student, and have you ever been stopped by cops before? And I was like not really." Abu said in that moment, he started to blame himself because usually if he did not have money for a Metrocard, he would ask the station agent, but "I was just being dumb, I didn't ask this time," he said. In the end, they did not believe Abu was a student and that he was just hopping. "I get it, I'm tall for my height, but still they slammed me with a hundred dollar ticket and they told me you gotta pay this and if you get caught hopping again it's going to be, we're automatically going to drag you to the station," he concluded.

DuBose: What do your parents say about this? About your interactions with police and all that?

Abu: They always, my mom's always told me to be smart, no matter what, never start an argument with them. Because at the end of the day, it's your word against theirs and they'll always come out winning. She always told me to always carry ID on you, she's the one that forced me to start carrying ID. She always saw me, just always play it smart. There's nothing wrong with loving your life. Never do anything to aggravate, because you never know how they think. And she told me a lot about police, how to handle myself, how to navigate through situations when it comes to it. And I've just been following her advice to just stay safe.

DuBose: Do you think that there are significant differences in the way that police interact with people of color and White people?

Abu: There really are. I believe there are. I feel like due to all the stereotypes being built up, I don't blame it completely on the police, sometimes I blame it on media for always portraying people of color in a bad way, always showing the hoods, always showing the criminals. And always showing these are Black communities. Usually when you see a Black community on the news, it's always the hood. Or when you see a Latino community, they're always poor. There was always something going on with the communities of color. And I feel like that really affected the way that cops treat Black people or minorities in general compared to White people.

So yeah. I feel like when a cop interacts, especially when it's a cop that grew up in a suburban type of neighborhood, meets up with people of color, they always tend to have these prejudices, whether they realize it or not. Whether they realize it or not, these prejudices are in the back of their mind. And sort of like dictate the way they interact with people of color. Compared to white people where they, unless a White person has proven that they are definitely a criminal. Then the police will start showing aggression. Even then, there are still different ways of handling it. If a Black man wants to show aggression during interaction with police, they wouldn't hesitate to shoot him, to use lethal force. But I feel like when it's a White person, or usually when I see videos of White people being dealt with by cops, there was like, yeah, sometimes they'll use force but it's never lethal.

Even one time there was a White guy with a shotgun literally aiming it at the cops and at no point during the rest of, did the cops have his hand anywhere near his gun. Instead he had his hand up, trying to calm this man down. It was two cops trying to calm this man down. And I'm saying that how can a full-grown man really point the shotgun at the cops and be completely safe, but then you got teenagers of color being shot down because they look suspicious or you feel like they were doing something wrong. I don't get it. You couldn't use a taser, you couldn't use non-lethal force to subdue them? They were unarmed in the first

place too. They were unarmed. And you couldn't subdue them and find out what's going on?

I feel like situations like that really just made me think about society in a whole, damn the way we get treated, the way people of color get treated compared to white people is definitely different.

Day 7

In this dissertation, the full transcript of Day 7 concludes each interview data sketch section. Day 7 was an important day for me as it concluded my data collection and illustrated the true growth and power of my participants in their final responses.

DuBose: Abu, so we are back one more time. We talked a lot about your future. We talked a lot about your past. We've talked a lot about a lot of different topics, but right now I want to talk about who you are in this moment. My first question is are you happy in this moment in time?

Abu: Honestly, I don't feel either way. I don't feel happy or sad. It's just whatever. I feel I'm going to tell 'em. I'm at a point in my life where I just decided things that are gonna benefit my future. I'm not willing reaping the fruits of my labor yet, so I don't think I'm happy or say right now.

DuBose: Are you comfortable with the direction your life is headed?

Abu: Yeah, I'm comfortable with it. I'm graduating high school. I'm going to college. I'm trying to focus on myself, get money, all of that. I'm happy where my life is headed right now.

DuBose: Is there anything that you can improve about yourself or that you would dramatically enhance about your life?

Abu: Honestly, I would say procrastination. Honestly, I don't know I say procrastination. I feel like sometimes I say I'm going to do things and it takes me longer than I expect to do it or I just push it off. I feel like if I really get out of the way, I could accomplish a lot more.

DuBose: What do you believe is possible for your life?

Abu: What is possible? I feel like there's no limit to what I could do if I put my mind to it. I feel like if I put my mind to anything, I could really accomplish it. Even, no matter what the barriers are, I could really break through them if I have that type of mindset that, oh, I'm not going to let anything get in my way. So I know I could push through anything.

DuBose: What do you value the most?

Abu: What do I value most? I value . . . I don't know. Value the most? Honestly, happiness. Happiness the most. I feel like no matter what I do, if I'm not happy, then it's all for nothing. I feel like at the end of the day whether I'm broke, I'm rich, I'm where I want to be, you know what I mean? No matter my circumstances, if I'm happy doing what I'm doing, if I'm content with it, then . . . If I'm not content with it, then I don't know. I'd be an empty shell basically. I'd be a empty husk. So happiness is what matters most at the end of the day.

DuBose: What do you want more than anything else right now?

Abu: Honestly, what do I want more than anything else right now? I just want the opportunity to prove myself. I want the opportunity to prove myself not only to my peers, but to myself, my family. I just want to prove that I can do things, not just educational, but I could be on my own. I could go to college. I don't know.

DuBose: Tell me.

Abu: I feel like that's my . . . my mission is just to prove anybody that doubted me wrong, like anybody that have slept on me, have a . . . you know have to throw some kind of weight about what I was doing. I wanted to prove to them like you're wrong for feeling like this. I'm doing what I need to do.

DuBose: What motivates you?

Abu: What motivates me? My visions, my dreams. My visions and my dreams. I have visions and dreams for myself and that's why I do what I do. Every time I'm depressed or something or I'm not feeling like myself, I always think to myself, yo, it's not going to last forever, so I've got to get what I need to get done, because, honestly, if I let these emotions overcome me, then my vision won't come true. Honestly, my vision of the future is what pushes me the most.

DuBose: What kinds of experiences are most important to you?

Abu: Happy, memorable experiences. I feel like that's most important to me, because like I said before, happiness is just . . . if go through life without happiness, it doesn't matter what you do. I feel like even when you are on hard times, happy memories get you through a lot. If you live a life where there is no happiness and you're going through especially hard times like, you're not going to find any way to really uplift yourself from that situation. So at the end of the day, it's about securing happy memories that mean most to you, things that just make you happy overall.

DuBose: What do you appreciate most about yourself?

Abu: What do I appreciate most is my abilities as a person. Honestly, I don't want to be too specific, but just my abilities in general. I feel like ability to adapt, to really think things through, to actually plan out my future and not do something dumb, I feel like that's honestly got me a lot further in life than a lot of people, especially like my family. A lot of people in my family don't think about things. They don't think things through until it's over and done and then they're either in jail or they're in some place that they don't want to be, 'cause they never had that monster like oh, let me think about the future. So I appreciate my abilities to navigate through life.

DuBose: And finally, what are you most grateful for?

Abu: What I'm most grateful for, the opportunities given to me. I appreciate the opportunities given to me because I feel like without these opportunities, I would never . . . I feel like the opportunities given to me has allowed me to rise above my circumstances. The fact that my mother came to America, the fact that she provided a life for her kid, the fact that through my school years, through . . . I was able to go through programs. I'm getting scholarships. I'm going to college. I honestly feel like those opportunities given to me are what I appreciate the most, to help me rise above where I once was. I really appreciate that.

Chapter VIII

MAKING ROOM

> My desire for this country is that we remain hopeful and we find a place in our hearts to love each other. It's really simple, just opening our hearts to others. . . . Making room.
>
> — *Michelle Obama*

Interviews

These four young men are brilliant and I was so honored to speak with them. When I was reviewing their transcripts, I noticed that these young men truly want to be successful. I saw it in their eyes and I heard in their voices as they described their families and how they wanted to support them. I noticed that when Muhammed and Jelly spoke, it was almost as if they had said everything they were saying to me before. Their voices had very serious tones but reminded me they were still very much in their youth. When looking at my principal theories, I see a little bit of the boys in all three principles. Many times, people want to intersect double consciousness with Black inferiority. Although this may be the case in some instances, I believe that Muhammed's and Jelly's surroundings and upbringings made them display these theories. Based on my first principal theory (perceiving oneself through the eyes of the other) and my third principal theory (seeing oneself, seeing the other, seeing themselves), I am led to believe that both Muhammed and Jelly have been told their entire lives who they should strive to be and what that should look like. It was almost as if they had the examples set before them of what success is by simply looking at themselves through the eyes of those they love and trusting their vision of what their life trajectories are to be. I could tell through our conversations that their current

identities drew from how they have survived in their communities and how they will thrive in the world.

Abu is a brilliant young man. I was utterly blown away by the fact that he spent some of our conversation discussing what kind of job he wanted and what he was planning to do at the age of 40. I found that I was truly bothered when he talked about the bullying he endured. He loves his academics, but he felt he seemingly had to “hide” his identity because students previously called him names. In the theoretical framework of double consciousness, Du Bois validated Abu’s feelings towards his peers by stating “measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (p. 3). Abu displayed my first principal theory, which is perceiving one’s self through the eyes of the other. However, as Abu discussed the bullying he endured, he clearly conveyed a sense of self. He answered questions very carefully and precisely. I could tell by his deep breaths as he spoke that Abu had to take his time to discuss some of the experienced he had been through, but he owned it all. He did not show feelings of victimization but acknowledged the strength he acquired. How his fellow classmates viewed him did not bother him anymore because he is proud of who he is and that is something he does not wish to change or try to assimilate.

Finally, I am so happy that I interviewed Deangelo, specifically because his answers were not at all aligned or connected specifically with those of the other participants in this study. He wants success just as the others do, but the way he viewed the world and understood that what is currently someone’s present did not mean it was his forever was distinctive. Deangelo was calm, cool, and collected when he answered questions. He was able to articulate what he specifically wanted his future to look like and what he would have to endure to achieve it, reinforcing my

first principal theory of double consciousness. To achieve, Deangelo perceived himself through the eyes of the other to obtain it.

Analysis

I posed this question at the beginning of this dissertation: What happens when one creates space for adolescent Black boys to examine their identity and place in society? This question can be perceived as provocative and challenging for some, with multiple distinct themes emerging as a result. Like a quilt, I believe there were threaded commonalities in each of these young boys' stories. As they responded to each question, it was as if they were weaving their narratives out of the threads of their individual recollections and experiences. With each revelation they shared, another intersection was uncovered. None of these boys were in the same friend group but they shared two solid themes: community importance and school. For the Black boy in America, the breadth of what was once deemed the idea of their double consciousness has now been evolved and been manipulated into the current eco-structure that is our current world.

However, it is my belief that the historical construct that stands in relation to double consciousness is as relevant or in existence after talking with these four young boys. Capitalism has been ingrained into the consciousness of American society, specifically in Black communities, as a need to become financially successful—as I heard repeatedly from Deangelo—with the goal of extracting oneself from the communities in which one is embedded. The idea that someone from a New York City neighborhood who works hard and finally has the finances to create something for their community has to leave. Once that notion becomes implanted into the conscientiousness of a Black boy in a community, then the function of the capitalist mindset takes hold. This then means that if they make it, they are gone from that space. A clear definition of space, according to *Webster's Dictionary*, is "a boundless three-dimensional

extent in which objects and events occur and have relative position and direction," but what complicated this definition in this dissertation were my participants. By initiating this study, picking the research location, and asking open-ended questions, the idea of what space was certainly was created by myself, but my participants cultivated it. When creating space for Black boys to tell their own stories, it is then imperative to get out of their way. We as researchers can fall into systematic and institutionalized biases based on our training which limits the scope of the stories we are allowing to be told in our research.

To believe that the systems and institutions that birth the most renowned research and researchers differ from that of the lowest-performing inner-city schools and most disenfranchised people is a categorical falsehood. We have to understand that all systems work perfectly. They do exactly what they are designed to do. We can no longer talk about certain systems or institutions being broken. The system works, but it just does not work for certain people. Inside of that, when thinking about ecology, one must think about the aesthetic of what we want to see. To me, one of the biggest tragedies of Black boys is that they want to be great. They are as smart, as beautiful, and as brilliant as anyone else's children. The question that then presents itself after my research question is: What is the reason why smart, beautiful, and brilliant kids need space to be created for them in the first place? That is the question, but I believe we have the answer that we can build on, based on the stories my participants told in this dissertation. When given the opportunity, Black boys can express themselves quite frankly about what they want, what they need, and what it will take for them to not only achieve in life, but also to be happy in their lives.

We as researchers assume that certain systems are not working and we ask ourselves why one state has twice the graduation rate of another state when it comes to Black boys. As

researchers, setting a glass ceiling on the expectations of Black boys against our own expectations makes it hard for them as well as the broader society to rise above it; thus, the relationship between the researcher and the Black boy participants has to change. It is necessary to ask them what they are interested in, who they are, and what they ultimately want out of their lives. Every curriculum, every class, every academic article, and every conference on Black boys has to be centered around the Black boys' authentic and unfiltered voices; it all has to be centered around their engagement; and it all has to be centered around their willingness for action. For example, if a Black boy does not want to sit for 90 minutes but is involved in a debate about what matters to him, if he not just being taught Black history from a textbook but is learning how to make history centered around Blackness, then the student's relationship to knowledge changes—the Black boy's relationship to school and information changes. That even changes how a researcher does research.

There are so many examples in New York City and across the country of effective education, exemplary livelihoods, and healthy lifestyles for Black boys, but these are rarely discussed because the presumption is that no one is doing well. Black boys are creating their own media, cultivating their curricula and literacies, and basking in the presence of their successes which they now have entitled "Black excellence." If every Black boy in urban spaces is doing horribly, then why do we have so many examples of success? Researchers must stop thinking of those who make it the exception to a broader societal problem for Black boys and those who acquire success as being out of the ordinary and, instead, truly study success. By talking only about abstract possibilities, one misses out on the beauty of current realities. Start asking questions about success and stop hyper-focusing on questions failure. Turn the questions into solutions.

A Letter to My Unborn Son

Dear Unborn Son,

I am writing to you because there are many aspects of our rich heritage that I would like to share with you. It all started with our forefathers who came to this country as slaves. Some hundred years ago, an African was brought to the shores of North America. As we are labeled as "African American," that African, according to the perception of a broader American society, is seen as our ancestor and will always be part of our heritage. He was worked and beaten, humiliated, and subjected to the will of people to exploit him. Through it all, he and our ancestors were still very proud African Americans who instilled a compelling and indisputable value system on each family member.

Passed down from generation to generation, the children in our specific family were taught the significance of hard work, education, survival, achievement, family cohesion, and especially prayer. In our family, children were instructed to respect their elders and immediately disciplined if they did not. We were not allowed to associate with children or families that may have had a negative influence in our lives. This rule was enforced regularly and on a continuous basis. We were taught the importance of maintaining a positive attitude and a clean and healthy appearance at all times. There were hardly any customary traditional male or female roles because the women in our family have always worked outside the home. Your family consists of intelligent individuals who encourage the attainment of education and recognize the ultimate impact as the gateway to freedom. For example, your grandmother came from a single-parent household because her father died before she was born. She knew that in order to be successful she would have to pursue higher education, and she became the first in her immediate family to enter a Ph.D. program.

When I was a boy growing up, I did not nearly have as much available to me that you have today. With advanced science and technology, there are supersonic airplanes, social media, Laptops and iPads, high-definition televisions, iPhones, Itunes, and more. According to the socioeconomic criteria and definition, I was raised in an upper middle-class family. I resided in a grand and exquisite home in the suburbs and had a bedroom to myself my entire life. I grew up in Prince George's County, Maryland, located 30 minutes from the nation's capital of Washington, D.C., which during my formative years was labeled the "murder capital of the world."

I have always strived for success and expect the best; consequently, I want the best for you as well. My aim is to protect and expose you to every possible aspect of life. However, when I contemplate what the future holds for you, I worry because our society is complex and confused with barriers of racism that will permeate every existence of your life. This perception is based on my experiences that have left me fragile, frustrated, and frightened. Let me explain further……….

At this present time, in this year of 2018, the country is in turmoil and driven by negative politics and economics. We live in a world where people are motivated by power, greed, competition, and hate. People are afraid to trust anyone and apprehensive about everything. The family composition is being shattered and destroyed. Some families are detached from each other and hardly communicate, leading to unhealthy lifestyles with value systems that appear to be the driving force in many American families today. Children are being influenced by drugs, peer pressure, violence, lack of supervision, and the media. At times, people are petrified to leave their homes because of the levels of violent crimes and drug infestation. This scenario does not exist exclusively in inner-city ghettos. It exists everywhere.

We recently faced a debilitating economic recession, which has manifested into a multitude of socioeconomic problems. Employers were forced to lay off employees. Unemployment rates escalated and, because of limited job opportunities, today's young adult generation (Millennials) cannot get work out of college. Many Americans who have worked in their fields for 20-plus years were fired because of budget cuts and consequently evicted from their homes because they could no longer pay the mortgage.

Currently there are 3.5 million homeless people in America. The problems we encounter today have complicated solutions, and the nation is searching for answers. Many communities of politicians, economists, scientists, psychologists, and ministers combined have failed to determine how to:

- stop the killings,
- cease the gang violence,
- reconstruct a stronger economy,
- put America back to work,
- eliminate homelessness,
- reduce teenage pregnancy,
- abolish racism,
- discover an AIDS cure, and
- rehabilitate criminals.

My Son, researchers consider you to be an "endangered species." An endangered species is an African American male living in a society where African American males are being eliminated with no repercussions. As your father, I share a common burden and a growing national concern over how to raise you in a nation where to be young, African American, and

male is to be seen with multiple labels and stereotypes. From birth to death, statistics indicate that African American males consistently languish at the bottom of America's socioeconomic ladder. African American male infants are twice as likely as White male infants to die in the first year of life, and more than three times as likely to be born weighing less than three pounds.

A similar racial disparity afflicts African American males at the other end of life's spectrum. While White Americans live an average of 6 years longer than African Americans as a whole, the life expectancy of African American males, 65.1 years, is far shorter than the 78.9 years of White females, 73.8 years of African American females, or even 72.1 years of White males. In fact, while longevity for most Americans has remained at a record-high level, the life span of African American males has actually declined. For example, the African American male in New York City is less likely to live to 65 years old than will a man in Bangladesh—one of the poorest countries on earth. The assurance of life between infancy and old age is not much better. Increasing members of African American males confront a dismissal of existence characterized by lagging levels of educational achievement, employment, and family stability.

If an African American boy survives the infant mortality gap, he will immediately confront his subsequent major hurdle, a systematic low expectation of teachers in school systems across the country. A recent survey in New Orleans revealed that six out of 10 teachers said they did not believe their African American male students would make it to college. Sixty percent of those were elementary teachers and 65% were African American. While African American males represent 43% of the New Orleans school system, they accounted for 58% of the students with failing grades, 65% of the suspensions, 80% of the expulsions, and 45% of the dropouts. Not only are an African American boy's chances of attending college much slimmer than his White American counterpart, he is, in fact, much more likely to be incarcerated or murdered than

to attend college at all. One out of every three African American males in their 20s is either in prison, on probation, or on parole. More African American men in their 20s are under court control than there are African American men of all ages in higher education. In California, African American males are three times as likely to be murdered than to be admitted to the University of California. By contrast, only 8% of White men in that age group are incarcerated or under court supervision, while more than four times as many White men are enrolled in college than are under court control. Even worse, between the ages of 15 and 25, an African American male is 10 times more like to be a murder victim than a White male.

Unfortunately, avoiding premature death, surviving a K-12 failing school system, and attending college do not significantly increase an African American male's chances of avoiding the second-class status in American society compared to Whites. African American men are still more likely to be unemployed than their White counterparts, and even middle-class African American males earn considerably less in the same status as White males, with the income gap continuously worsening.

Now that I have your attention, my Son, with the grim statistics that researchers have interpreted as "limited life chances" available to you in the future, I want you to know that as your dad, we will not be ignorant of the negative. But we will focus on the positive and go to any length to protect you from this disaster, in spite of it all. Through faith in God and prayer, I believe that God will pave the way. If I need to relocate us out of the area in which we currently live for a better learning environment for you, then we will move. Conversely, if it means we have to take a different approach and enroll you in a special school that offers classes for African American males, I will be prepared to do so. Ultimately, the solutions to the African American male crisis are not family relocation or the isolation of African American boys. However, racism,

policing, discrimination, and the perpetuation of negative, stereotypical images of African American males have contributed enormously to the problem and remain present in our society. Despite these evils, no matter how overt or insidious, we must fight them in every direction.

Please be assured that I am willing to take on the responsibility to assist you with survival. We will not teach you to hate, but we will teach you compassion to combat the ignorance. We will supply you with the love, support, and sense of self-worth that can only come from family. We will prepare you to understand the racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity of American society. We will instill a long-lasting value of education and provide role models and constant guidance. This direction should help you comprehend and conclude that just because you cannot sing like Miguel, dance like Chris Brown, or shoot a three-pointer like Steph Curry, you still cannot soar above the self-destruction of crack and crime.

I will inspire you to dream the impossible dream and become all that you can become, despite the adversities of the future. Events from the past cannot change, but they can change in our perception of them, and in our interpretation of what they mean to us today. What we understand of our history is what we understand of ourselves. If a child is taught that he or she is a wonderful being, blessed with all the gifts needed to succeed, then he or she will naturally seek that success. If we believe we are fully deserving of the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, then we will fight to retain those rights. However, if we believe we are not capable, that the stars others reach for are not for us to grasp, then we will never achieve our goals and we will constantly look outside ourselves for salvation. Those who have accepted themselves as failures will only find excuses for failures.

My beautiful Son, you will become an extraordinary citizen of society and grow up in harmony. You will be able to see beyond the probabilities of life to the possibilities. Even when

society appears to recognize insufficient or no value for your life, I as your father, and other family members, will demonstrate that African American males still have a stake in this life. Above all, I will teach you how to believe in yourself, have patience with others, and carry yourself with diplomacy. Most of all, I will teach you how to be a man. As my granddad loved my father, and as my father loves me, I love you beyond the stars, my son. Until we meet.

Love,

Daddy

Making Room

I want to be a human who teaches the importance of culture, the value of inclusivity, and an understanding of how the hybridized societies in which we live in are truly built and mutated throughout the generations. Over the past 5 years, I have had a transformative experience that has brought me into a space of constant and consistent growth. I moved away from my small county outside of the city of Washington, DC, to one of the largest cities in the world, New York. As a graduate of Howard University, I have been taught the value of attempting to understand every person's human experience and realizing that everyone has his or her own views, culture, and values—but, most importantly, his or her own story.

Since moving to New York, I have had the opportunity to work for numerous media companies, including Fox News, BET, MSNBC, *The New York Times*, CNN, and ABC News, where I served as a graduate student intern and learned about media behind the television screen, rather than in front of it. I came to this city as a Master's student, eager to make a change in the world, but what I realized was that I had so much more to learn about the world before I did that. When working for the news, one does not just hear one side of a narrative; one hears, reads, and watches thousands. They are all different, detailed, and full of energy, light, and darkness. Whether it has been the killings of unarmed Black Americans by the police, the Ebola outbreak in West Africa, the disappearance of the Malaysian airline, the largest general election held in India, the abduction of the Nigerian schoolgirls, or Syrian immigration, I have been in these media spaces. I have cried for the people who have suffered, and after receiving this information, I have had to help narrate their stories.

Many have studied Black boys, but what makes my work unique is that with this dissertation, I have taken the tools of the oppressor, gave them to the oppressed, and offered

them space with the intent of *making room* for them to cultivate their own voice. The best thing we can ever do for Black boys is to get out of their way and listen to them. What I have come to understand is that the world is a very multifaceted place. No story or person's life experience is simple. It is diverse and complicated, full of joy and laughter, yet despair and tragedy continuously happen throughout. During my time working in these media spaces, the narrative that has continued with most of the stories I worked on was hate. This hate has been based in racism, sexism, homophobia, and so much more. However, I was most affected by how Black American adolescent boys have had their stories told and molded to fit a homogeneous illustration that neglects the incredible and beautiful range they have because of people in power who cannot humanize their experience. So I have done something different. Rather than do a study that is looking to solve a problem, this work will forever serve as a platform for these Black boys I talked to. I wanted them to feel empowered, beautiful, brave, and intelligent, and I wanted their voices to be heard as the heartbeat of this research. I hope I continue to become a better storyteller and that this research contributes to solutions to the mischaracterization of Black boys. This is what it means to make room.

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Appendix A

Informed Consent

Teachers College, Columbia University
525 West 120th Street
New York NY 10027
212 678 3000

INFORMED CONSENT

Protocol Title: Making Room: Creating Space For Black Boy's To Tell Their Own Stories

Principal Investigator: Mr. Brennan DuBose, Teachers College 240-485-7431

INTRODUCTION

You are being invited to participate in this research study called "Making Room: Creating Space For Black Boy's To Tell Their Own Stories." Approximately 4 children will participate in this study. You will be asked to participate in seven 60 to 90 minute interviews over a span of 14 weeks.

WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?

This study is being done to determine what is happening when Black boys engage media to examine their identity and place in society.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO IF I AGREE TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

If you decide to take part in this study, you will be interviewed by the principal investigator (Brennan DuBose). During the interview you will be asked to discuss your experiences with media. This interview will be audio-recorded. After the recorded interview is written down the original recording will be deleted. For legal guardian, if you do not wish your child to be audio-recorded, your child will not be able to participate. Each interview will take approximately 60 – 90 minutes. Your child will be given a pseudonym/ false name in order to keep their identity completely confidential.

WHAT POSSIBLE RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS CAN I EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

This is a minimal risk study, which means the harms or discomforts that you may experience are not greater than you would ordinarily encounter in daily life while taking routine physical or psychological examinations or tests. You might feel embarrassed to discuss problems in certain subjects however, you do not have to answer any questions or divulge anything you don't want to talk about. You can stop participating in the study at any time without penalty. You might feel concerned that things you might say might get

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Consent Form Approved Until: No Expiration Date

back to their teacher. The principal investigator is taking precautions to keep your information confidential and prevent anyone from discovering what they say or their identity, such as using a pseudonym instead of their name and keeping all information on a password protected computer and locked in a file drawer.

WHAT POSSIBLE BENEFITS CAN I EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

There is no direct benefit to you for participating in this study. Participation may benefit the fields of media and urban education to better understand the best way to train media professionals and teachers.

WILL I BE PAID FOR BEING IN THIS STUDY?

You will not be paid to participate. There are no costs to you for taking part in this study.

WHEN IS THE STUDY OVER? CAN I LEAVE THE STUDY BEFORE IT ENDS?

The study is over when you have completed the series of interviews. For guardians, your child can leave the study at any time even if they haven't finished.

PROTECTION OF YOUR CONFIDENTIALITY

The principal investigator (Brennan DuBose) will keep all written materials locked in a desk drawer in a locked office. Any electronic or digital information (including audio recordings) will be stored on a computer that is password protected. What is on the audio - recording will be written down and the audio-recording will then be destroyed. There will be no record matching your real name only your pseudonym. Research data concerning children will be kept for five years.

HOW WILL THE RESULTS BE USED?

The results of this study will be published in journals and presented at academic conferences. Your name or any identifying information about will not be published. This study is being conducted as part of the dissertation of the principal investigator (Brennan DuBose).

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Protocol Number: 18-109
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Teachers College, Columbia University
525 West 120th Street
New York NY 10027
212 678 3000

INFORMED CONSENT

WHO MAY VIEW MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY

___I consent to allow written, and/or audio taped materials viewed at an educational setting or at a conference outside of Teachers College ___________________________
Signature

___I **do not** consent to allow written, and/or audio taped materials viewed outside of Teachers College Columbia University ___________________________
Signature

WHO CAN ANSWER MY QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS STUDY?

If you have any questions about taking part in this research study, you should contact the principal investigator, Mr. Brennan DuBose, Teachers College 240-485-7431or at bd2377@tc.columbia.edu.

If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you should contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (the human research ethics committee) at 212-678-4105 or email IRB@tc.edu. Or you can write to the IRB at Teachers College, Columbia University, 525 W. 120th Street, New York, NY 1002. The IRB is the committee that oversees human research protection for Teachers College, Columbia University.

(The Participant's Rights form is not a separate document from the informed consent. It is all one document.)

PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS

Teachers College, Columbia University
Institutional Review Board
Protocol Number: 18-109
Consent Form Approved Until: No Expiration Date

Teachers College, Columbia University
525 West 120th Street
New York NY 10027
212 678 3000

INFORMED CONSENT

- I have read and discussed the informed consent with the researcher. I have had ample opportunity to ask questions about the purposes, procedures, risks and benefits regarding this research study.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary. I may refuse to participate or withdraw participation at any time without penalty.
- The researcher may withdraw me from the research at his or her professional discretion.
- If, during the course of the study, significant new information that has been developed becomes available which may relate to my willingness to continue my participation, the investigator will provide this information to me.
- Any information derived from the research study that personally identifies me will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without my separate consent, except as specifically required by law.
- I should receive a copy of the Informed Consent document.

My signature means that I agree to participate in this study

Print name: ______________________________ **Date**: __________

Signature: ____

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Appendix B

Parental Permission Form

Teachers College, Columbia University
525 West 120th Street
New York NY 10027
212 678 3000

PARENTAL PERMISSION FORM

Protocol Title: Making Room: Creating Space For Black Boy's To Tell Their Own Stories

Principal Investigator: Mr. Brennan DuBose, Teachers College 240-485-7431

INTRODUCTION

Your child is being invited to participate in this research study called "Making Room: Creating Space For Black Boy's To Tell Their Own Stories." Approximately 4 children will participate in this study. Your child will be asked to participate in seven 60 to 90 minute interviews over a span of 14 weeks.

WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?

This study is being done to determine what is happening when Black boys engage media to examine their identity and place in society.

WHAT WILL MY CHILD BE ASKED TO DO IF I AGREE THAT MY CHILD CAN TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

If you decide to allow your child to take part in this study, your child will be interviewed by the principal investigator. During the interview they will be asked to discuss their experiences with media. This interview will be audio-recorded. After the recorded interview is written down the original recording will be deleted. If you do not wish your child to be audio-recorded, your child will not be able to participate. Each interview will take approximately 60 – 90 minutes. Your child will be given a pseudonym/ false name in order to keep their identity completely confidential.

WHAT POSSIBLE RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS CAN MY CHILD EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

This is a minimal risk study, which means the harms or discomforts that your child may experience are not greater than your child would ordinarily encounter in daily life while taking routine physical or psychological examinations or tests. Your child might feel embarrassed to discuss problems learning math. However, your child does not have to answer any questions or divulge anything they don't want to talk about. Your child can stop participating in the study at

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any time without penalty. You might feel concerned that things your child might say might get back to their teacher. The principal investigator is taking precautions to keep your child's information confidential and prevent anyone from discovering what they say or their identity, such as using a pseudonym instead of their name and keeping all information on a password protected computer and locked in a file drawer.

WHAT POSSIBLE BENEFITS CAN MY CHILD EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

There is no direct benefit to your child for participating in this study.

WILL MY CHILD BE PAID FOR BEING IN THIS STUDY?

Your child will not be paid to participate. There are no costs to you for your child's taking part in this study.

WHEN IS THE STUDY OVER? CAN MY CHILD LEAVE THE STUDY BEFORE IT ENDS?

The study is over when your child has completed the series of interviews. However, your child can leave the study at any time even if they haven't finished.

PROTECTION OF YOUR CHILD'S CONFIDENTIALITY

The investigator will keep all written materials locked in a desk drawer in a locked office. Any electronic or digital information (including audio recordings) will be stored on a computer that is password protected. What is on the audio - recording will be written down and the audio-recording will then be destroyed. There will be no record matching your child's real name with their pseudonym. Research data concerning children will be kept for five years.

HOW WILL THE RESULTS BE USED?

The results of this study will be published in journals and presented at academic conferences. Your child's name or any identifying information about your child will not be published. This study is being conducted as part of the dissertation of the principal investigator.

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PARENTAL PERMISSION FORM

WHO MAY VIEW MY CHILD'S PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY

____I consent to allow my child's written, video and/or audio taped materials viewed at an educational setting or at a conference outside of Teachers College ____________________
Signature

_____I **do not** consent to allow my child's written, video and/or audio taped materials viewed outside of Teachers College Columbia University ____________________________________
Signature

Initial Initial

WHO CAN ANSWER MY QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS STUDY?

If you have any questions about the study or your child's taking part in this research study, you should contact the principal investigator, Mr. Brennan DuBose, at 240-485-7431 or at bd2377@tc.columbia.edu.

If you have questions or concerns about your child's rights as a research subject, you can contact the **Institutional Review Board** (IRB) at 212-678-4105 or email IRB@tc.edu. Or you can write to the IRB at Teachers College, Columbia University, 525 W. 120th Street, New York, NY 10027, box 151. The IRB is the committee that oversees human research protection at Teachers College, Columbia University.

PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS

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PARENTAL PERMISSION FORM

- I have read and discussed the informed consent with the investigator. I have had ample opportunity to ask questions about the purposes, procedures, risks and benefits regarding this research study.
- I understand that my child's participation is voluntary. I may refuse to allow my child to participate or withdraw participation at any time without penalty to future medical care; employment; student status or grades; services that my child would otherwise receive. I understand that my child may refuse to participate without penalty.
- The investigator may withdraw my child from the research.
- If, during the course of the study, significant new information that has been developed becomes available which may relate to my willingness to allow my child to continue participation, the investigator will provide this information to me.
- Any information derived from the research study that personally identifies my child will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without my separate consent, except as specifically required by law.
- I should receive a copy of the Informed Consent document.

My signature means that I agree to allow my child participate in this study

Child's name: ____

Print Parent or guardian's name: ______________________________

Parent or guardian's signature: ________________________________

Date: ____________________

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