

A THUMPING FROM WITHIN UNANSWERED BY ANY BECKONING  
FROM WITHOUT: RESILIENCE AMONG AFRICA AMERICAN  
WOMEN, FARMVILLE, VIRGINIA, 1951-1963

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## ABSTRACT

In 1959, as a reaction to the 1954 Supreme Court's *Brown vs Board of Education* desegregation decision all public schools in Prince Edward County, Virginia were closed. This dissertation explores one group's response to the schools closings by examining the patterns of resilience that emerged at the grassroots level among a group of African American women in Farmville, Prince Edward County, and Virginia. Using a multi-disciplinary synthesis of research in education, history, geography, sociology, social movements, personal interviews and questionnaires this dissertation investigated the development resilience.

African American women are taught early in their socialization process the value of independence, mutual aid, religiosity, community stability, and respect for elders. The school closings didn't just affect the children of Farmville, it changed families and communities, but most particularly it changed the lives of Farmville's women. Much of the research demonstrates that resilience and activism in oppressed communities has a dual nature that surfaces when those communities are under stress. Resilience among this group of African American women emerged both organically and as a result of their religious and community involvements.

African American women experienced the cultural, educational, contextual, social, behavioral, and political worlds in Farmville, Virginia, from an "outsider within" perspective. When they stepped outside their socially and psychologically constricted lives they developed a sense of resilience that was fortified by both historic and personal commitment.

In examining broadly the history of education in Virginia, the historic allegiances of African American women to community, religion, identity, education, and place what emerges is a fuller understanding of the how these interactions impact the lives of Black women. The development of personal agency in Farmville was courageous and the exercise of that agency

could have been physically dangerous. However, as the civil rights movement captured the American consciousness, the women of Farmville engaged in a unique social movement that would sustain a campaign for education parity.

## DEDICATION

To the most incredible parents anyone could have dreamed of. I could not have wished for better human beings to parent me. My father Robert Pennington, who as a child witnessed a horrific act of man's inhumanity never lost his or his ability to extend kindness. He reminded his children that strength and love rested in the palms of their hands. He worked tirelessly to give his children the very best that *his* money could buy. My mother, Clementine Butler Pennington, approached everyday with wonder in her eyes and laughter in her voice. She created a haven from the world with books, music, and those endless dance lessons. I learned quiet dignity and grace from her; she has always been my hero. Together they were unstoppable, formidable, challenging, and unapologetic in the desires for their children. I am because they were. Thank you Mother and Dad!

To my husband and partner Donald Wested, there is so much to thank you for at this point. Your consistency, your ability to make sure I slept enough, ate enough, cried enough, you kept me going when I was about to give up. Thank you for my morning coffee and for believing, believing and believing!!!

My cheerleaders Dawn, Patricia, Kendall, Ronald, Arnold, Katherine, Dana, Gabby, and David, each of you has helped in your own particular way and I am so grateful for you all.

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Several years ago I was just months away from completing my PhD program in Urban Education. My dissertation was accepted, elevation to candidacy paper signed. Like a bolt of lightning my partner/husband/best friend became ill and everything came to a halt. My dissertation methodically laid out in our dining room was gathered up and boxed. It was only temporarily of course. What I didn't know was that an agonizing cycle of my dissertation being boxed, unboxed, and finally boxed for good would last 5 years. But the goal never changed - to graduate. In my tenure as an older graduate student, complete with the experiences of start, stop, and restart, I have had the absolute and complete honor of encountering individuals who not only encouraged my intellectual growth; they have had a hand in my personal and professional development. This work is a result of those many relationships. It would take pages and pages to thank all of those who have held my hand along this journey, but I must thank a few.

As an undergraduate, graduate student, Ph.D. candidate, graduate student-teacher, and Adjunct (Main Campus and Ambler) I am appreciative of and to the many disparate Temple University communities that consistently made room for me and became places of comfort that were safe, available, and secure. I thank you!

I am extremely and eternally grateful to the women of Farmville, Virginia, for their cooperation and for allowing me the privilege of entering their lives. They opened their hearts and homes to me and were extraordinarily generous of spirit in their willingness to share the sadness that surrounds the memories of the school closings. Their stories were often painful, powerful but somehow the funny frequently shone rough. They reminded me of where we started and how far we have come as women of color.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	ii
DEDICATION.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	v
LIST OF TABLES.....	x
LIST OF FIGURES.....	xi
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	xii
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	13
Purpose of the Study.....	14
2. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	20
Introduction.....	20
Theoretical Framework.....	23
Social Movements.....	29
Impact of Barbara Johns.....	36
Education in Virginia.....	46
Womanist Identity and African American Women.....	55
Education and African American Women.....	63
Community and African American Women.....	73
Dubois in Farmville.....	83
Religion and African American Women.....	85
3. METHODOLOGY.....	95
Introduction.....	95
Selecting the Participants.....	99
Questionnaire.....	103
Face-to-Face and Telephone Interviews.....	104
Coding of Interview Data.....	105
Data Coding was a Three-Step Process.....	107
Step 1.....	107
Step 2.....	108
Step 3.....	109
Ethical Considerations.....	109
Limitations.....	110

Researcher’s Positionality.....	111
4. FINDINGS.....	116
Introduction.....	116
Respondent Biographies .....	120
Jade .....	120
Kelly and Ruby .....	120
Amber .....	121
Beryl.....	121
Iris .....	121
Coral.....	122
Olive.....	122
Themes – School Closing .....	122
Race Relations .....	129
Family .....	135
Community .....	138
Religion.....	141
Loss.....	143
Identity and Loss.....	143
Education and Loss .....	146
Community and Loss .....	149
Religion and Loss .....	152
5. CONCLUSION.....	155
Introduction.....	155
Implications for Future Research.....	159
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	162
APPENDICES .....	180
A. MAP OF PRINCE EDWARD COUNTY .....	180
B. AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILDREN ENTERING FREE SCHOOL AND CONSENT LETTER.....	182
C. PHOTOGRAPH OF 16 YEAR OLD BARBARA JOHNS AND CONSENT LETTER.....	187
E. ATTORNEYS FOR BROWN VS BOARD OF EDUCATION.....	190
F. TARPAPER SHACKS/PLAINTIFFS EXHIBIT .....	191
G. POTBELLY STOVE/PLAINTIFF EXHIBIT .....	192
H. LETTER OF INTENT .....	193

I. LETTER OF INTENT .....	195
J. PARTICIPATION QUESTIONNAIRE .....	197
K. OPEN ENDED QUESTIONNAIRE .....	207
L. COMMUNAL PARTICIPATION .....	211
M. CHURCH ACTIVITY PARTICIPATION.....	213
N. PERMISSION TO AUDIO, VIDEO, PHOTO FORMS .....	217
O. CONSENT FORM.....	222

## LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Participant Demographics and Interview Summary .....	101
2. Respondent Demographics at Time of School Closing/Opening .....	129
3. Family Discussion on Race.....	132
4. Respondent Educational Attainment.....	135
5. Respondent Adult Participation Behavior .....	139
6. Respondents Church Attendance-Childhood/Adult Religious Links .....	142

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Qualitative Research Graph .....	102
2. Historic Research Graph .....	103

**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

American Friends Service Committee .....	AFSC
Free School Association .....	FSA
Morton High School Parent Teacher Association .....	MHSPTA
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People .....	NAACP
National Council of Negro Women .....	NCNW
National Education Association.....	NEA
Prince Edward County Prince Edward County Board of Supervisor .....	PECBS
Prince Edward County Christian Association.....	PECCA
Prince Edward County Free School.....	PECFS
Prince Edward County School Board .....	PECSB

**We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries  
To thee from tortured souls arise  
We sing, but oh the clay is vile  
Beneath our feet, and long the mile;  
But let the world dream other wise,  
We wear the mask  
Paul Lawrence Dunbar (1895)**

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

As we approach the second decade of the twenty-first century, the story of African Americans and their campaign for education civil rights in the middle half of the twentieth century is a story that continues to resonate. The purpose of this dissertation is to examine one of the many under examined narratives of the Civil Rights Movement - the education struggles in Farmville, Virginia, and the participation of its African American female residents. What we know about Farmville, Virginia, is that schools were closed from May, 1959 to September, 1963. What we don't know, and what remains inadequately studied, are the lives of the Black women in Farmville who participated in the movement to restore education for their children and the belief systems that guided their resistance. The roles, activities, and motivations of these women who developed individual and collective resilience have not been isolated for their unique experiences. Being resilient did not mean being indestructible, but being able to deal with life events, recognize problems and limitations and using them as opportunities, and the ability to make use of personal and collective resources.

Incomplete in the current body of literature on the school closings are the voices of those women who were impacted by the events in Farmville; how this phenomena shaped the context for resilience, response, and organization; and how epistemological frameworks developed among African American women, community, and family. There

had been few challenges to the education status quo, but the ordinary Black women of Farmville would slowly begin to make a difference in this battle.

Situated across the academy - Education, History, Geography, and Women' and Black Studies this dissertation argues that it was against a backdrop of political, social, racial, and educational changes that a social movement developed in a small southern town. The Farmville school closing story is not well known because it doesn't have the essential ingredients of the quintessential civil rights story. After all this was refined Virginia, there are no water hoses, barking dogs, police with billy clubs, or snarling sheriffs shouting epithets. Jill Oglie-Titus (2007) defines the Virginia way as "'separate by consent' allowed Blacks a semblance of autonomy as long as they remained within the lines circumscribed by their white neighbors" (p. 35). This is further reflected by J. Barrye Wall, editor, writing in the *Farmville Herald*, who opined "have we in any manner spoken ill of the Negro citizens? Many of them we have known for one and two generations... We hold them in high respect and many with affection" (p. 1, 1960). African Americans, especially parents, had been conditioned to embrace a concept of managed race relations that emphasized a particularly genteel brand of paternalism (Smith, 2002). The tentacles of this paternalism would eventually consume the education aspirations of the Black<sup>1</sup> children in Farmville. However, without conceding to the many established cultural indignities of a discriminatory racialized education system, Black women in Farmville would organize protests of segregated businesses; prepare letter-writing campaigns; plan book drives; arrange and prepare their children to live away

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<sup>1</sup>Black and African American are used interchangeably to describe people with African heritage.

from home; and bring to the surface those qualities, skills, and networks necessary in their lives as they engaged in the pursuit of education quality.

Nestled in the rich, fertile farm country of Virginia is Prince Edward County. Farmville is the only incorporated town, and the county seat. This rural county in 1951 was one of the “tobacco counties” in what had been the traditional slave plantation area of “Southside Virginia”<sup>2</sup> (Peeples, 1963) (Appendix A). Both the County of Prince Edward and the town of Farmville in the 1950s manifested the cultural, social, economic, and racial circumstances typical of many Southern counties and towns (Schuler & Green 1967). In this superficially placid rural community, the two critical events set the stage for the examination of resilience, not a singular quality but as a result of both environmental and individual factors, in the community’s Black women. Two interconnected events, each possessing a disparate cast of characters and separate agendas, over a period of nine contentious years would widen the already existing chasms between the racially and educationally divided communities in Farmville.

The first event: April 23, 1951 - a group of high school students staged a two-week walkout at Robert Russa Moton High School in Farmville planting the seeds of discontent. The students were protesting the egregiousness of their segregated *Plessey vs. Ferguson* (1896) based “separate but equal” school system and the inequities it produced

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<sup>2</sup> The “southside” is part of that section of the southeastern United States that has been described as the quintessential South. It had what was the South’s defining characteristics—plantations, with their slave histories. The southside is part of the “Black Belt” and has a disproportionate number and percentage of the South’s African American population. The Black Belt actually forms a crescent, beginning on Maryland’s Eastern Shore and going down the Atlantic coast through the Tidewater of Virginia, the coast (except the Outer Bank) and the central areas of North Carolina, and the marshy Low country of South Carolina and Georgia; it then heads west through the red clay hills of south-central Georgia (where farming replaces fishing), and on through the central parts of Alabama and Mississippi before ending in the Mississippi Delta, with the Mississippi River’s adjacent states (contiguous counties), including the largest expanses of the Delta in Mississippi and Louisiana and lesser parts of Arkansas and Tennessee (Draper 1930).

in facilities and funding. There is a straight line from the walkout to the eventual school closings.

Barbara Johns would lead the walkout campaign, canvassing and organizing her fellow students, trusting her plans only to a few juniors and seniors who were considered reliable. They met secretly behind the bleachers of the school's athletic field (Olson, 2001). Years later Johns would say, "We knew we had to do it ourselves and that if we had asked for adult help before taking the first step, we would have been turned down." Another student recalled that Johns said that "we could make a move that would broadcast Prince Edward County around the world (Olson, 2001, p. 81)." The students goal was simple - a new high school to replace additions that represented R. R. Moton High School.

On the morning of April 23, 1951, "the students got the principal to leave the building on a ruse...hoping to absolve him from blame for their actions" (Wilkinson 1960, p. 269). He left the school never suspecting that it was a ploy to get him safely away. A note forged with his signature was sent to every classroom announcing a school assembly (Olson 2001). Kluger (1976) writes:

At the appointed moment in the auditorium, 450 students and a faculty of two dozen teachers less one principal hushed as the stage curtains opened. The student strike committee was seated behind the rostrum. Standing at it and in command of the suddenly murmuring room was Barbara Rose Johns. She asked the teachers to leave, and as the excitement grew, most of them obliged. And then the beautiful sixteen year-old girl at the rostrum told her schoolmates what was in her heart. It was time that Negroes were treated equally with whites. It was time that they had a decent high school. They were going to march out of school then and there and they were going to stay out until the white community responded properly (p. 468).

The second event: May, 1959 - the Prince Edward County School Board, after failed negotiations with the Black and moderate White communities, voted to close all public schools in Prince Edward County, acceding to the political call for ‘massive resistance’ that echoed across Virginia. To avoid instituting the Supreme Court’s school desegregation mandate, the Prince Edward County School Board closed all public schools in 1959, posting “No Trespassing” signs on school grounds. This was the culmination of a campaign that began within hours of the *Brown vs Board of Education* decision mandating school desegregation. The White citizens of Farmville joined with the Farmville County Board of Supervisors in a combined effort to undermine any attempt to integrate public schools. Practicing what Bonastia (2012) has determined was the “politics of self-interest” (184) the White Board began a systematic campaign to decimate the school budget a year earlier in 1958. Part of their strategy was to allocate 80% of the school budget to school expenditures, dedicating the funds to future private White academies, guaranteeing White teachers’ salaries, while denying the same to Black teachers and students (Bonastia, 2012).

Combined with constant overt and subtle practices of racial discrimination Black parents found themselves frustrated and in a position bordering on utter despair (Banks, 1962). In the first year of the school closings approximately 1,800 African American children were locked out of their schools. When schools finally reopened in 1964, almost 1,700 African American and lower class White children had been without public schooling for five years (June-Friesen, 2013). Closing the schools in Farmville was the county’s response to a larger, more entrenched national policy of maintaining a hegemonic education system that privileged one group over another. However, it was

such a watershed event that today several scholars consider the modern Civil Rights Movement to have begun in Farmville (Hohl, 2000; McAdams, 1996; Miles-Turner, 2004; Morris, 1984; Peeples, 1963; Sitkoff, 1981).

However, it can also be argued that the Civil Rights Movement in the United States has multiple origins that begin with the arrival of the first enslaved Africans, ironically in Virginia in 1619. Two hundred years later Denmark Vesey, in 1822, adopted an early version of liberation theology by combining the political and social need for change and freedom among enslaved African Americans. The movement persisted during the slave years with Nat Turner's rebellion in 1831, and Harriet Tubman's continuous excursions across the Mason-Dixon Line. What is indisputable is that the civil rights movement has existed across the United States in one incarnation or another for centuries.

In Farmville a social movement, rooted in the seventeenth century, was now grounded in the education arena. Throughout Virginia's Black community by the mid-1950s, according to Peeples (1963), dissatisfaction with the southern caste system began to put on a public face, and by early 1960s sit-ins were being held at Virginia's "White only" lunch counters. Mid-century America according to Gates and West (2002) "was the century in which African American life was transformed and the century in which African Americans changed America" (p. 6). In Farmville the transformation was bound to the separate and unequal school policies and this community became 'ground zero' in the continuously evolving civil rights movement.

As a point of contestation the education landscape and the school closings in Farmville would eventually focus the nation's attention on education inequity. The

Prince Edward County School Board's decision to close schools would galvanize many in the White Farmville community to remain steadfast in their resistance, and would animate the Black community into action. Toni Morrison (2004) recalls that the southern Black women she met in 1953, as she traveled in the rural south were just country people, people denied adequate education, relegated to tiny balconies in movie theatres, sitting in the backs of buses and drinking from separate water fountains. Morrison recounts, "they were just ordinary, and despite lives driven by laws that said 'no, not here,' 'no, not there,' 'no, not you,' racial segregation had not marked their souls" (p. 1). Donald Baker (2001) also wrote about the impact of inadequate education and the effects of segregation in Farmville. He quotes Helen Davis who remembered that the school closings stirred the embers of a long dormant flame. Davis said that until the closings "no one ever challenged. You just go along. You don't have the things within to challenge; you don't have the means to challenge" (p. 3).

Stepping into this education breach were Black women who would use their social location to become "bridge leaders" straddling the distances within the African American and White communities, their families, and their churches. Robnett (1997) defines these women as providing an "intermediate layer... bridging potential constituents and adherents" (p. 191). These women would provide a strong stabilizing force within the grassroots organizations in Farmville. According to Robnett (1997), bridge leaders exhibit many of the following characteristics:

1. They become bridge leaders...because of a social construct of exclusion.
2. They operate in the movements or organizational free spaces, making connections that otherwise would remain tapped.

1. They employ a one-on-one interactive style...for mobilization and recruitment.
2. They are more closely bound to the wishes and desires of the constituency because...they do not need legitimacy with the state.

The women in Farmville would additionally enter a new emotional arena as they engaged and exploited their informal and formal networks. There is general agreement among sociologists regarding the definitions of informal and formal networks (McGuire, 2000). Informal networks are understood as those webs of relationships extending out to friends, family, in-laws, neighbors you get along with, and friends of friends. It is within these relationships that people exchange resources and services (Scott, 1991; Wellman, 1983). These informal networks are distinct from formal networks because they are not commonly recognized by structured organizations (Cook, 1982). It was through the extensive use of the informal networks among the women in Farmville that they were empowered to act as bridge leaders. In this capacity judgments large and small were made. Before the universal use of the telephone the flow of information was made by word of mouth. Mothers consulted each other deciding to place their children in schools in neighboring counties or with families and friends in other states, arranging for local transportation, determining if they would hold classes in their homes or the basements of Farmville's Black churches, deciding which parents would serve lunch, they motivated one another and sustained a grassroots social movement committed to securing access to an equal education for their children.

Conversely, formal networks are usually connections to people one knows authoritatively i.e. employers, superiors at work, co-workers or through business networks. In this arena resources and services are imposed from the top down and their distribution is measured by proximity to those in charge (Cross & Prusak, 2002). The women would come to understand that there were also formal networks at their disposal. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Prince Edward County Christian Association (PECCA), and the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) would assist them in their search for solutions for their children's education. There were however, other formal networks the Prince Edward School Board (PESB), and the Prince Edward County Board of Supervisors (PECBS) to name only two that would work tirelessly to thwart any education demands of Black parents.

Using these two incidents as backdrop, the period between the 1951 student walkout, the school closings in 1959, and their subsequent 1964 reopening, has been characterized as constituting "the dramatic peak of the struggle for Black equality in Prince Edward" (Miles-Turner, 2001, p. 45). There is a growing body of scholarly literature examining the various aspects of the school closings in Farmville. There are analyses from the perspective of the Black community's reaction to the absence of education for their children; literature examining the lack of Federal intervention; examinations of the continuous maneuvers by the White School Board to insure schools remained closed; and the corresponding legal remedies pursued by the NAACP. Through a series of face-to-face and telephone interviews, and the examination of historic documents on the lives of the Black women who were affected by the school closings are brought forward for inquiry. This makes possible a fuller understanding of the lives and

motivations of grandmothers, mothers, sisters, aunts and extended female family members. This dissertation is intended to fill in one of the gaps in this ever expanding body of research into the Farmville school closings by examining the patterns that emerged among a specific group of rural, southern African American women when the continuity of their children's education was interrupted.

The historic background of Virginia's resistance to *Brown* is critical. As President in 1954, Eisenhower and his Administration did not publicly endorse *Brown vs Board of Education*, nor did they denounce in 1959 the school closings in Prince Edward County. Lee (2009) maintains that Eisenhower did not "employ the moral authority of his office or take executive action on behalf of the locked-out children" (p. 19). This was the first and only time an entire school system was shuttered, *the first and only time* an action of this magnitude was taken anywhere in the entire nation. As the Kennedy Administration assumed office, they would be warned by Harris Wofford (the first White student to attend Howard Law School who became Senator from Pennsylvania, and advisor to future President Barack Obama) that the conditions in Prince Edward County "must soon be met.....before other districts make the same unhappy choice" (Lee, 2009, p. 19). One of the many fears of the school closings in Farmville was of its possible reverberations across the south. Lee (2009) wrote:

The administrator of the Prince Edward School Foundation, Roy R. Pearson, had made a "whirlwind visit" to Atlanta and New Orleans, accepting speaking engagements to discuss the process of organizing private schools. The exportation of Prince Edward County's school philosophy threatened the future of public schools across the South making the crises a national issue and requiring executive leadership (p.19).

Lee (2009) continued that John F. Kennedy shook his head with “incredulity” when he learned that Prince Edward County, Virginia abandoned public education in defiance of federal court orders. The County Board of Supervisors refused to levy taxes to operate desegregated schools, marking Prince Edward County as the only locale in the nation without free public education”

(p. 19). The President’s brother, Attorney General, Robert F. Kennedy, speaking in Louisville, Kentucky at the centennial of the Emancipation Proclamation in 1963, said,

with as much sadness as irony that outside of Africa south of the Sahara where education is still a difficult challenge, the only places on earth known not to provide free public education are Communist China, North Korea, Sarawak (Borneo), British Honduras and *Prince Edward County*. But while the situation at Prince Edward County or the violence' which occurred last fall in the University of Mississippi may capture the headlines, the far more important fact is that an increasing number of southern communities, local officials, and citizens groups are working effectively to desegregate their schools peacefully and without fanfare.

The Kennedy Administration having inherited the Prince Edward County school debacle from the Eisenhower Administration realized it was a crisis that threatened to cripple a generation and destroy public education. Bonastia (2012) indicts both the Eisenhower and Kennedy Administrations writing:

The Prince Edward story stands as a critical chapter in the struggle over civil rights in the United States, a singular example of white resistance and black perservance from the 1951 student strike to the 1964 reopening of schools. The decisions of the Eisenhower and Kennedy Administrations about when and if to intervene in a local community’s disputes had unmistakable impacts on the paths of change in Southern locales (p. 161).

In 1963, the Kennedy Administration would respond to a petition by the Reverend Leslie Francis Griffin, Chairman of the NAACP and President of the Moton High School Parent-Teacher Association (MHSPTA) for federal support to prepare African American students for re-entry into public school. A coalition of foundations including the Ford

Foundation (\$250,000.00); the Field Foundation (\$100,000.00); private donors; President Kennedy would give his donation anonymously; the National Education Association (NEA) donated school supplies and books (June-Friesen, 2013). Teachers were also an important source of pooled contributions “\$30,000 from Washington State, \$20,000 from Minnesota, and \$15,000 from Southern California, among other locales” (Bonastia, 2012, p. 147). All would join with Black parents and in the Fall of 1963 the Free School Association (FSA) was established in Farmville (Appendix B and C). Working with teachers recruited from across the country and under the guidance of Dr. Neil V. Sullivan, on a one year leave of absence from the superintendency of the Union Free School outside of New York City (Bonastia, 2012), arrangements were made to lease three of the closed public schools for African American students. These events, connected by history, race, and locale would create an environment that assisted the Black women of Farmville in developing multilayered skills in the demand for equality.

The experiences of the African American women in Farmville represent a unique opportunity to examine the emergence of resiliencies driven by the urgency to attain an equal education. This dissertation is organized in the following format: Chapter 1 - Introduction provides the historical and social context for the development of resilience as a skill at the grassroots level among a small group of southern African American women within a particular time frame driven by a specific social phenomenon. Chapter 2 – the Literature Review the theoretical framework for the study and analysis of what has already been written and developed that relates both broadly and specifically to this topic. This chapter additionally provides understanding and insight that assists in placing the research topic within a logical frame. Another important purpose of reviewing the

literature and developing a theoretical framework is to discover strategies that have or have not been productive in investigations of topics similar to this examination. It also according to Gay, Mills & Airasian (2006) speaks to “what has been done and what needs to be done” (p. 33). Chapter 3 – Methodology the purpose of this chapter is to provide an outline of the methodologies and thought processes employed in investigating through narrative the lives of Black women in Farmville. Using face-to-face interviews, a questionnaire, and historic documents the complexity of a social phenomenon is examined. Chapter 4 – Findings establishes an understanding of the study’s key outcomes. The results indicate that the experiences of the African American women in Farmville who exercised individual and collective resilience, maintained a belief in the power of education, and through their relationships with family, community, and spirituality were able to influence an educational movement. Chapter 5 – Conclusion summarizes, interprets, and contextualizes the findings and provides implications for the direction of future research.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Until recently, historians have devoted an extraordinary amount of attention to analyzing the more demonstrative forms of protest, to the exclusion of change-oriented activities that occurred in other forms and other venues (Gomez-Harvell, 2002). Black women who historically shouldered the greatest burden in movements for change, who participated in the day-to-day, behind-the-scenes “nitty-gritty” work which kept movements afloat were often relegated to the background. It was “predictable that they, too, would be “written out” of period histories or given perfunctory recognition in a footnote” (Gomez-Harvell, 2002, p. 78).

As a result, most studies of the school closings in Farmville consign Black women to circumstantial noise. The closings have been approached from either one or two streams of literature – a) the legal system and ensuing aspects or b) White resistance. Tushnet (1987) provides an in-depth examination of the legal system's role in desegregation in *The NAACP Legal Strategy Against Segregated Education 1925-1950*, with Sullivan (1965) addressing the issue of White resistance in *Bound for Freedom*. Virtually overlooked in the scholarly literature however, is the role ordinary African American women played in fighting for equitable education in Farmville, Virginia.

In the analysis of the Black women in Farmville I draw on the scholarship of Katie Cannon (1988) who has identified three concepts associated with women of color who confront issues in their daily lives. In Farmville, these otherwise ordinary women in their fight for education parity framed resistance Cannon (1988) would argue with – invisible dignity, unshouted courage, and quiet grace. As respondents described their experiences they were able to more fully comprehend how the behaviors they witnessed as children developing into the adult frameworks conceptualized by Cannon (1988).

Cannon (1988) highlights the concept of *imago dei*, as an expression of invisible dignity. This entails seeing God as a God of equality and intentionality and an acceptance of power greater than oneself. King (2011) contends this notion of dignity and acceptance of one's place in their relationship with God, is deeply embedded in the lives of Black women and derives from their spiritual ethic of community and personal history.

Unshouted courage evolves over time – as a result of the multiple oppressions encountered by Black women on an almost daily basis. This courage enables African American women to meet the difficulties in their lives with resistance and fortitude.

King (2011) defines courage as the process of “choosing from some dark place beyond logic an epistemology based on lived experiences rather than precepts” (p. 92). St. Augustine of Hippo expands our understanding of the power of courage noting courage, one of the daughters of Hope, “allows us to see that things do not remain the way things are” (Brown, 1995, p. 136). Courage in the face of the unknown was steel in the spine of the Black community in Farmville.

Grace is often mistakenly associated with compliance. However, as conceptualized by Canon (1988) it is interpreted as the moral agency which prevented Black women from becoming immobilized by terror during slavery and the strength to survive living in the racist societies that border their lives. Grace is the quality of hushed resistance found in the lives of Black women. As scholars acknowledge and validate the moral agency of African American women, their strategic and creative survival and empowering tactics are preserved, enhanced, and supported.

The lives of this group of ordinary women have not been thoroughly examined as to the *why* of their commitments. What we do know is that the education crises in Farmville produced women who were able to cross boundaries between the public life of their struggle and the private spheres of adherents and potential constituents. Part of what has remained underexamined are the foundations of the belief systems of these women, and frequently girls, formed their commitments and summoned the resolve to engage in a education liberation movement.

As part of the expanded scholarship on this period, my goal is to illuminate the creativity, complexity, and the resilience of the African American women as they engaged a system of rules and regulations that systematically sought to restrict their

abilities, self-definition, dignity, and any attempts to establish autonomy with their community (Chafe 2000; Gilmore 1996; Higginbotham 1993; Hunter 1997; Neverdon-Morton 1982).

### **Purpose of the Study**

A central theme of this dissertation is that Black women's resilience can best be understood in a historical context as a consequence of the dynamic African American socio-political-religious-communal-familial experiences.

Dissertation questions:

1. What were the impacts of the confluence of education disruption and place on the Farmville community and on specific women and families?
2. How did the school closings shape the context for African American women in Farmville to respond, organize, and address the educational crises they faced during the 1956-1963 time frame?
3. How did the voices of the women who were interviewed for this study reflect and illustrate the broader education context? What were their epistemological frameworks and how did these change over time? How are those frameworks reflective of the larger community and broader implications of these events?

The South of the 1950s possessed the ingredients for profound change. The ground was being laid for social, economic, and community reorganizations, for readjustments in the structures of class, race, and gender, and most particularly in the systems of beliefs that determined the educational future of millions of African American children. As the death knell was sounding for Jim Crow Laws, one of the last, most virulent expressions of White supremacy in Virginia were the school closings in

Farmville. Throughout this dissertation attention is drawn to both the collective and individual behaviors and methodologies employed by the women in Farmville to engage the educational system

The Jim Crow era in the rural South as noted by C. Vann Woodward (1989) was a “twilight zone” in American history. Many in the White community in Farmville believed as Ulrich B. Phillips that the “central thread of southern history is a common resolve to maintain white supremacy” (Ely 1976, p. 23). The White community’s response to the issues surrounding education desegregation almost blinded them to the reactions of the Black community. They were not prepared for the unwavering commitment of Black parents (Bonastia 2012), particularly Black mothers, to dismantle the biases incumbent in a system of beliefs that determined the educational future of thousands of African American children.

To be a Black woman in Farmville meant that your personal, political, and social experiences were informed by the realities of life in a racialized, class conscious, rural southern community. This study of Black women’s community association and the everydayness of their convictions thickens our perceptions and broadens our understandings of reactions to lives under siege. This dissertation will add to the existing literature that examines the lives of Black women who challenged a belief system about who was worthy of a “decent education.” It also it bears witness to and solidifies community identities when women “speak” and differentiate themselves.

For African American women who have been pivotal in the struggle for equality and have long recognized the special circumstances of their lives, their unerring belief in the value of and their commitment to education, despite the era, would be tested in the

protracted legal and ethical struggle for education equity in a locale where the context of their lives was determined by systemic discriminations.

This study is intended to contribute to the exploration of the practices employed by African American women in navigating the imposed educational, social, economic, racial, psychological, and gender roles (Robnett 1997) that were designed to determine the direction of their lives and the lives of their children.

The closing of schools in Farmville has generated considerable scholarly attention in the past five years, not as much attention has been paid to the individual lives of those affected. While a limited number of personal interviews have been conducted and thesis and dissertations have been written, the story of Farmville remains incomplete. This dissertation sought to interview a cohort of women who were either affected by or participated in the education movement. In providing a perception on resilience it becomes possible to generate new understandings of the early civil rights education movement and the participation and impact of small groups of Black women in general, and in Farmville in particular.

The women of Farmville and their community of sisters, through their individual and collective community, religious and social networks, were uniquely situated to cross the borders between the public life of the education movement and the private sphere of family. The input of these women made it possible to expand the parameters of community activism. Giddings (1984) agrees, maintaining that Black women have played a significant role in political and education resistance movements, often bridging the public and private spheres. Shaw (1996) argues that in a society that denied Black women status, these women would create a sense of socially responsible individualism

fusing public and private responsibilities. The Black women in Farmville would elevate the concept of social movement theory and rearticulate their experiences from a womanist perspective allowing them to self-describe their experiences and acknowledge the distinctiveness of their journey (Hill-Collins 2000).

**Give me schools and give me better books, so I can  
 Read about myself and gain my truer looks.  
 I don't want nobody to give me nothing.  
 Open up the door. I'll get it myself.  
 We got talents we can use on our side of town.  
 Let's get our heads together and build it up from the ground.  
 James Brown, the Godfather of Soul<sup>3</sup>**

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

The literature review is the most complicated element of any lengthy piece of social research because “it forms the backbone of the wider theoretical base of any topic” (Boote & Beile 2005, 4). The literature review is critical to grounding a research topic, analyzing the works of others, deciding what issues related to the research are worth examining, and where the areas of contestation or agreement among scholars reside. It is in the literature review that major flaws, gaps, and inconsistencies in theory and findings are exposed and areas for future research are discovered.

For this dissertation the complicated nature and disparate entities involved in the school closings required a review of literature across various fields. It begins by 1) contextualizing the lives of African American women; 2) providing a theoretical framework; 3) from sociology - places the school closing with a social movement framework; 4) from education - a brief history of education in Virginia; 5) from history - the background for education in Virginia, and an examination of the influence of Barbara Johns on the Farmville education protest movement; 6) framing African American women's lived experiences through the literature and relating the epistemological

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<sup>3</sup> I don't want nobody to give me nothing” by James Brown©1960 (Renewed), Dynatone Publishing Company. Rights administered by Unichappell Music Inc. All rights reserved.

frameworks that informs their lives in the literature to the women in Farmville through a) identity; b) education; c) religion; and d) community. As a result this review, while not exhaustive is lengthy.

The literature review draws attention to the dearth of qualitative research that examines the relationships between the school closings in Farmville and the participation of African American women. This work is intended to reside in the vacant spaces between feminist, historic, geographic, and womanist examinations of Black women's lives. What has consistently remained closeted, across the disciplines, are those experiences of ordinary African American women who, as part of their daily life, participated in the southern education struggles. Giddings (1984) has summarized this disciplinary disconnect by pointing out that because Black women are generally portrayed as at the margins and frequently relegated to supporting roles in most movements, their invisibility is part of a larger system of oppressions.

The scholarly research on the school closings in Prince Edward County has concentrated primarily on the racial atmosphere in 1950s Virginia, or the judicial responses to *Brown v Board of Education* (Anderson, 1988; Branch, 1988; Egerton, 1999; Gates, 1962; Kluger, 1977; Smith, 1965). While a number of articles and books were immediately available, they were generally concentrated in three specific areas: 1) those constructed outlining the systemic patterns of overall southern segregation; 2) legal areas focused on research that examined the NAACP's strategies to dismantle "*separate but equal*"; or 3) areas that concentrated on the maneuvers of the Virginia legislature to maintain its segregated schools. These examinations from an either or, or top down perspective were presented with minimal reference to the lived experiences of the people

in Farmville (particularly women) who were involved in the day-to-day education struggle.

The time span between past and recent studies investigating the school closings in Farmville is over forty years. Between Bonastia (2012) and Smith (1965) there have been newspaper and journal articles, a few novels, and a limited number of scholarly books dealing with the school closings. This issue, despite its importance in the fields of education, women's studies, sociology, and history has not garnered the research interest necessary to propel it forward in any field. This is a complicated topic, unpacking it requires an interdisciplinary approach because it crisscrosses disciplines. Consequently, the research examining the anonymous, unnoticed, unsung African American women who were involved in one of the most important social movements of the twentieth century is almost nonexistent. Marable (2006) argues that when a people are "regarded as beings of an inferior order and altogether unfit" (p. 44), their histories, memories, shared rituals, and traditions are relegated to areas beyond society's formal boundaries. With this understanding it follows that the lives of Farmville's Black women are deemed unworthy of study. This has historically been true of the lives of most African American women despite the growth of research on the lives of Black women.

In the fifty plus years since the zenith of the modern Civil Rights Movement, the experiences and roles of rural, poor Black women has virtually been neglected, forgotten, or considered inconsequential (Barnett, 1993; Hall, 1990; Hine, 1994). In the wider academic discourses Scott (1990) maintained that the invisibility of Black women's in research "is in part a result of gender, race, and class biases ..." (p. 5).

Social class and gender were important constructs in the Civil Rights Movement. Several authors (Gilkes, 2001; Robnett, 1996) argue that because the structures of many civil rights organizations were male dominated it follows that the scholarly focus would be male. While the male structure may have existed across movements, Black women through their support constituted the body politic of civil rights organizations. They were committed to ground level activism bringing both their existing and extensive social and kinship networks to the struggle. The kinship network among rural Black women illuminates the nurturing and supportive environment that exists within female relationships. Kinship was key to Black family stability and survival, and it provided an atmosphere that fostered and maintained the strength necessary to engage the unfamiliar arena of civic participation. Robnett (1996) argues that despite being the vital links between communities, organizations, and various civil rights movements, and although they were written out of history, Black women acted as “critical mobilizers” (p. 5). While individual lives have received nominal examination, the collective experiences of women involved in small, rural, southern movements are almost absent from the literature. This is certainly true of the Black women who participated in the educational social movement in Farmville.

In bringing Black women in from the periphery, Shaw (1996) characterizes and normalizes their humanity and defines them outside their oppressions. Black women are researched from the vantage points of their unique societal positions, their diversities, mutual interests, and shared visions of the future. For these women their development and successes are examined through the collectivity of their efforts, and they are compensated for external societal constraints through understanding the “importance of

working hard and preparing for and expecting success” (p. 13). Shaw’s (1996) research provides a foundation for understanding that while providing the backbone for both local and national Civil Rights Movement and the Black Church, African American women were conscripted and obliged to take orders, but they were also groomed to give them. This understanding ultimately pushes forward the research viability of the average, everyday rural, southern African American woman.

Bernice McNair Barnett (1993) notes that African American women have an extraordinary diversity that marks their lived experiences:

Sisters in struggle—sharecroppers, domestic and service workers, schoolteachers, college professors, housewives, beauticians, students, and office secretaries—all shed blood, sweat, and tears in the movement. In their homes, churches, voluntary associations, political organizations, women’s clubs, college campuses organizations, neighborhoods and work groups, southern Black women of differing backgrounds shared a common desire for freedom of oppression (p. 2).

As a group, and with rare exception, African American women have been poked, prodded, analyzed, dissected, castigated, ridiculed, demeaned, vilified. They have been characterized as mammies, matriarchs, welfare mothers, or Jezebels. Hill-Collins (2000) states that these stereotypic images have been essential elements in the construction of Black women’s identity and oppression. Black women have been “a consistent, multifaceted threat to the status quo, and as punishment have been assaulted with a variety of negative images” (p. 294). It is within the structural context of interlocking systems of gender, class, racial, and sexual oppressions that African American women have chiseled out identities in and outside their communities that many consider courageous. Articulating the positionality of Black women Barnett (1993) argues that

despite suffering the daily indignities heaped on them by their location in the structure of society:

Many women were much more than followers...many more were also leaders who performed a variety of roles comparable to those of black male leaders. Although seldom recognized as leaders, these women were often the ones who initiated protest, formulated strategies and tactics, and mobilized other resources (especially money, personnel, and communication networks) necessary for successful collective action (p. 163).

### **Theoretical Framework**

In approaching the theoretical methodologies available for the analysis of the lives of Black women, it is necessary to understand how we define theory. Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua in *This Bridge Called My Back* (1984) assert that “theory in the flesh means one where the physical realities of our lives—our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings—all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity and contradiction” (p. 23). Boylorn (2009) expands this adding that “theories describe, explain, predict, increase awareness, foster understanding, and critique” (p. 45). Embedded within theories are our experiences and those questions that surface from our familiarities and reflects the world in which we live.

Choosing a particular lens to analyze the women in Farmville does not indicate that it was at the elimination of others. There are elements of black feminist theory which as defined by Radford-Hill (2000), examines the forms, functions and social processes of human sexuality and explores the dimensions of gender in a variety of contexts. There are strands of intersectionality theory which offers a way of investigating and making sense of how gender joins other identity factors to influence how women experience oppression and is grounded in the concept that women lead layered lives.

And standpoint theory which privileges women's lived experiences as ways of knowing and understanding the world. Each of these theories is grounded in the multiple and overlapping oppressions African American women face including racism, classism, and sexism. These influences echo across these pages. It is with this caveat, that the women of Farmville are examined through the lens of womanism.

In 1979 Alice Walker wrote the Chapter Introduction for Laura Lederer's edited volume, *Take Back the Night: Women on Pornography* (Burrow 1998). In the Introduction, Walker would refashion our cultural language and give voice to an embryonic theoretical framework. In the chapter, "Third World Women," Walker introduced *womanism*, an elongated lens of analysis that could reshape the examination of the complex and diverse natures that are the lives of women of African descent in America.

Boylorn (2009) writes that this new womanist framework "speaks to the idea that stories about black women should fall from black women's mouths" (p. 50). She continues that "the central premise of womanism is the absolute necessity of speaking from and about one's own experiential location and not to or about someone else's" (p. 51). The essential elements in the *womanist* theory are that there are significant generational, cultural, racial, ethnic, regional, and experiential differences among women. It is necessary to understand the ranges of their responses to gender/sex, power, social change, and values that demand theorizing that explores how women envision themselves, speak for themselves, fulfill their roles, manage their resources and determine their abilities to alter prevailing social norms (Radford-Hill 2000). This is critical in womanism.

Prior to Walker's delineation of womanism as both a descriptive category and analytic frame of Black women, Toni Cade Bambara (1970) offered a definition that is both straightforward and complicated. She described the Black woman as:

...a college professor. A dropout. A student. A wife. A divorcee. A mother. A lover. A child of the ghetto. A product of the bourgeoisie. A professional writer. A person who never dreamed of publication. A solitary individual. A member of the Movement. A gentle humanist. A violent revolutionary. She is angry and tender, loving and hating. She is all these things...and more (p. xviii).

In presenting the term "womanism" (a derivation of womanish) as loosely defined by first Cade Bambara (1970) and then Walker (1979), Black women are positioned as emerging into self-awareness, powerful, autonomous, responsible, in charge, and acting like grown-ups. Katie Cannon (1988) amplifies Walker's analytic foundation viewing Black womanism as an interpretive principle, with a tradition that provides an "incentive to chip away at oppressive structures, bit by bit" (p. 48). Bobo (1995) adds that womanism is designed to flow from a worldview and consciousness allowing for the resolution of seeming contradictions not through an either/or negation, but through interaction and wholeness. In using the womanist model Burrow (1998) describes her as a "particularist (concerned first and foremost about Black women, but other women as well!) and a universalist (focusing on the welfare and wholeness of all persons regardless of gender, race, class, sexual orientation)" (p. 21).

Walker's construction of the womanist paradigm, and the meaning she imbued, situated the Black woman in the center of history and culture. It was designed to redirect the narrative that had distorted her image in American society. In positioning Black women as essential to the dialogues regarding agency, strength, and competence, Walker inscribed her as a thoughtful, knowledgeable individual who engages in the constant

search of consciousness. It is at this nexus of the individual and concept that womanism becomes an interpretive framework for epistemological interrogation.

The womanist framework continues to evolve because it is the lived reality of Black women within the context of being with themselves and with others. Womanism engages the thematic deconstruction of paternalism, pushing Black women primacy in moral and social systems forward. The fluidity in the concept allows McKenzie (2005) to argue that the contours of womanism are as much a response to the positive affirmation of what it means to live in communities of love, communities of shared commitments, and values as it is a response to the oppressive context of injustice.

Womanism, added to the *American Heritage Dictionary* in 1993, has had a profound influence on the formulation of theories and frameworks in Black studies, history, women/gender studies, religious and education studies. Phillips and McCaskill (1995) note that in generating unique thematic constellations, womanism has excavated valuable research models that harmonize complex and diverse social systems. Through the lens of womanism and “their notions of sisterhood, Black women have drawn models of research in which “research ‘subjects’ are not ‘subjected’ to objectification, anonymity, and power imbalances but, rather are elevated to research collaborators, named historical personages, and empowered citizens” (p. 1010).

The organizing principle of womanist philosophy is according to Phillips and McCaskill (1995) the “absolute necessity to speak from and about one’s own experiential location and not to or about someone else’s” (p. 1010). Through a cross-disciplinary analysis and drawing on concepts and ideas from multiple areas of study such as history, education, sociology, women’s studies, and geography this dissertation demonstrates that

study across fields expands the epistemological terrain of African American women in the southern education movement. The examination of these forgotten civil rights protests, fought in regions bordering the Deep South, also provides a better understanding and explanation of the relationship between social action, social location, and agency within local communities. It was at the junctures of race, gender, hierarchy, and social change the Black women in Farmville developed the abilities to nourish a movement.

### **Social Movements**

Until recently the scholarship on social movements has not been widely applied to the examination of activism by Black women (Banaszak & Beckwith, 2003; O'Keefe, 2013; Tripp, Casimiri, Kwesiga & Mungwa, 2008). This is not only unfortunate, creating a void, because the content and very structure of Black women's activism lends itself to social movement analysis. Collins (1990) and Gilkes (1980) make reference (without elaboration) to the possible linkages between social movements and Black women's activism. Gomez-Harvell (2002) maintains that "more common in the literature is the often cited and obvious fact that Black women have been major participants in those political upheavals already designated as social movements. What is suggested here, however, is that Black women's ... activism has been an ongoing, but often "invisible," social movement in its own right" (132). The African American women of Farmville, bound by race and gender were similar, yet very different. They shared strong assumptions about the rightness of their cause, they shared grievances, and a belief that united they could address the existing education disparities (McCarthy, 1996). Historically however, many understood that life in the rural South was constricted by a common vision of exclusion based on race, gender, and ethnicity (Frasure & Williams

2009). They were, according to Relph (1976), people who were their place, and the place their people. Despite their shared commonalities and allegiances to community, Klandersmann & Oegema (1987) warns that this is not enough to mobilize individuals. Potential constituents must be convinced of the legitimacy of participation (Siddle-Walker, 1996), and then they must be persuaded to act. The following discussion of social movements demonstrates that for Black women collective action has always represented a fundamental characteristic of their political activism.

The literature on social movements is “rich with theory of how ordinary citizens become central actors in the process of social change through mass-based action” (Harris-Lacewell, 2004, p. 256). Robnett (1996) maintains that for social movement theorists a central concern is the process of micromobilization or the ways in which individuals come to participate in movement organizations and identify with its issues and goals.

For this dissertation I look to Sidney Tarrow (1994), a leading social movement theorist, to lay the initial ground for social movements as utilized by the women in Farmville. His approach is a unique fit for African American women. He writes that social movements are “collective challenges by people with common purposes and solidarity in sustained interactions with elites, opponents and authorities” (p. 3-4). He continues that “social movements attempt to replace a ‘dominant belief system that legitimizes the status quo with an alternative mobilizing belief system that supports collective action for change’ ... (p. 106). Tarrow concludes that in examining the history of social movements it is undeniable that “the irreducible act that lies at the base of all social movements, protests, and revolutions is contentious collective action” (p. 3). In Farmville that collective action was mobilization around education.

An important contribution to this belief in collective action and the transformative nature of education is the phrase coined by Miles Horton and Paulo Freire. These educators believed that “*we make the road by walking*” and it captures the notion that *you* (whether a collective or individual you) are the best person to know which “social interventions” will work. They argue that is nothing more fundamental to social change than learning who you are, in finding and honoring your authentic self, recognizing that it is multifaceted, complex, and evolving-and then making sure that the social change methods you use are consistent with that self (Horton & Friere, 1990). These educators beautifully described how the women of Farmville would find the “road” to education equality was unpaved, there were no guide books, and the situations they faced were neither familiar nor predictable.

As the broad principles of social movements were incorporated into emerging resilience patterns among the Black women in Farmville, the fight for education parity would redefine their previously restricted roles. Meyer and Whittier (1994) argue that “because social movements aspire to change not only specific policies, but also broad cultural and institutional structures, they have effects far beyond their explicitly articulated goals” (p. 277). These social movement alliances focused attention on working through and across social, psychological, economic, and social class lines (Hall 1990). This group of women would cultivate patterns of resilience that reorganized the boundaries not only of their lives, but also the boundaries around equal access to a quality education.

Social movements exist within a wider racial, societal, and cultural context. McCarthy (1996) adds that they draw on cultural images to outline what is an injustice,

discover patterns of violations, and then develops frames of what can and should be.

Snow et al (1986) argue that,

the framing process constitutes one of the major avenues through which collective action is generated, disseminated, and sustained. Frame alignment is the key process because it refers to linkages of individual and SMO (Social Movement Organizations) interpretive orientation, such that some set of individuals interest, values, and beliefs and SMO activities, goals and ideology are congruent and complimentary (p. 484).

Through framing, social movements are able to recruit and mobilize participants with creative ideological work as frames are amplified, bridged and extended. Willie (1965) adds that a social movement is an insurrection driven through collective action “neither started nor stopped by choice of a single person” (p. 209). Weisman (2008) writes:

Social movements are all essentially collective in the sense that they result from more or less spontaneous coming together of individuals whose relationships are not defined by rules and procedures but merely by, at a minimum, a common outlook on society (p. 6).

Black women have a history of being active in all forms, levels, and types of social change movements (Barnett, 1993; Robnett, 1997, 1998). Cash (2001) concurs, maintaining that “African American women have a long history of social action to provide the basic survival needs of African Americans” (p. 3). They would use their racial and societal positions as the nexus of their activity, with protest providing a real, tangible place to rewrite the script on resilienc. Atwater (2009) agrees “fortunately for us, many African American women became involved in the movement that eventually changed the country in ways that were virtually unparalleled in history” (p. 81).

The Black women in Farmville through the education movement would use collective activism to reframe how the movement would identify issues, organize experiences, and make sense of events (Martin, 2003). They would also confront the

intersecting and multiplicative oppressions they faced as women, African Americans, and workers in both local and national social movements. In Farmville the involvement of Black women in the racial equality struggle was critical to its success. The stage was set for a social movement that would remodel the contours of these women's lives.

With few exceptions many social movement theorist have ignored Black women's organizational skills, their incredible abilities in transforming social systems, and in their empowerment of the Black community. Barnett (1993) addresses this issue writing that: The invisibility of modern Black women leaders and activists is in part a result of gender, race, and class biases prevalent in both the social movement literature and feminist scholarship (p. 164).

The needs, drives, and passions of these women cannot be dichotomized as simply leaders and followers. Whether organizing in their churches or canvassing their neighborhood, Barnett (1993) suggests that Black women viewed their participation in civil rights movements (this includes education rights) as essential to its success.

However, their absence in the education historic literature has a long tradition. Margaret Walker (1979) argues:

Even in pre-civil war days black women stood in the vanguard for equal rights; (*sic*) for freedom from slavery, for recognition of women as citizens and co-partners with men in all of life's endeavors...However, because of the nature of American history, and particularly because of the institution of slavery and segregation, the names and lives of black women leaders are all but unknown in American society (p. xvi).

Black women would find that it was through their roles as mothers, their participation in churches, their support for one another in Black female networks, that their newly creative expressions of autonomy could be knit together to reshape their everyday narratives (Hill-Collins, 1991). Getting people involved in a political

movement, meeting them “where they are” (Frasure & Williams 2009, p. 218) is an essential contact point. In this instance Black women used their normative relationships to forward and redesign the existing southern narrative of the educational lives of their children, they would also challenge the underlying assumptions of their womanhood and personhood.

Many of the Black females of Farmville were motivated to band together and successfully mobilize around the common theme of education justice. Through formal and informal personal, professional, religious, and familial relationships, networks were established that provided venues for the movement’s successful mobilization. There are several studies that have examined and established the importance of interpersonal relationship for the success of movement mobilization (Gould, 1993; Klandermans & Oegema, 1987; Morris, 1984) and one of the strongest alliances that surfaced were the extensive help systems among Black women.

In broadening the spaces in which the concept of resilience develops in social movements, scaffolding for the analysis of transformation, empowerment, and liberation evolves and is sheathed in the normalcy of Black women’s lives. Robnett (1996) maintains that in the analysis of social movements when leaders are the general focus, resilience itself is normally left unanalyzed. In expanding her own analysis, Robnett (1997) argues that women leaders in the civil rights movement “emerged during moments of crises when people were emotionally charged by an incident” (p. 29). When the focus shifts to resilience, rather than individuals, part of what is uncovered is how oppression in one’s daily life gives rise to resilience as a natural, almost normal response to extremely abhorrent behavior.

Special attention should be paid to the fact that in the South, particularly the rural South, not all African-American women were eager to join the movement for education or civil rights. In Farmville there were women who were reluctant to endorse the movement. Oglive-Titus (2009) points to this and recalls one girl who remembered that despite the objections of some mothers “some teenagers found ways around their parents’ disapproval...like the 16 year old girl who moved in with an older brother after her mother told her “that if I got in jail she wouldn’t come and get me” (p. 41). Black women were not/are not a monolithic group. Collier-Thomas (2001) argues that the “metalanguague of race” (p. 22) often overshadows class, familial, and gender conflicts internal to the Black community. That preoccupation with “race work,” “racial uplift,” and essentialist notions of “black womanhood” have tended to obscure the significant tension and conflicts among African Americans of different class or regional backgrounds” (p. 23). She continues that there is however, broad solidarity on a wide range of issues across class, regional, and color lines. Differences did not prevent Black women from creating and maintaining a “culture of resistance” (p. 147) characterized by the need for social change. This was no less true in Farmville where the fight for education justice would narrow the fissures in the Black community and a broad cohesion was hued across class, economics, and color.

The women of Farmville would react to the school closings by instigating and shepherding a social movement that would not only redefine their social location, it would also shape the interests and educational opportunities for the Black children in the town. African American women would become carriers of the messages of education to their community. Robnett (1996) concurs noting, “the purveyors of many of the

movement's messages were women (1663).” Oberschall (1993) contends that the opportunity for involvement in any social movement is stimulated because a long endured condition is increasingly experienced as more unjust and more inequitable, and groups develop a belief in their capacity to act collectively.

As resilience began to emerge as a collective and dynamic process, when seen through the eyes of Black women, Sacks maintains (1988) it exists within a “complex set of relationships and negotiations...” (p. 77). Whether mobilizing in the church or community, passing out leaflets, arranging the delivery of library books, or coordinating multiple transportation routes for children, Black women labored cooperatively navigating color, class, and caste lines. In insinuating this work across a variety of academic disciplines with multiple methodological perspectives illustrates that “the cultural reality and world view of many African American women is grounded in strong religious belief systems, a collective social orientation, strong family/kinship bonds, communalism, cognitive flexibility, affective expressiveness, and a present time orientation” (Hill, 1999; Holloway, 1990; Jones, 2003).

### **The Impact of Barbara Johns**

The role of resilience among African American women has a shared historic continuity. From Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman during and after slavery; to Ida B. Wells, Madam C. J. Walker, Anna Julia Cooper and Mary Church Terrell who engaged communities of women after Reconstruction thrusting them into a twentieth century yawning with possibility; to Fannie Lou Hamer, Shirley Chisholm and Dorothy I. Height, who would agitate for expansion of the paradigm of what it was to be American, female and Negro. The women of Farmville would add their voices to this chorus. So it was no

accident that the incident that propelled Farmville into a mid-twentieth century whirlwind was driven by two teenage girls: Barbara Johns (D) and Dorothy Davis, an original litigant in *Brown vs. Board of Education*.

Johns, Davis, and the women of Farmville would add their testimonies to a cause that began as “race” work in the slave and newly freed communities, to those clamoring for justice within family systems, religious communities, and education. In order to provide the stability essential in their communities, African American women would insist upon some form of autonomy (Gilkes, 2001). They would use these autonomous spaces to clarify their roles in the women’s networks they established. The remarkable nature of these networks was that they laid the foundation for the development of their collective and individual skills. Black women’s resilience was set out by Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin in 1895 when she called for Black women across the nation to act in their self-interest. Fifty years later, whether they knew of St. Pierre Ruffin or not, her words provided a powerful roadmap and a historic background for the symbolic and spiritual emergence of the concept of resilience. She spoke the following in Boston in 1895 before the First National Conference of Colored Women:

All over America there is to be found a large and growing class of earnest, intelligent, progressive colored women, women who... are only waiting for the opportunity to do...more... Now for the sake of the thousands of self-sacrificing young women teaching...in lonely southern backwoods for the noble army of mothers who has given birth to these girls, mothers whose intelligence is only limited by their opportunity to get at books... the dignity of our race and the future good name of our children, it is "mete, right and our bounded duty" to stand forth and declare ourselves and principles, to teach an ignorant and suspicious world that our aims and interests are identical with those of all good aspiring women. Year after year southern women have protested against the admission of colored women into any national organization on the ground of the immorality of these women. Now with an army of organized women standing for purity and mental worth... ready to break this silence, not by noisy protestations

of what we are not, but by a dignified showing of what we are and hope to become... For many and apparent reasons it is especially fitting that the women of the race take the lead in this movement...Our women's movement is woman's movement in that it is led and directed by women for the good of women ...for the benefit of all humanity, which is more than any one branch or section of it...we are women, American women...we are not alienating or withdrawing, we are only coming to the front, willing to join any others in the same work...(1)

Fortified with this history and belief in the integrity and dignity of education, the students at Robert Russa Moton, the first freestanding all Negro High School (freestanding indicates that it was not attached to an elementary school) in Prince Edward County, initiated the town's first overt act of civil rights protest. This group of students operated with a sense of honor in the righteousness of their cause.

The groundwork for the inevitable education struggle was written onto the past of White southern resistance to the public education of African Americans. Smith (2002) argues that “preserving and maintaining Anglo Saxon ideals and civilization” (p. 76) were at the very heart of this resistance. To understand public education in 1950s Virginia it would be necessary to examine the social, political, and economic influences that governed the lives of both Black and white Virginians. These areas are not the foci of this dissertation and are too broad for this paper. However, in the 1950s Virginia, like much of the South, was at a crossroads. The era of the “invisible Negro” who didn't serve on juries, who was only seen in City Halls or public buildings as elevator operators or janitors, who was compliant was slowly disappearing. In Virginia, as in much of the South, Bonastia (2012) maintains that Negro children found themselves in an isolated, rural locale that offered them no “access to a movie (except in the balcony) or a gymnasium or a bowling alley or a pool or a skating rink or YWCA or a civil service job

or any clerical job” (p. 35). Virginia in the 1950s was a prisoner of its 300-year history of slavery, Reconstruction, Jim Crow Laws and education segregation.

The modern movement for education equity in Farmville began with sixteen-year old Barbara Rose Johns who came to the protest movement with support from her family, in particular her uncle, the Reverend Vernon Johns. The Reverend Vernon Johns was a political activist born in Farmville in 1892. He was a social activist in both Virginia and Alabama who later became Pastor at Dexter Street Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama. He was also friend, mentor, and colleague of a young Dr. Martin Luther King. With a family background of striving for racial justice, Barbara became active in school affairs. As a member of the school council she traveled around the county and had the opportunity to see other high schools. According to Smith (1965) Johns “began to think that Moton High School was blight on the county, on all Negroes in the county, on her (p. 31).” Olson (2001) would later write that “although she spent much of her early life there, Farmville was a place where Barbara Johns never really felt she belonged” (p. 79).

Barbara had a favorite teacher who listened patiently to her dreams and complaints. During one of their conversations she expressed how unhappy she was with the conditions of the school. The teacher told her “why don’t you do something about it?” For Barbara this challenge made her think, she would later write “I decided, indeed something had to be done about this inequality. I prayed for help. That night, whether in a dream or whether I was awake, a plan began to formulate in my mind. A plan that I felt was divinely inspired.” The students, with one dissenting vote, walked out, set up picket lines with hand painted signs proclaiming “We want a New School or None at All” and “Down with the Tar-Paper Shacks” (Olson, 2001, p. 81). The students would gather later

and establish a student-based headquarters in a local church basement (Hohl, 1993; Miles-Turner, 2001; Neff, 1992). They audaciously challenged the inequity of their educational facility-the school had no gymnasium, cafeteria, lockers, or auditorium with folding chairs instead of fixed seating, and the most ignominious-outdoor privies.

Built with a capacity for 180 in 1939, R. R. Morton on opening day had a student body of 167 and by 1950 the enrollment was 477 (Dunnville, 2004; Marable, 2004; Wilkerson, 1960). The 1951 student walkout would provoke discussions among students and parents around the issues that affected the quality of their education – the curriculum, the inadequacies in the facility, the lack of sufficient instructional materials, and the deficiencies in staff pay.

When Barbara Rose organized the school walkout and told her Grandmother, Ma Croner, “Grandma, I walked out of school this morning and carried 450 students with me” (Kluger, 1977, p. 471) she was, perhaps unknowingly, making the tacit connection between place, history, education, and the struggle for equality. Barbara would display a particular type of leadership normally reserved for men-charismatic, exemplifying Richard Ellis’ (1991) definition:

The effect one individual has on a group of other individuals. Without the effect, there is no charisma. The purpose of charisma is not simply behavioral change (as one would expect from traditional or legal authority, i.e. coercive power), but a conversion of individual values and beliefs (p. 312).

Barbara understood that it would take more than words to convince her classmates to follow her. It was her willingness to act that spoke loudly-she cared about education in Farmville. Another student striker added “the only thing I ever thought about was I

wanted to get the best education that I could...”<sup>4</sup> At a time when the United States was just beginning to experience its global strength and flex its considerable muscle in becoming the world’s pre-eminent power; when growing anti-colonial struggles questioned racism at home (Harpalani, 2004); as US territory expanded (Alaska and Hawaii became states by the end of the decade); and as the Soviet’s made a second trip to the moon, a small town in Virginia mapped an insurrection that would echo for fifteen years.

In June 1950, the NAACP decided to end its pursuit of school equalization. In Farmville what began as a demand for “separate but equal” facilities, and drove the April 1951 walkout, would through the intercession of the NAACP become an entirely new movement. The organization claimed victory in *Sweatt vs. Painter*, 339. U.S. 629, the first time the Supreme Court ordered a Black person admitted to a White school because the Black school was unequal. This success was the tactical turning point for the NAACP. This legal shift in confronting educational racism at its foundation, “*separate but equal*” would go beyond the beliefs of a few bigoted individuals. It would confront head on the interrelated ideologies and practices that had grave effects and consequences in the life chances of Farmville’s Black children.

The Farmville student walkout occurred just ten months after the NAACP decision not to challenge school equalization cases, and six months after the Virginia State Conference officially followed its parent organization’s lead. When the attorneys visited Farmville on April 25, 1951, they informed the striking students they were no longer challenging separate but equal. Instead they were going to challenge segregation

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<sup>4</sup> Quote taken from unnamed female in interview with Kara Miles-Turner (2004), interview materials in possession of author.

*per se* and if the parents backed them they would take the case. On April 26, 1951, at a mass meeting to discuss the issues, parents voted to request the NAACP's help. As a result, on May 21, 1951, the law firm of Hill, Martin, and Robinson (E), on behalf of nineteen families (representing thirty-three students) petitioned the school board to end segregation in the county's schools.

With the encouragement and support of Reverend L. Francis Griffin, Pastor of the First Baptist Church and Reverend Vernon Johns (Kluger, 1975) student leaders and supporters were convinced to reevaluate their cause. They concluded "*separate but equal*" was not enough, and total integration became the new goal in Farmville. This partnership with the NAACP would create an atmosphere brimming with animosities and hostilities that would result in the longest, most intensive litigation in the history of the Civil Rights struggle. The litigation would result in the closing of all public schools in the county for the next five years, 1959-1964.

To many in Farmville the walkout would be construed as an outright act of defiance, disrespect, and uppitness<sup>5</sup>. School segregation armored southern supremacy, the processes in which local school decisions served to reinforce the continuous social commentary about racial, psychological, and gendered hierarchies. Hegemony reinforced the Negro's "place."

However, there were those who would view the walkout as an act of uncommon courage in the face of the unknown. The parents in Farmville shared a cultural and psychological truth that within the Black community they were responsible for one another's children (Shaw, 1996). It was generally accepted that it was the responsibility

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<sup>5</sup> "Uppitness" is loosely defined as any breach by Blacks of the racial contract, the stepping out of one's "place," aspiring to rise above one's assigned station.

of adults to protect and provide for the children within those Black communities. The South had fixed the status of African Americans and erected what amounted to an elaborate caste system (Anderson, 1988; Bond, 1934; Frazier, 1935; Harlan, 1958) that systematically and clearly defined from birth the social, economic, and education possibilities of Black children's lives. These systems designed to retard the social reproductive abilities of a Negro child's life united the Black community in Farmville in the struggle for educational justice. Shaw (1996) sheds light on the belief in and reasons for community cohesiveness around education, explaining that, "on completing their education, in addition to serving as good examples of the consequences of individual effort, ambition, and ability ...represents one of the best traditions of the community" (p. 67). Children, particularly females, were given a sense that through education they were able to contribute more to both family and community. Their parents gave them the gift of a worldview that spoke to the value of their education and its benefits to the group (the race).

Black children in the segregated South were the recipients of clear messages regarding their status, and the Black parents of Farmville understood the educational consequences of those messages. Their children didn't matter. Black children during the 1950s were also regularly denounced for their alleged non-concern with education (Weinberg, 1991). These imaginings contrasted sharply with the long history of valuing education in the Black community, and this was especially true in Farmville.

As a result of a new understanding of the importance of their actions, Moton student strike demands would eventually be included in the growing NAACP's litigation campaign for the full integration of all public schools. Dorothy E. Davis, a fourteen-

year-old ninth grader (representing one hundred seventeen students) was the first plaintiff listed on the complaint filed on behalf of Moton students in 1951 (Brinson, 2004). This case would become one of the landmark litigants in *Brown; The Dorothy E. Davis v County School Board of Prince Edward County* was one of the five lawsuits incorporated into the historic desegregation decision.

As one of the original litigants in *Brown*, Farmville in the 1950s would set the stage for its women to participate in a continuing social and political movement for education rights. African American women would step into the contested area of education and find themselves colliding with a system designed not to fully service their children. To be a Black woman in Farmville meant that your personal, political, and psychological experiences were informed by the realities of life in a racialized, class conscious, rural, southern community. Smith (1965) illustrates this world recalling the words of Mrs. Robert Johns, owner of a small grocery who echoed the sentiments of many Black female Farmvillians when they encountered whites.

People used to come in and I used to get so angry that they would . . . call you by your first name. 'Violet, how about this' -- and that kind of thing. I would tell them I thought only my personal friends called me by my first name. We used to have a verbal fight almost every day with some salesman or another (p. 28-29).

When Black parents, in 1948, petitioned the all-white School Board for improvements to the High School the response was to erect what has been described as “tarpaper shacks” (F) with leaky roofs – water falling into buckets and on heads, heated by pot-bellY stoves (Appendix G) that in winter made you too warm if you sat close, and too cold if you moved away, the outside was covered with tar paper making them look like chicken coops rather than school buildings (Gates, 1962; Hohl, 1993; Miles-Turner, 2004; Morris & Morris, 2002; Smith, 1965). Vera Allen, mother of one of the original

walkout students said the school “looked like a prison camp.” The disparity between Moton High School and the White Farmville High School was on display for everyone to see.

When schools were shuttered in 1959 it did not come as a complete surprise. The all-White PECSB had been threatening for years that they would be perfectly willing to close county schools rather than comply with federally mandated integration. Bonastia (2012) writes that “many Prince Edward Blacks could not fathom that the county would resort to such extremes” (p. 18). The school closings would expose the fissures between the two communities. Whites believing they enjoyed an element of trust with the Black community, and Blacks now understanding that there was no good will that could be trusted.

The African American community in Farmville, principally the women, maintained more than a passing interest and respect for the education of their children. They shared a belief with a student in Alabama that:

School is the link that runs through us all. It keeps us forever connected. If you run into somebody that went to your school...I believe I have got open arms and an open door. So I think that school is sort of like blood, family<sup>6</sup>

Understanding that education provided more than opportunities, there was little else in Farmville’s Black community to be proud of. Despite this concern and passion for education, by the late 1940s Farmville’s Black community faced formidable obstacles. Part of what is critical in the examination of Farmville, is understanding how the concept of resilience slowly developed among a group of Black women as a normal response

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<sup>6</sup> Quote taken from unnamed female in interview with Kara Miles-Turner (2004), interview materials in possession of author

when forced to confront the multiple oppressions that constricted their lives. In Farmville the responses to the inequities in the educational lives of Black children rippled across the lives of Black women and demanded the rise of multifaceted patterns of resilience that had historic roots in the Black community.

Education would be the catalyst that united the Black women of Farmville. There was the reality that they should be content with an inferior educational system, and ultimately, and most overwhelming, the certainty that there would be no education at all for their children. According to Smith (1965) whites were comfortable with their rationalization of education discrimination. He maintains that systemic discrimination was imprisoned in southern history:

...it had something to do with the South's ancestral disaffection for mass education, the scars left by the Civil War, real poverty ...and the unexpected demand of the Negro for a high school education (p. 18).

African Americans in Farmville through the 1950s were characterized as "docile" and the fight for education was portrayed as "an accident...like a fixed star leaving its orbit and going astray." However, this dissertation argues that it was through the resilience of the town's Black women that education would become the focal point of protest. Education equality became a living, breathing dynamic and achieving it became the focus of Black women.

### **Education in Virginia**

Public education in Virginia had a contentious beginning. According to Heatwole (1916) the early educational interest among the people of Virginia was primarily with the large population of orphan and needy children that were sent to the colony from the hospitals and asylums in England. This concern led to the establishment

of several types of early schooling: a) Sunday Schools “developed as a means to rescue children of factory workers from their filth, ignorance and sex of their parents” (p. 14); b) Old Field Schools (Community Schools) that provided the greatest proportion of children’s education; and c) Common Schools that were intended to serve all the children in an area. These types of schools were the foundation for free public schools wherever legislative requirements would guarantee taxes to finance them. Within this system of early public education there was a generally favorable attitude toward instructing both Negro and Indian slaves

In the mid-seventeenth century a series of laws were enacted to further define how and who would have public education available to them. By 1800 Virginia, motivated by fear of slave insurrection, ignited in the wake of Gabriel Prosser’s thwarted attempt at rebellion, legislators passed laws that prohibited teaching slaves to read and write. Prosser, a literate blacksmith born into slavery, could read and write and learned the trade of blacksmithing, he would ultimately be hung with his two brothers as punishment for their crime.

It is impossible to adequately dissect the origin of public education in Virginia without noting the influence of Thomas Jefferson. Heatwole (1916) outlines a series of proposals Jefferson designed based on his philosophy of local self-government. Heatwole (1916) claims Jefferson’s plan was destined to fail on two fronts: 1) the geographic and demographic divides in the State; and 2) the resistance toward a tax supported education system. Jefferson believed that “education should be financed partially from state sources” (Mullins, 2001, p. 26).

For the next one hundred plus years public education would be fractured, occasional, and inconsistent, and was very slow to take hold among the citizenry (Anderson, 1988). Fairclough (2000) argues that education's development "was not characterized by linear progress: it was slow and haphazard, and things sometimes went from bad to worse" (p. 77). By the end of America's Civil War in 1863, the group of students most disenfranchised throughout the early development and implementation of Virginia's public education system would be Black children.

In the chaos that ensued across the South at the end of the Civil War, one area of life in particular offered potential to newly freed Blacks – education. Reconstruction in Virginia would provide ex-slave the opportunity to do much more to establish a tradition of educational self-help. Ex-slaves were "first among native southerners to wage a campaign for universal public education" (Anderson, 1988, p. 18). They would play a central role in etching the idea of universal public education into southern state constitutional law, producing the Underwood Constitution of 1869, nicknamed the "Carpetbaggers Constitution" which established a system of free public schools (Tarter, 2007). Du Bois (1898) would later write that "the first great mass movement for public education at the expense of the state, in the South, came from Negroes" (p. 22).

In the beginning ex-slaves made considerable attempts to create an educational system that would support and extend their emancipation (Anderson 1988). However, in many rural and urban areas they were encouraged and pushed into a system of industrial education that only reinforced their economic subordination. Hoffschwelle (1998) cites that school reform campaigns generally stayed within the South's racialized boundaries.

She continues that:

The General Education Board, Anna T Jeanes Foundation, and John F. Slater Fund subsidized state personnel and educational facilities for blacks within the confines of an industrial curriculum, reflecting their assumptions that African American males were suited only for the field or factory and that black females were suited largely for work in the field or as domestic servants (p. 61).

The economic and social forces that were aligned against universal education for Black children in the Reconstruction Era still existed at the dawn of the twentieth century.

There were also northern industrialists who would align themselves with ex-slaves and some Black southern educators (most notably Booker T. Washington) as Reconstruction ended and the twentieth century approached. Anderson (1988) argues that ex-slaves “would benefit greatly from the support of northern whites, but they were determined to achieve educational self-sufficiency in the long run without the aid of northerners” (p. 15). These industrialists, however, eventually distorted the education ambitions of ex-slaves, and constructed what Butchart (2011) labeled a system of “unequal education almost exclusively legislative and political” (p. 154). Anderson (1988) asserts that because Blacks lacked economic and political power, Whites were able to control the organization and content of Black elementary and if available, any secondary education. Despite these interferences, African American ex-slaves persisted in their struggle to nurture and develop an education system that coincided with their desires and requirements.

Ex-slaves did much more than establish a traditional self-help mantra. They were among the first native southerners to wage a tireless campaign for universal public education. Beginning in the mid-1860s with the assistance of the Freedman’s Bureau and

northern benevolent societies, they worked tirelessly to create the school system that was virtually complete in its institutional form by 1870 (Anderson, 1988).

When public schools opened in July 1865, Freedman's Bureau Agent Captain D. James Connolly wrote, "parents in Farmville evince a disposition to have all their children educated and labor hard to that end" (Bonastia, 2012, p. 145) There was a palpable appreciation for education as both young and old flocked to the newly opened schools impatient to achieve the education forbidden under slavery. Bullock (1970) writes that "reports from PEC (Prince Edward County) in 1871, for instance, announced that every colored school was crowded and growing in enrollments all the time" (p. 57). "Historical data presented on Prince Edward County... notes that schooling for blacks was considered 'progressive' compared to neighboring counties" (Pitre 2009, 76). Contrary to the optimism and enthusiasm expressed by ex-slaves at the possibilities of education, Butchart (2011) paints a stark picture in describing the eventual psychological impact of the looming education disenfranchisement writing:

It was not only, nor even primarily, an attack on educational opportunity. It was rather an assault on a dream, a dream of black independence and freedom through literacy and knowledge. The assault began as freed people began to act on the dream (154).

Anderson maintains that across the South:

Starting in the backs of churches, farm lands, and other locations, Black communities answered the call for education by building small school houses. Many of these school houses were poorly kept, damp and moldy structures. Children would walk miles on unpaved roads to these schools in order to gain a fair education like their white brothers and sisters. Black communities, being neglected by state governments, got tired of their tax dollars being removed from the community into the white schools in which their children were not allowed. To solve this problem, they began to challenge the state government (p. 237).

In story after story, Anderson in *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*, recounts how elderly ex-slaves would come to community meetings and literally give their “last copper penny” so that their grandchildren would have a better chance at a future. The stories told emphasized over and over how southern Blacks attempted to take charge in achieving their goals of education for their children. Butchart (2011) reinforces this writing that:

from slavery through Reconstruction and into Redemption African Americans fought tenaciously for literacy. Even before formal emancipation, and at an accelerated pace thereafter, the freed people built schools, recruited teachers from among the literate in the own communities, welcomed anyone else willing to teach them, and filled the schools to overflowing (p. 153).

Despite white resistance, violence, and terror Blacks were spurred to use their own money, skill, and care to bring about the education changes they needed for their children and grandchildren.

Public education may have been a novelty in most southern rural areas at the end of the nineteenth and early years of the twentieth centuries but, many rural Black Virginians were excited to have free education. In establishing their own schools not subject to White interference Black children would have a feeling of comfort and would learn in an atmosphere free of racial epithets. However, they were in almost all circumstances still at the mercy of the White-controlled state government for funding. The not so hidden agenda among many Whites was their desire not to have Blacks educated, they feared any challenge to White supremacy. Black schools consistently received far less financial support than White schools, had fewer books, worse buildings, and less well paid teachers. Dilapidated, segregated schools marked Black Virginians

with a stigma of inferiority and their status of second-class citizenship they would endure throughout most of their lives.

The discussion of education in the South at the end of Reconstruction and into the early years of the twentieth century must include the northern benefactors who assisted African Americans with financial support. Different benefactors established funding sources that would be used for a myriad of educational purposes. One of the first was the John F. Slater Fund established in 1882. The Slater Fund donated money for public country training schools for Blacks across the South. The General Education Board consisted of a \$1 million endowment from John D. Rockefeller and was used for school building maintenance and construction. The Jeanes Foundation, also known as The Negro Rural School Fund, Inc., would donate money to African-American schools, but focused primarily on training Black teachers. One of the most well-known of the northern philanthropist was Julius Rosenwald, the son of a German-Jewish immigrant who sympathized with the Black struggle for educational equality (Anderson, 1988). Rosenwald stated reason for his support was a belief that “the horrors that are due to race prejudice come home to the Jew more forcefully than to others of the white race, on account of the centuries of persecution which they have suffered and still suffer” (Ascoli 2006, 121).

The Rosenwald Fund would provide state-of-the-art architectural plans for its school buildings. It hired two black architecture professors from Tuskegee, Robert R. Taylor and W.A. Hazel, who drew the original set of plans for a 1915 pamphlet “The Negro Rural School and Its Relation to the Community.” From 1910 to the early 1930s the Rosenwald Fund was responsible for building more than 5300 school buildings (in

Southside, Virginia, where Farmville is located there were 381 Rosenwald schools). These schools, which represented the social centers of their African American communities, also helped to set standards for white schools (Anderson, 1988; Anderson & Moss, 1999; Hoffschwelle, 2006).

Despite their decades long involvement with rural schools Anderson (1988) maintains that the Rosenwald Fund:

never gave even one-half of the cost of a schoolhouse, and it generally contributed an average of about one-sixth of the total monetary cost of the building, grounds, and equipment. Most of the cash, either through private contributions or public funds, came from rural black citizens. Their additional contributions in the form of land, labor and building materials were also substantial (p. 154).

The desire for an education was a powerful force among Blacks in the South (Anderson, 1988; Wilkerson, 1960). This was especially true for women, who according to Williams (2005), after Emancipation designed and used all manner of strategies to acquire an education for themselves and their children. Across the southern landscapes the quest for educational parity would ultimately carry different symbols, meanings, and implications for Blacks and Whites (Sniderman & Piazza, 2002). In Farmville for African Americans many of these symbols translated into living with the burden of inferiority exhibited in the allocation of education resources, funding, facilities and facing a system designed for inequality (Craig, 2009). For Whites it meant that Blacks should be satisfied with the status quo, continue to rely on a system determined to keep schools and public venues separate, and most importantly they should continue to be *patient*. However, as the twentieth century approached, many Black women in Farmville were moving toward a more collectivist pattern of civic engagement as they continued to encounter obstacles in the search for education equality.

In Farmville's Black community there were two fundamental institutions – the church and the school. Miles-Turner (2001) argues that Blacks in Prince Edward County would develop a reputation for gaining improvements to their educational institutions through their own efforts. They understood their “inherent right to equality long before the dominant society acknowledged it, and believing education to be a critical means to attaining true freedom, black citizens labored in a multiplicity of ways to improve the educational conditions in their community” (p. 20). With this understanding it is crucial to point out how Weber (2001) essentializes the important role education plays in the lives of Americans, particularly African Americans:

1. Education is the first major social institution that most people encounter fully outside the family.
2. Education is the formal institution whose central purpose is to promote dominant culture beliefs about how and why society is the way it is, including the rationale for our systems of race, class, gender, and sexuality.
3. Education perpetuates the American Dream ideology-the belief that hard work and talent are rewarded and that anyone can succeed...
4. Education has been a central site of conflict over the gap between its egalitarian mission and its unequal structure, process, and outcomes (p. 9).

Given their understanding of the functions of education, Black women in Farmville would approach this institution with a foundation that began in their childhood. Shaw (1996) argues that Black “parents emphasized that if girls maintained a posture of respectability, acquired appropriate training, and developed the ability to manage public and private roles effectively, they could achieve both enviable private lives and laudable

public careers” (p. 38). While there was a general emphasis in southern hegemony that presented Black females as voiceless, this community of women shared a historic, and public and private vision of the importance of education as a means to success.

### **Womanist Identity and African American Women:**

Womanism is a social change perspective rooted in Black women’s...everyday experiences and everyday methods of problem solving in everyday spaces, extended to the problems of ending all forms of oppression for all people, restoring balance between people and the environment/nature, and reconciling human life with spiritual dimension...Womanism does not emphasize or privilege gender or sexism, rather, it elevates all sites and forms of oppression, whether they are based on the social-it addresses and raises categories like gender, race, or class to a level of equal concern and action (Philips, 2006, p. xx).

For decades, African American female scholars have argued in the literature that emphasis on only one identity (e. g. race or gender) is inadequate to describe the experiences of women of color and other marginalized groups (Salazar & Abrams, 2005). Collins (1990) points out Black women have often struggled to speak truth about who they are and “have worked hard to form positive self-definitions in the face of denigrating images of Black womanhood in the dominant culture” (83). Understanding these groups must include awareness of the multiple and overlapping identities that inhabit the lives of women of color.

Identity in the American psychological, social, and political psyche is shrouded in ambivalence. When the identity has color, history, and gender attached it becomes more complicated and its consequences more profound. In small town America identity is knitted into a romantic ideal and coalesces around the myths of kinship, fraternity, and virtue (Fein, 1971). In the imaginings of America the small town has been presented as

the center of authentic living with a sense of democracy and simplicity, and it stands as a distinctive place type with a universal experience (Robertson, 1980). This notion of authenticity is particularly relevant to this dissertation because it presents individuals who are “in touch” with their basic principles and clearly and accurately see themselves and their lives as significant.

In Farmville, as in many small, rural southern communities, identity rests on three pillars: idealized friendliness; highly personalized communities; and extended families (Jakle, 1994). However, for African Americans there could be no attachment to these essential sentimental underpinnings of southern society. The family, as it evolved in slavery, would adopt alternative methodologies that defined family, community identities, and attachments. The notions of extended family and kinship would be used in the broadest of terms. The lines between household, community, and family identity “were permeable and open, encompassing not only relationships by birth and marriage but also various fictive kin (those individuals that are unrelated by either birth or marriage) who became honorary “aunts” and “uncles,” “brothers” and “sisters” (Berlin & Rowland, 1997, p. 225). As the educational crises in Farmville deepened the concepts of extended family and kinship would be redrawn, and in the process create additional spaces for women to exercise a consistent pattern of resilience in organizing their relationships.

As African American women began to redefine their personal and community identities it was against a backdrop of hegemonic mythology. Knowlton (2011) maintains that the “mythos of the Rockwellian conception of small town America is merely a shadow of reality” (p. 4). Conformity to this reality, Bonastia (2012) notes, meant that

“Prince Edward whites, like most Whites throughout Virginia, took great pride in their “civilized” brand of resistance... (p. 210). Complicity in the southern lie included being wedded to the folklore that through shared histories, communities of memory, and perceptions of harmony good things come to life in small, rural community identities (Bellah, 1986).

Overlooked in the discussion of these community identities is the realization that these identities do not originate inside the self alone. However, buried deep within small town institutions are myths that are promoted through shared history and memories they are paternal, discriminatory, exclusionary, gendered, racially, and socially biased. Orvell (2012) opines about the ways in which Americans in the mid-twentieth century came to cherish small town life were antithetical to the everyday reality of those who were “othered.” Othering was a particularly destructive component in assembling the collective and individual identities of the rural African American women in Farmville.

Boylorn critiques “othering” in her description of the complex lives of rural African American women:

Many of them were unable to pursue and/or were disinterested in formal education but they learned what they needed to know from life lessons and experience. Some of them were deeply religious, finding a husband if only to have a head of household. Others, religious but rebellious, lived their lives on their own terms, redefining what it meant to be strong, black, rural women. These women merged together creating a community with a community-psuedo kin and “other mothers” who emerged as heroines and healers... (p. 19)

In reimagining small town community identities, it becomes critical to represent those not included in the romance and mythology because of race, ethnicity, or gender. Mullings (1996) tackles the issue of southern gender roles noting, that they were dominated by a “Euro American model which...historically emphasized male dominance

and female dependency. This model was supported by education, law, religion and other major institutions of society” (p. 129). In examining the lives of Black women in their community and how they fused identity with activism and a nascent concept of womanism, Scott (1991) presents an intimate portrait of women who were “politically conscious mature black women whose stories not only illustrate how they have survived “out in the real world but who also reveal their interior worlds” (p. 7). Hine (2007) also repositions Black women and their identities against American social psychology. She argues through identity reconstruction Black women were able to “fight for survival, racial uplift, social justice, equality of opportunity and full citizenship” (4). Scott positions herself in the center of the scholarly discussion as a radical feminist, forming her own identity by imitating her foremothers, grand and great grandmothers. She maintains that the experiences of Black women in America have created spaces for these women to historically develop identities in direct opposition to white women and develop a “proliferation of female networks, at once harnessing social class similarities and yet bridging potential disruptive status differences” (Hine, 2007, 2).

In defining their own experiences African American women used religion, bolstered by history and tradition, to exercise agency across their public and private lives. Using what can be described as a precursor to the womanist theologic model<sup>7</sup> (developed by scholars in the 1980s), the women in Farmville operated from a religious tradition that interrogated the social construction of their oppressions, their values and their struggles.

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<sup>7</sup> Thomas writes that “Womanist theology is the positive affirmation of the gifts which God has given black women in the U.S.A. It is, within theological discourse, an emergent voice which advocates a holistic God-talk for all the oppressed. Though centered in the African American woman's reality and story, it also embraces and stands in solidarity with all suppressed subjects. In a word, womanist theology is a theory and practice of inclusivity, accenting gender, race, class, sexual orientation, and ecology. Because of its inclusive methodology and conceptual framework, womanist theology exemplifies reconstructed knowledge (p. 5).

Sanders, Gilkes-Townsend, Cannon, Copeland, and hooks (1989) designed a womanist three pronged interpretive model that is applicable to the women in Farmville who: a) embodied Black women's historical struggles and strengths; b) critiqued the various manifestations of Black women's oppressions; and c) constructed their own ideological and ethical claims. The model assumes a "liberating perspective so that African American women can live emboldened lives within the African American community and within the larger society" (Thomas, 1998, p. 4). This model according to Sanders (1989) also "impels scholars who embrace it to be outrageous, audacious, and courageous enough to move beyond celebration and critique to undertake a difficult task of practical constructive work toward the end of black women's liberation and wholeness" (p. 84-85).

Because Black women have for generations been forced to work outside the home so that their families could live and develop socially, economically, and educationally it was necessary to create an autonomous identity. Scott (1991) argues that Black women have operated outside traditional middle-class white norms "thus transcending and "recoloring" their blackness – changing a "negative" into a "positive" (p. 3). She is particularly adept at making the connections between and across Black women's socialization, social activism, and identity formation. She articulates that through a synthesis of ideas she was able to develop a deeper understanding of the choices Black women make as they determine who they are and their individual methods of developing their identity as they survive. In analyzing the women she interviewed, her conclusions could have been written about the women in Farmville who,

fit well into a larger historical pattern of how the eloquence of their own lives served to reflect those of their grandmother and sisters; and how

they, like other black women of achievement throughout American History, often blended paid and unpaid work in the fields of education, politics and literature (p. 146).

In neglecting the thousands of ordinary Black women in the South who worked tirelessly in the creation and cultivation of social, cultural, educational, and religious community identities, it was customary to ignore their contributions and successes. As a result, Black women were perceived as incompetent regardless of evidence to the contrary (Rosenbaum and Travis, 2008). Hall (1990) takes issue with this locating of Black women outside the discussion of community identity. She argues that African American women were skilled at building on their community identities to marshal resources, craft alliances, and to create a collective consciousness that was central to small town identity. A necessary part in reconstructing the imaginings of small town America is also the acknowledgement that there are memories of events that are individual, personal, and community memories. In this study when viewed through the lens of Farmville's Black women the individual recollections have different shapes when viewed through the lens of Blackness.

The school closings created a painful and powerful break in the social and emotional character of Black community identity. The disruption in the familial, the social, the familiar, and the academic memories of this community were changed through both the public and private perceptions of the event.

The chaos created in Farmville to the collective, national, and individual memory was at the height of the Jim Crow system. In 1950s Virginia, Blacks lived within an imposed separate, yet not totally inferior society, a society skilled at separation while simultaneously portraying Blacks as people incapable of affecting change. Consequently,

it produced justifying myths that were selectively and capriciously written into its past and onto its institutions. These institutional myths were particularly important when they concerned education. Bell (1997) comments on the importance of education in the Black community writing that, “education was one of the instruments for bringing about a new social order” (xxiii). In Farmville the institutional mythologies were painfully written across in the educational memories of the Black population. For the women in Farmville, because education was inextricably linked to community identity, to economic success, and ultimately to equality, their commitment to the success of their involvement in the struggle for education parity was paramount. It can be effectively argued that this wrap around view of the validity of education stems from how Black women traditionally understood the need to tailor, adapt, and incorporate past, albeit moderate, successes to their unique historic period.

Among the many women in Farmville there are personal stories of self/collective transformation in the “white heat” of the struggle for education, social, economic, and political change. “Each woman proved a long-distance runner and embraced a range of strategies. Each woman traversed a host of...innovative coalition building and each woman articulated an intersectional analysis that made connections between multiple movements for social justice” (Gore, Theoharis & Woodward, 2009, p. 4). As the women in Farmville banded together they began to realize that the outcomes in the struggle for educational equality would determine not only the outcomes in their children’s economic, social, and legal identities, it would also define theirs.

This group of women also valued the efficacy of their small actions. This was especially true of rural women who were not necessarily dependent on the White

community for economic support. Jade recalls how her mother and others on surrounding farms signed petitions without fear of reprisals, collected books, sponsored raffles and fish fries to raise funds for education. Education was the symbol that represented escape from all that made life difficult and attainment of all that was possible and had been withheld by the White PECSB. Education was viewed as the gateway to equal opportunity, the threshold of a new and better life (Franklin, 1963). Another key part of the process in establishing community identity among African American women was the importance of “voice.” In breaking the cycles of oppression Hill-Collins (1998) maintains that, while limiting, the metaphor “coming to voice” is a powerful tool in political activism. Because education was to give children a sense of values, a sense of ideals, and a way of living (Blassingame, 1982), the voices of Black women became a symbol that life could be very different for the children of Farmville. The melding of race, class, and gender in the lives of African American women not only sensitized them to the politics of being Black and female, it made them acutely aware of the responsibilities in their communities social, emotional and educational lives.

The past fifteen years has produced a series of reexaminations of the everyday lives, of what scholars have determined are ordinary, yet astonishing Black women (Radford-Hill, 2000; Ross, 2003; Shaw, 1996; St. Jean & Fegin, 1999; Tillerson, 2006). Hine (2007) adds that there is “sufficient scholarship that exists today that expands our understanding of the roles these and other Black women played in transforming American social realities” (p. 2). This renovation has extended both the academic dialogue and research priorities of a new generation of scholars. The contributions of the

women of Farmville and other rural Black women should be included in these expanding concepts of how resilience develops.

### **Education and African American Women**

The struggle in Prince Edward County over its segregated schools can be viewed almost in biblical terms of *David vs. Goliath*. In a small, rural, southern town, in a border State, in a movement that lacked the essential ingredients of the standard civil rights story, including the lack of widespread media coverage; protests without face-to-face confrontations in the streets, spiked with gruesome violence, which according to Bonastia (2012) “helps to explain the lack of media and scholarly attention” (p. 12), a group of women unaccustomed to a public fight would take on David in the form of the all-White PEC School Board. Bonastia writes that the demands for education equality were met with an extremist legal response couched in “civilized mostly nonracial rhetoric; and stretched from the late 1940s into the 1970s” (p. 10).

Some scholars have paid only cursory attention to the educational importance of the school closing in Farmville to the overall Civil Rights Movement. Taylor Branch (1988) in *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-1963* ignores the event while profiling Reverend Johns. Sociological studies of the Civil Rights Movement by Morris (1984) and McAdams (1996) pay only cursory attention, while Richard Kluger (1976) in *Simple Justice* includes only the essential background information. None of these works includes the women of Farmville. There has been however, a tacit admission that the response by the White community was a confirmation of the dominant racial narrative. Scholarly attention has been focused on the singular nature of racial cruelty in the South, the belief that Whites were so blinded by racial hatred that they would deny

Black children an education for five years. This was fed by the notion that Whites in the “black belt” had the deepest and most immediate concern about the maintenance of white supremacy” (Key, 1984, p. 5). Only recently has the research begun to unpack, in depth, Black women’s reactions in response to the school closing. This dissertation adds another voice to this underrepresented education phenomena.

Second only to the Church in institutional importance in many southern, rural African American communities were the schools. As African American women in Farmville began to come to grips with the overarching psychological, social, and economic impacts the school closings had in the lives of their children, they knew that *their* educational aspirational identity had been solidified in the psyche of southern Whites. Education, social, and economic policies from the beginning to mid-twentieth century, according to Dill (1988) were in part formulated around historical and sociological analysis of Black family life in a period when psychological and biological theories of racial inferiority abounded. At the end of World War II as African Americans and other people of color began to experience upward mobility through education. However, they were frequently confronted by the entrenched structural and psychological barriers erected to prevent their social relocation.

The belief in the power and possibility of education has deep roots in the historic, communal, and religious consciousness of African American women. Bettye Collier-Thomas (1982) asserts that education has persisted as one of the most consistent themes in the life, thought, struggle, and protest of Black Americans. This long established and respected importance for education was held in Black communities across the United States, and was a value that directly connected to the lives of Farmville’s Black women.

The education of Farmville's daughters was of particular importance. Shaw (1994)

writes that for girls:

the education process went beyond simple schooling—it imparted an orientation toward achievement. Family members supplemented formal schooling by encouraging... daughters to believe that regardless of the limitations others might impose on them because of their race, class, or sex, none of those conditions necessarily determined their activities, and neither should race, class, or sex, inhibit their aspirations (p. 1).

Many of these women were members of a generation of African Americans who knew, understood, appreciated, and believed in the historic value their community placed on the acquisition of education. Education was the pathway to freedom, mobility, and opportunity.

Litwack (1998) speaks to the efforts of southern Black parents during Jim Crow who in order “to afford their children an opportunity for schooling or to improve on the schools they now attended...were often willing to make significant sacrifices” (p. 32). Anderson (1988) expands the importance of education arguing that during the harshest years of Jim Crow, the Black community sacrificed time and money to build and sustain their own schools, staffed by teachers who believed in their sense of mission to advance the race.

By 1959, the Black community once again found itself continuously and unrelentingly betrayed by the legal and education systems that defined the configurations of the institutions that dictated and impulsively legitimized their modes of behaviors. To accelerate education parity in Farmville, Black women would step forward and engage those gendered and racially charged environments that had a long established stranglehold on the life systems of Black American children's education.

In the interest of their children's education, Black women were confronted with competing and shifting priorities. However, if we engage several of the most important components utilized by the women of Farmville a more complex picture comes into focus around the issues of their responses to the school closings and how those responses would become normalized when education was at stake.

In their communities Black women are respected for being direct, appreciated for their intellect, admired for their display of strong community and racial consciousnesses, honored for their self-confidence, and are frequently cast as role models for young people. In their communities they were undisputable. The Black community understood that:

the reality was that Black women worked the fields, nursed the children, prepared the meals and tended to housekeeping chores. It is well known that Black women have most often been the backbone of the churches and civic organizations in the Black community, they did the work that make Black institutions and organizations viable and effective (Daniels 2000, p. 2)

The qualities the Black women of Farmville would bring to the education arena: resilience, tenacity, honesty, supportability would represent the multifocused approach to conflicts Black women would adopt across the United States. One of the most important adaptations in Black women's lives has been their resiliency. Resilience according to O'Conner (2002) is an "individually determined phenomenon as it seemingly rests on inherent traits, natural abilities, or personal character and temperament" (p. 856). Each of these characteristics was on display either individually or collectively as women became bound to the goal of education equality. There were women who became leaders through their natural abilities; others became organizers through their inherent traits; while others used their gifts of temperament to negotiate dissention or disaffection.

Another characteristic exhibited by these women was their willingness to take educational risks, risks “that increase the probability of...failure...as a consequence of the imposition of structural constraints” (O’Conner, 2002, p. 857). Despite limitations there were opportunities and “the availability of specific institutional material, or human resources” (p. 858) that could be employed in the negotiation of constraints. Opportunity is registered through the availability of institutional and non-institutional resources” (O’Conner, 2002, p. 858). Many of the women of Farmville were provided access to outside resources. These opportunities presented themselves through the AFSC whose host families sponsored children in private schools in Iowa and New Jersey and public schools from Kentucky to Michigan to Ohio and Pennsylvania. It also provided Helen Baker, wife of Farmville’s Black dentist the opportunity to begin a Leadership Institute for the town’s Black women, arrange trips to Washington and Williamsburg, and recruit students from Black colleges to organize recreational and educational activities for local youth (Bonastia, 2012). As the education crises deepened, Black women would harmonize their resilience, calculate their risk, and capture all available opportunity to move beyond public objectification toward empowerment for their children. These characteristics were on display individually and collectively as women became bound to the goal of education equality.

Any scholarly understanding of the growth and development of resiliency patterns, how the closings shaped responses to address the educational crises, and how the epistemological frameworks of those interviewed were contextualized must also include an examination of the growing significance the Black women in Farmville placed not only on education, but on community aspirations. Education in the lives of Black

women had a community component which aligned with larger Black communities aspirations for girls. Carlson (1992) writes that:

in the larger society, girls and women were urged to become educated so that they could become good wives and good mothers, especially to their sons. To this, the black community added the expectation that the female sex become educated for the same purpose as were males—that is, for self-improvement, as well as community and racial “up lift” (p. 63).

Extraordinary attempts were made to incessantly and pervasively control the economic, political, and educational lives of the Negroes in Farmville. Morris (1984) refers to this as a “tripartite system of domination” (p. 1). Hill-Collins (2000) in describing the same system uses a term coined by legal scholar Kimberlè Crenshaw (1989) “intersectionality.” This concept is an approach within feminist theory that prioritizes the examination of the complex ways in which interlocking forms of oppression shape people’s life chances and identities. Hill-Collins sounds an alarm for the academic community, however, writing “that our lack of clarity in understanding the role of the school as context....” (p. 19) has often restricted scholarly investigation.

The importance of education is an essential component in the cognitive belief system of African Americans. Bernstein (1996) argues that a school metaphorically holds up a mirror in which an image is reproduced. He continues that, “a school’s ideology may be seen as a construction in a mirror though which images are reflected” (p. 7). The mirror that was held up to the Black children of Farmville was calculated to reflect their educational inferiority. Bonastia (2012) writes:

Prince Edward’s leadership in resisting school segregation was not merely organizational-forming the white academy, attempting to use public monies to fund its operations-but rhetorical as well. J. Barrye Wall spilled rivers of ink at the *Farmville Herald* espousing the view that the county had closed public schools, and would keep them closed, in defense of sound constitutional principles (p. 161).

The educational, social, and psychological limitations that engulfed the lives of the town's Black children galvanized a community of Black women to work across the ideological lines of social class, appearance, skin color, economics, age, religion, and community affiliations – issues that on occasion have tended to divide Black women (Hall, 1990).

Education as a basic principle in the lives of Black women is seen through a cross-disciplinary analysis of three authors. First, an examination by Lynn Weber (2001), of *Understanding Race, Class, and Gender and Sexuality*. A conceptual framework is presented for the inquiry into the interlocking systems of race, class, and gender. Like Harvell (2006) and Hill-Collins (1998), Weber historicizes the nature of the socially constructed issues that affect women's lives in their communities. She notes "that real life experiences have never fit neatly into the boundaries created by academic disciplines. Lives are much more complex and far reaching" (p. 13). She introduces six themes: 1) context; 2) social construction; 3) systems of power relationships; 4) social structural (macro), social psychological (micro); 5) simultaneously expressed; 6) interdependence of knowledge and activism (25). These categories provide a background for study when looking at the lives of the women in Farmville. Weber (2001) illuminates this dissertation in connecting gender, power, ideology, politics, and economic principles with institutions and how the social relations of control organize systems of oppression at the macro level of community, and micro level of the individual.

As the Black community again found treachery in the legal systems used by White Virginians, African American women would be "encouraged" into action. They would bond with one another and form education communities with women who were

not only family, but neighbors, women they knew intimately, casually, and of course those all-important “kinfolk.” Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham (1992) presents a snippet of the history of women who have a common cause. In a study of Black Baptist women in the late nineteenth century she discovered that in the early days of Reconstruction freedwomen’s intense desire for education received support from Northern white female missionaries. Together these women formulated a doctrine, not unlike that of W.E.B. Du Bois’s “talented tenth,”<sup>8</sup> thereby creating Black and White advocates for education.

Clark (1984) argues that the first level in controlling social aspirations and social transformations is establishing moral values, and then establishing the ‘proper’ form. It is at this level that the “moral conceptions of social life” (in this instance the social possibilities of education) are given formal expression through...mandates” (p. 196). It would ultimately become clear to the Black women in Farmville that education equity would exact a high price as they reshaped the mandates for the education of their children, both inside and outside of their community.

Shirley J. Carlson’s (1992) *Black Ideals of Womanhood in the Late Victoria Era* is important in the area of education and the Black woman. Carlson established a schema for the duality of Black womanhood. Beginning with the observation by W.E.B. Dubois that Black Americans have developed ‘twoness’<sup>9</sup> as American and Negro” (p. 17), and with Carlson adding Black women to the examination DuBois’s twoness expands into a

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<sup>8</sup> Du Bois (1903) maintained that the Negro race, like all races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men. He argued that the problem of education among Negroes was that they must first of all deal with the Talented Tenth, meaning that they identify and develop the best of this race to become teachers that they may guide the masses away from the contamination and death of the worst.

<sup>9</sup> In the *Souls of Black Folks*, DuBois uses the terms “double consciousness,” “double ideals,” “double life,” and according to Allen (1992) the use of these descriptives contrary to what is generally believed “does not contradict the assimilationist/nationalist paradigm through which we have become accustomed to interpreting them” (2).

concept that can be described as ‘threeness.’ Carlson’s (1992) study is regional (the focus is Illinois), however, there are generalizable principles applicable to many African American women. In providing historic context for the development of Black women in the domestic sphere, Carlson outlines the additional qualities Black women needed that were essential to Black community survival.

As in the womanist model, Carlson (1992) presents the Black woman as “self-confident and outspoken, she was highly esteemed by her community which frequently applauded her as a ‘race woman’ and role model for young people” (p. 62). In this community of women there was also a palpable desire for education. However, rather than focus on “education with emphasis on the domestic sphere and social graces, girls and women were urged to pursue an education which would develop their economic independence” (p. 64). Carlson’s (1992) assessment of this shift away from the domestic sphere is how her work informs this dissertation. This shift is key in investigating the importance of education in marginalized communities.

Finally, Stephanie Shaw’s (1996) *What a Woman Ought To Be and To Do*, examines the importance of formal education in the lives of African American females and the roles played by the community and the family. The Jim Crow South had assigned identities for women of color-domestics or agricultural workers. Education would create barriers that would make them less vulnerable to exposure to either sexual or economic exploitation. Formal education, and the people who made it possible, create “highways” (Shaw, 1996, p. 1) around the paths of these exploitations. Several characteristics were critical in the development of the female student. Self-confidence, poise, and good character were a few of the qualifications necessary to insure that education was primary

in the lives of African American women. Shaw (1996) argues that “a person of character possessed the kind of self-confidence that enabled her to trust her own judgment and not be diverted from personal goals by interests contrary to her own” (p. 15).

These women, whether or not they were educated, were “participants in family groups, class groups, gender groups, and other while simultaneously operating within larger social, political, and economic groups” (Shaw, 1996, p. 5). With education as a torch, African American women would work across these groups, both publically and privately, singly and in groups to augment the skills they were developing and widen their roles.

The authors discussed present a multifaceted view of the important relationships between the connective tissues of education, community, family, and the interlocking systems of race, class and gender oppressions. Hall (1990) contends that despite, “their socially ascribed statuses” (p. 77) African American women have generationally been sensitive to the politics of being. Their history of racial and gender consciousness made it incumbent upon them to create the spaces required to remain linked to both self, family, and community. As a result, they were capable of cultivating the emotional atmosphere necessary to cross historically divisive lines. The Black women in Farmville would become empowered to construct models of connectivity across multiple spheres. The patterns that developed from a single struggle were an outgrowth of other areas of their community lives (Kotter, 1990). What further binds these works is the understanding that Black women have a commitment to their shared multiple roles and identities. Many of these identities were developed and cultivated during slavery when community, family, and individual survival depended on mediating across masters, mistresses, and multiple

indignities. Building strong alliances constituted one of the cornerstones in the lives of Black women, and this ability would encourage and sustain the education struggles in Farmville. Women would adapt and reshape the face of Farmville education. Resiliency patterns would emerge and exhibit themselves in the lives of these Black women through their commitment, relationships, flexibility, and religion and would inspire them to take action as they engaged the education system. It is the *how* that has remained unexamined.

### **Community and African American Women**

Living Black in White America involves acquiring a set of valuable skills that enables one to survive in hostile environments. Principal among these skills is the need to provide assistance to other community members, and the will to individually and collectively resist oppression. These skills are delivered to children by those who are closest - parents, grandparents, extended family, the church, and the school community. Within the Black community there are also others who provide additional strength and support for community values-“other mothers” (Hill-Collins, 2000) and those everyday people who teach values and skills. This is particularly true of Black school teachers who are community role models. In examining the relationship between African American women and their rural, southern community and the essential nature of resilience in those communities’ three works are particularly important. First, Allan Pred (1984) *Place as Historically Contingent Process: Structuration and the Time Geography of Becoming Places*. This work maintains that place represents a human product and contributes to history in a specific context through the creation and utilization of a physical setting. Pred (1984) uses place as central in addressing the issues of education, identity,

community, power, and gender within the contextual framework of the existing institutions. Because place is conceptualized partly in terms of the unbroken flow of events within a particular time frame, its periodization becomes a static time capsule and the issues that surround the emergence of resilience can be examined retrospectively.

Pred's (1984) work informs this study through his examination of place as comprised of "those generative rules and power relations – including the control over material, symbolic, authoritative and instruction resources that are already built into a specific historical...situation or into a historically specific...system" (p. 281). He outlines specific characteristics in the making of space as historically significant. He maintains that:

1. Place is not only what is observed on the landscape, locale or in a setting for an activity or social interaction, it contributes to history in a specific context through the creation of a physical setting.
2. Place allows for the formation of biographies as a reflection of structuration processes.
3. Place is not something that stands on its own, but as a phenomenon that is part of individual consciousness, inseparable from biography formation.

He further contends that:

- a) Power and power relations are embedded in our institutions and involve individuals or groups.
- b) Biographies are formed through place-specific social reproduction which can transform the physical environment.

- c) Continuity of processes is at the level of individual biography where language is acquired, personality is developed, where ideology evolves, and consciousness develops (P. 286-288).

In Farmville, the manners in which these phenomena are interwoven in becoming place vary with historical circumstances. In Farmville in resisting the symbolism of inferiority, as exhibited by the physical presence of the “tar paper shacks;” in claiming authority to revise place biographies; and in developing political consciousness through community activism, Black women would contribute to the historic rewriting of this specific place as they developed resilience to combat educational racism.

In situating the lives of Farmville’s Black community, Pred (1984) reinforces Bourdieu (1977) in asserting that all social activities take the form of concrete interactions in time-space. Bourdieu gives us the concept of *habitus* developed as a “sense of one’s place...a sense of the other’s place” (p. 125). *Habitus*, in this instance, relates to perceptions of the positions (places) of ourselves and others in the world we inhabit, and how those perceptions affect our actions and interactions with people and places. *Habitus* also implies that a web of complex processes connects the physical, the social and the mental, and is culturally driven by mechanisms such as education that imposes a dominant perspective on a cowed population in order to legitimize power (Ritzer & Goodman, 2003).

The Black community in this *place* was quite exposed and vulnerable, but not defenseless. “By any objective standard no one would have chosen Prince Edward County as the location for a tough struggle of national importance to desegregation” (Bonestia, 2012, p. 193). The perception that the community could not rally, could not

sustain itself was embedded in the “other’s” community ideology. Farmville mothers, could not-would not accept defeat. While simultaneously caring for their own families they would play key roles at the local level. They provided “nearly all the staffing at the training centers, and by coordinating lodgings and meals for out-of-town guests who taught in crash educational programs” (Bonastia 2012, p. 192). This does not mean however, that there were not parents, families and teachers who were disheartened and frustrated as schools remained closed year after year. In centering place and exploring the notion of *habitus*, as historically contingent, place become fluid allowing fissures to develop that question the master narrative’s positions on the reproduction of social and cultural forms, the reclamation of personal biographies, and the transformation of institutions. What remains underexamined in Farmville is how these activities, which includes protest in a society that positions one and her community on the margins, engages, mobilizes, and effects change.

Second, Susan Stall and Randy Stoecker’s (1998) *Community Organizing or Organizing Community* analyzes community organizing through the lens of the historic divisions between the public and private spheres. They maintain that “communities just don’t happen. They must be organized, someone has to build strong relationships between people so that they can support each other through long and sometimes dangerous struggles” (p. 730). The community in Farmville understood that in contacting the NAACP to assist in school desegregation their battle could prove to be long and contentious. With the White community desensitized to the Black community’s education concerns, and encouraged by Dabney Lancaster, the former Superintendent of Longwood College, they organized to “fight (integration) from the housetops, from the

street corners, in every possible way” (Bonastia, 2012, p. 63-64). Simultaneously, the Black community organized around Reverend Griffin and aligned themselves with his commitment “I offered my life for a decadent democracy, and I’m willing to die rather than let these children down” (Bonastia, 2012, p. 39). Each community organized to solidify their position.

To clarify how various communities organize, Stall and Stoecker (1998) examine and draw distinctions between two separate models: a) the Alinsky model that analyzes “community organizing” –as the public sphere battles between the haves and the have nots; and b) the woman-centered model that evaluates “community organizing” – as a process that builds on expanding private sphere relationships and empowering individuals through those relationships (p. 733).

The authors maintain that the very term “community organizing” is inextricably linked to the late Saul Alinsky (1909-1972) who understood the craft of building enduring networks of people who identified with common ideals and who would engage in social action based on those commonalities. Alinsky would organized communities as diverse as local neighborhood groups, ethnic clubs, union locals, and bowling leagues in an effort to expand city services and the political process in 1930s Chicago. He was committed to the idea that where communities already existed individuals must be identified who could move the community to action (Alinsky, 1971). While the Alinsky model is attributed to a single individual, the woman-centered model has roots in the lives of African American women.

While there was a diversity of women who mobilized around different issues, the authors state that they are “most interested in those mobilizations which fit community

organizing definitions of being locally-based. This model can be traced back to African American women's efforts to sustain home and community under slavery" (Stall & Stoecker, p. 738). Rooted in these determinations, the woman-centered model is based on the notions of home and community being forces that maintained life. bell hooks (1990) describes this as a reverence for a "homeplace" and amplifies its historic importance for African American women as a site to recognize and resist domination,

Historically, African American people believed that the construction of a homeplace, however fragile and tenuous (the slave hut, the wooden shack), had a radical political dimension...it was about construction of a safe place where black people could affirm one another and by doing so heal many of the wounds inflicted by racist domination (p. 42).

In examining what they term a "woman centered model," (p. 729) this work focuses on the organizing relationships that build community. Stall and Stoecker note that "behind every successful social movement is a community or network of communities" (p. 729).

In Farmville the impact of African American women on community mobilization is anchored to an examination of power, conflict, politics, and the organizing processes that created the atmosphere for resilience as a process. Stall and Stoecker's (1998) work expands the avenues of inquiry in their examination of the expertise of building a network of people who identify with common ideals and who act on those ideals. Gilkes (2001) adds to this, arguing that for African American women the search for justice was also a struggle for institutional, individual, and community transformation. She maintains that these struggles have "never developed without a simultaneous struggle for group survival" (p. 53). Group survival in Farmville would also be strengthened through the commitments of Black women to their church communities. In these institutions

there was an unspoken understanding that women were “the glue that held the church together” (Gilkes, 2001, p. 102).

The concepts of organizing relationships, identifying issues, mobilizing around issues and the connections established within a community to locally based political action are entrenched alongside the notion that women function across multiple spheres. In analyzing African American women within the realms of existing scholarships, it allows a cross pollination in the research on social movements, Black women, politics, and education with each sphere providing soil for growth in our understanding of resilience and organizing.

In the last two and a half decades the notion of separate and distinct spheres of social, cultural, and economic life with each sphere containing its own properties, codes, and rules of behavior has been subject to rigorous critiques (Davidson, 1998). Much of the critique has been from Black female scholars who note that this marginalization of Black women has disallowed analysis of the intersectionality of African American women’s lives. These women have frequently functioned within constricted modes of access to the public sphere while simultaneously confronting problems that inhibited their ability to gain control over the terms of their privacy (Davidson, 1998). Stall and Stoecker (1998) augment our understanding of the particular importance of Black women’s expansion of the public sphere beyond their private household in the search for equality.

In determining the import of the private sphere, the authors use the cult of domesticity as an explanatory model. Stall and Stoecker (1998) maintain that the mid-nineteenth century attempt to idealize and confine women’s activities to the domestic

sphere (private) was ostensibly designed to create a safe haven from the harshness in the public sphere. They write that because women of color, “historically treated as units of labor” (p. 733) were excluded from the dominant domestic narrative they were not part of the part of the protected private haven. Hill-Collins (1997) argues Black women’s experiences and those of other women of color have never fit (the private-public) model. She explains that there is another analytical approach that challenges the very constructs of the duality of public/private. Davis (1983) used this approach to argue that “Black women were able to circumvent many of the conditions of patriarchal domesticity through their outside work” (p. 237). She extends the discussion of women and work arguing that currently work itself, once a function of the public sphere, has been privatized and relegated to the private sphere.

Davidson (1998) argues that the concept of separate spheres developed from the “cult of domesticity,” “the cult of true womanhood,” and the “female world of love and ritual” (p. 612) which describes the constellation of nineteenth century conditions that resulted from women being separated from the seats of authority. These spheres were conceptualized and legitimized with limited inferences to or discussions of the multiple ethnicities of American women. Davidson continues that the concepts of public and private have and continue to bare the inscription of ongoing struggles “that surround questions of social power” (p. 612) not ethnicity. Adding that mainstream scholarship regarding separate spheres deconstructs the private and public realms outlining how women were afforded the capacities for authority and through female networks that provided social and economic support. Despite the separate sphere model being a social

construct, African American women were nevertheless generally not considered part of the binary logic that defined them.

For these women the public and private spheres were never bifurcated. Shaw (1996) forcefully argues that Black women, despite being products of a sexist and racist society, approached the public sphere fortified and armed with family traditions nurtured in the private sphere. She writes,

They were also women who had learned that their communities deserved as much of their attention as their families. The support they received to go out of their homes and to work for the race made no small difference in their having the ability to perceive these public and private ventures as complementary rather than contradictory (p. 111).

Black women “were prepared and encouraged to resist, wherever possible, the constraints the larger society sought to impose on them” (Shaw, 1996, p. 38). The spherical modus operandi of each world was/is frequently superimposed across their lives. African American women,

hold a unique place at the confluence of the histories of African Americans and of women. From one angle, black women face a variety of constraints in their lives because of private sphere responsibilities bequeathed to them as women. From a second angle, they were consigned grave public responsibilities because of the needs of the race (Shaw 1996, p. 4).

Despite the validity that the separate sphere model was socially constructed outside the lives of Black women, does not negate the essential notion that the public and private spheres bare a social reality. However, in the community that housed Farmville’s African American women when their private lives slammed into the public educational lives of their children, women who were coached to believe that achievement was not only attainable-it was essential would view education as critical and its design should and must be to develop to inspire the success of their children. Black women’s social agency,

their identities, and their competencies were challenged in Farmville as they defied law and custom in order to nurture and sustain themselves, and their children, as ultimately they questioned the dual nature of the southern education system.

Shaw (1996) provides the most cogent presentation of mutability in the lives of African American women, whose lives beginning in childhood, were molded to “achievement in *both* public and private spheres” (p. 29). The women in Farmville shared a cultural tradition that empowered them to encourage their children to succeed. These women had to devise stratagem that permitted them to fulfill family, community, and personal commitments. They began to gradually understand the gravity of their efforts on behalf of their children in confronting racism in the public sphere. They learned that “unless they were carefully prepared for it, prepared not to allow ...confrontation to thwart their development, they might not succeed... and would never become community leaders” (Shaw, 1996, p. 29). In this vein, Stall and Stocker pose an intriguing question, “is it possible that community organizing is neglected for the same reasons that women’s work in social movements has been neglected?” (p. 731).

Each of the aforementioned works presents African American women within the narrow confines of the Black community while exploring the cultural, social, and religious forces that frame their lives. These works are not evaluated to the exclusion of others, they do however, provide a backdrop for the issues of kinship and empowerment within Black women’s community relations.

Part of what is significant in the examination of the Black women in Farmville is that they began to manipulate, redefine, and reconstruct the southern, small town romantic script, step out of their physical and psychological “*community*” and challenge

local, regional, and national educational autonomies that governed the lives of their children.

The reassessment of civil rights history requires a reexamination of the social networks within Black communities, the role of local churches, and the impact of Black women who participated in and organized drives that became indispensable to the movement (Dwyer, 2000). Black women, despite being viewed as powerless, would have a dramatic impact within and beyond their communities as they became critical actors in the Farmville protest movement. This study examines the roles of Black women in one rural, southern community. In the lives of Black women, at the intersections of race, class, and gender distinctive patterns of resilience would emerge during the struggle for education equity.

### **Dubois in Farmville**

William Edward Burghardt (W.E.B.) Du Bois was a twentieth century scholar and activist whose academic and adult life had several goals: 1) to use social science as an expository tool that would illuminate the truth about the “Negro problem”: 2) to gather data over time through an inductive approach to generate scientific knowledge; and 3) to use social science as a tool for reform (Zuckerman, 2004). In this vein, in 1897, one year after the Supreme Court decision in *Plessy v Ferguson*, (1896), when Negroes constituted approximately 12 percent of the population of the United States, W. E. B. Du Bois conducted the very first in a series of investigations of small distinct groups of Negroes for the United States Department of Labor. Prior to this study Du Bois remarked that, “not a single first-grade college in America undertook to give any considerable scientific attention to the American Negro” (p. 204). During July and August of 1897, Du Bois

traveled to Farmville, Virginia, to conduct field work using the methods developed in his Philadelphia research: survey interviews of African Americans; archival studies of various data housed locally; and participant observation. Additionally, he would examine demographic variables like occupations and wages, conjugal conditional of marriages and divorces, the value and amount of property holdings, and family expenditures (Lewis 1993). *The Negroes of Farmville: A Social Study* published in early 1898 according to Lewis (1993) would become the “standard” for the methodological approach as part of the Atlanta University Studies on the Negro” (p. 195).

Du Bois (1898) would use the Negroes in Farmville to describe the conditions of Blacks in small rural communities. In this study he used, for the first time, statistical measurements and sociological interpretations to study a social phenomenon. He discovered that small southern communities frequently acted as clearinghouses, taking “the raw country lad from the farm to train in industrial life and sending north and east more or less well equipped recruits for metropolitan life” (p. 135). DuBois' description of Negro life in Farmville has the structure of future community studies that would be conducted by American anthropologists, his participant-observation methods certainly belong to the mainstream of American ethnographic classics. "The investigator spent the months of July and August in the town; he lived with the colored people, joined in their social life, and visited their homes” (Lange, 1983, p. 142). In contextualizing the *Philadelphia Negro* (published in 1899, one year after his Farmville study), Du Bois brought into perspective his discussion of southern migrants who resided in Philadelphia. Both studies strengthened his notions on the emergence of Black social, religious, and community organizations, the growth of the Black middle class, and the widening social

class gaps within the African American community associated with industrialization and urbanization (Du Bois, 1897, p. 38).

For Du Bois documentation and accuracy of what was truthful would provide the indicators for what realistically could be accomplished (Lange, 1983). These concepts have assisted researchers in the examination of subjects as varied as housing, religion, economic viability, and family formation. Du Bois was responsible for laying one of the bricks in the foundation for the overlap in social sciences of history, anthropology, philosophy, and economics as they became independent academic disciplines at the end of the nineteenth century.

### **Religion and African American Women**

Step into the average church on any given Sunday and you are more than likely to notice the stark homogeneity of the congregation. Segregated congregations are the norm and have defined the United States religious landscape since the founding of the union. Racial and ethnic congregations “are rooted in two historical dynamics that converged in the nineteenth century – the quest for congregational independence by African Americans and the push for discriminatory practices from predominately white denominations and the nation at large” (Wiggins, 2005, p. 141). For African Americans in the rural South this isolation created by the racial solitude in worship facilities would eventually serve multiple purposes.

Does religiosity contribute to an individual’s sense of psychological well-being? According to Geertz (1974) “both common sense and theoretical considerations would suggest a ‘yes’ answer. Religiously active persons appear to have both cognitive and emotional maps which help them make sense out of “moral bafflement” (p. 29). Prior to

the 1960s Civil Rights Movement there was considerable academic conflict on the effects of religion in the lives of African Americans. While there was little research that isolated the religious beliefs of African American women, there was scholarship that pointed out how both religion and the Black Church were catalysts for collective involvement in the modern Civil Rights Movement (Morris, 1984; McAdams, 1996). These scholars shared the belief that the structural aspects of religion seemed ideal for mobilizing groups and individuals around shared civic goals. The Church according to McAdams (1996) could provide a base of operations, forums for social interactions, and the critically important communication networks required for collective action.

workable tool for others, Christianity teaches blacks to be “meek,” “humble,” and “to turn the other cheek” when (they) should retaliate in kind. Blacks are religiously enslaved, their minds neglecting the very real and very present now for the delirious pleasure of wandering in a vague, remote, and uncertain hereafter (p. 577).

For African American women in the rural South who were racialized, gendered, and marginalized their religiosity became the soil in which they planted their individual and collective experiences. This group of women, for generations, had use religion permeated by history and tradition to carve out pathways that “made sense out of no sense.” The fellowships and skills developed within these religious bodies built self-esteem and empowerment and allowed a group of women to determine their own path forward.

For many African American women in Farmville their “religion was the organizing principle around which their lives were structured. The Church was their school, their forum, their political arena, their social club, their art gallery, their conservatory of music” (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990, p. 93). And in their lives it

possessed the one feature most valued- it was among the few institutions in the community controlled by Blacks. The Church was a place where Black women could participate in the various clubs and church activities that historically offered opportunities for social interaction and social status that was not available in the white dominated society (Kluger, 1976; Scott, 1990; Smith, 1965). There was space within the Black Church for African American women to gain affirmation that their lives bore meaning and that their daily lives and experiences were of value. This would be of critical importance to Black women in Farmville as the issue of school equality became more and more precarious.

In offering insight into the historic importance of the Church in the life of the African American community, Smith (1965) provides a cogent evaluation writing that “the church ...has historically been at the foundation of Black community life, bridging the transition from slavery to freedom and providing a sense of community and stability to Black society” (p. 18). Scott (1990) maintains that the” Church was so central an institution in the... Black communities that there was never a clear line between church-related and secular associations” (p. 9). And Watkins (1996) writes that, “Christian humanism is deep within the marrow of Black folk. It is a reflection of both their piety and their hope for all people to be treated decently” (p. 25). Gomez-Harvell (2002) adds to the discussion of religion in the African American community. She does so from a political vantage point, writing that “African American politics is imbued with a spiritually informed belief that people ought to do what is right” (2008). And finally Wiggins (2005) maintains that:

the high regard for the Black Church has been predicated on its institutional centrality to the cultural, familial, and economic well-being of

African Americans. Its autonomy and leadership in these areas have also been persuasive features that promote and extract loyalty from its membership. This loyal membership was predominantly female (p. 15).

The Black women of Farmville having the seeds of consciousness planted through their religious networks were adapting a “Black liberation tradition rooted in the importance of education” (p. 214). With this humanist, womanist, community oriented, historic background, these women would approach the issue of education armed with extraordinary religious support.

In the lives of the African American women in Farmville, the importance of religion and the physical presence of the Church cannot be overestimated. Many of these women used their access to the physical structure of the Church to join one or more women’s associations. Tillerson (2006) provides as extensive list of the women’s clubs that ranged from the Loving Sisters of Worship, to the Missionary Club, to the Mount Moriah Progressive Women’s Club, to the Noblesse Oblige Club, the NAACP, and the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW). Participation in these grassroots organizations bound these women together in their activism. These clubs and associations made it possible for Farmville’s women, regardless of socioeconomic status or religious affiliation, an avenue to participate in the grassroots struggle for education parity.

Aligned with the women in the fight for education equality were two of Farmville’s most influential ministers. The Reverend Vernon Johns, paternal uncle of original strike organizer Barbara Johns, and the Reverend Leslie Francis Griffin. Both men preached at the First Baptist Church on Farmville's Main Street. It housed the oldest and largest black congregation in Prince Edward County (Kluger, 1976, p. 454). Each

man possessed his own unique personal style of ministry. Bonastia (2012) writes that Reverend Griffin,

assumed the pastorate of First Baptist Church...upon his father's death in October 1949. W.E.B. Du Bois' 1898 study of Farmville identified First Baptist as "the chief and overshadowing organization" of the Farmville Black community, with the church building serving as "the central clubhouse of the community." (p. 29)

He took his role as a country preacher seriously commenting that:

the ministry was the best area in which I could help my own people, and it offered me more freedom than any other profession. There was nothing mystical about it. I had no vision, dreamt no dreams, saw no sights and I didn't walk across hell on a spider web (Bonastia 2012, p. 29)

At a time when the fight for civil rights included special attention to education equality, Reverend Griffin opened the Church doors to the organizing Black women in his community. Without fanfare he would contact Richmond lawyers Spottswood Robinson and Oliver Hill, who were roaming the State of Virginia, organizing a massive legal drive for equalized school facilities for Blacks. Because Virginia has been a major focus of the NAACP's fight against segregated school since the 1930s, Farmville's strategic importance increased.

The Reverend Vernon Johns was a mentor to both Reverend Griffin and his niece Barbara. He encouraged them both to become in socially and politically involved while developing their intellectual curiosity. He was also much more of a firebrand. Kluger (1976) described Johns as a "dazzlingly articulate and argumentative preacher who made as many enemies as friends with his thundering sermons that took no pity on the black man for his ignorance and docility in the face of the white man's malice" (p. 454). And Bob Smith (1965) earlier wrote that,

In the story of the strike that already has taken the shape of folklore on the lips of many white residents of Prince Edward County, the master devil is Mr. Vernon Johns...But only Mr. Johns is credited with the diabolical skills needed to 'invent' the strike (p. 76).

With the participation and influence of two of Farmville's ministers, it was no accident then that many of the meetings and organizations that galvanized the women of Farmville were held in the Farmville's Black Churches.

Within the Black community in Farmville the Church can now be understood as functioning not only as the institutional center of African American life, it was also the harbinger of continuous hope. Matthew and Prothro's (1966) ground breaking study of Black southerners would recognize the importance of religion to community life and to political organization. They describe Blacks "as a God-fearing, church going people (p. 232)." The authors maintain that the racially segregated church may have "planted the seeds for the destruction of segregation" (p. 232).

Embedded within the context of religiosity, however, there are two avenues from which African American women approached the education issue. Mattis (2000) introduces us to the notion that these women can be broadly categorized into two distinct groups, those who are spiritual, and those who are religious. While spiritual and religious have overlapping constructs, they do have well defined meanings. Spirituality "most often includes reference to connections or relationships with a Higher Power of some kind...Religiousness is often associated with the individualistic level of organizational religious movements" (p. 106). Many of the women in Farmville who participated, either directly or indirectly, in the fight for education equality were in one or both of the aforementioned categories. In connecting the religious lives of African American women to the educational struggles in Farmville, two authors are particularly important.

Patricia Hill-Collin's (1998) *Fighting Words*, asserts that collectivity, emancipation, liberation, and the empowerment of Black women as a group rests on two interrelated goals. First, the goal of self-definition or the power to name one's own reality; and second, self-determination, the power to decide one's own destiny. Hill-Collins, in language that is accessible across multiple disciplines, argues that ideas and knowledge are intrinsically connected to power. In constructing dialogues "with many intellectual communities" she situates how knowledge is produced and legitimated within social, economic, political, and educational realms. As the women in Farmville became more comfortable with their abilities to lead, there was also an increased awareness of how the educational disparities eventually would impact across the various aspects of their children's lives. Part II – *Black Feminist Thought and Critical Social Theory*, and Part III – *Toward Justice* invigorates this dissertation in demonstrating how the categories that define the lives of African American women are socially constructed and reconstructed over time and place and built around a dialogue of intersections. It is at these critical intersections that many of the Black women of Farmville came to voice and were able to establish a new education paradigm for their children.

Valeria Gomez Harvell's (2002) dissertation *Religion and Socio-Political Activism Among African American Women: An Empirical Investigation* deconstructs the political and religious activities of African American women. She draws attention "to the dearth of research whether qualitative or quantitative that explores the relationship between the religiosity and political activism of African American women" (p. 48). She carefully critiques the definitional inconsistencies that have attended both past and present scholarship and emphasizes "the need to redefine political activism" (p. 55).

Harvell's work provides an intellectual footing and insight into a) the lineage; b) the development; c) the progression; and d) the maturation of political activism in Black women. It should be pointed out here that Chapter II, Part 2 *Models of Black Women's Political Activism* and Part 3 *Redefining Political Activism*, the chapters most relevant to this study, are only part of Harvell's larger exposition. While the focus is on these sections of this work, there will be discussions of other sections as needed, particularly when Harvell reinforces Parts 2 and 3 with comments made elsewhere. While there is a critical body of literature that examines the religiosity of African American women (Clark, 1962; Collier-Thomas, 1984; Dobson & Gilkes, 1987; Gilkes, 1980) these authors have fused religion with activism providing a framework for both dissent and activism.

The Black Church has traditionally been a power base politically, socially, and religiously within the Black Community. Beginning in the days of that "peculiar institution" until the present, the Black Church has been integral to the development of not only the Black community, but to the progress of American society regarding racial issues (Watkins, 1996). It has been a pillar of society for African Americans and the foundation from which most other institutions have been based. Protected in its unfettered access to community, the Church established an unspoken credo allowing Black women avenues to create strong, independent, permanent alliances across gender, social class, ideological, and philosophical lines (Hall, 1990). For many African American women in Farmville the Church was the focal point in their lives.

Religious institutions in the Black community, because of their unique character, composition, and stability traditionally supported large-scale social change (Hill-Collins, 1991; Oberschall, 1993; Ross, 2003). This support was especially true of the religious

institutions in Farmville with Churches forming the core of many Black women's overall community work and in their belief in the political righteousness of their educational activism. Dodson and Gilkes (1987) identified the special value education held in the Black community writing "that if any one ministry could be identified as central to the black sacred cosmos of the twentieth century...it would be education" (p. 84).

Black Churches, largely independent of White society, were skilled at shielding the inner workings of African American female activities from the scrutiny of the dominant culture. Black Churches have reinforced a variety of social, economic, political, and ethical actions essential to Black community development (Sobel 1979). Black women understood that the success of any social movement in the Black community required the use of churches as resources, as safe meeting places for planning and strategizing, and as aid societies. They would use their churches strategically!

For African Americans, particularly females, a frequently overlooked element in their lives is their apparent self-confidence in situations that are stressful. One explanation may be their perceptions of religious sisterhood. Within the African American religious experience there is the sense of fellowship generated within Church institutions. The Black Church as the major institution in the Black community operates independently, with Mays and Nicholson (1969) maintaining that the Church possesses a certain "genius of soul...that gives it life and vitality, that makes it stand out significantly above its buildings, creeds, rituals, and doctrines, something that makes it a unique institution" (p. 278). Historically, these unique institutions offered opportunities for Black women to discover and nurture the necessary self-assurance and feelings of liberation (Ellison, 1993; Hall, 1990; Morris, 1984). This growth was generally not

possible in the wider society. It is clear why many scholars (Harris, 1994; Mattis, 2000) have found persuasive evidence for connecting African American women's religiosity to their political activism. The educational equality movement in Farmville and similar social movements throughout the South would utilize these Black institutions as bases where women individually and collectively could commit and recommit themselves to their particular struggle.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Ellison (1993) elaborates more fully on the importance of fellowship that is generated within the black churches.

**You may write me down in history  
With your bitter twisted lies,  
You may trod me in the very dirt  
But still like the dust, I'll rise  
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave  
I am the dream and the hope of the slave  
Maya Angelou**

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### Introduction

The research for this study was developed to implement a hybrid, qualitative/historical methodology to understand the educational and historic context of the school closings in Farmville, Virginia from 1959-1963. According to Creswell (2003), mixed methods research has been the most innovative development in research design over the past three decades. The rationale for using mixed methods in this study was that qualitative methods were sufficient, by themselves, to capture the trends and details of this educational phenomenon. Combining methods included conducting historical archival analysis and conducting site visits to support the analysis of those archives. The background historic research created analytic space to identify individuals to interview from which narrative analysis of place, historic contents, and the individual context of each of the women involved in the study. When combined, this information was compiled to provide the descriptive and analytic basis for the impact of historic events on this group of women and to use their perspectives to illuminate events surrounding the school closings policies that until now have not been connected to the discussion of place based educational policies.

The research was designed to provide a qualitative/historic analysis of the information collected through a) locating, identifying, and analyzing historic documents

that were related to the particularized nature of the school closing policies; b) through narratives the development of the Farmville education movement; c) the questionnaires of individuals impacted by the school closings in Farmville; d) the interview data collected from a cohort of women who were affected by the closings and participated in the movement.

The questions that directed this analysis were:

1. What were the impacts of the confluence of education disruption on the Farmville community and on specific women and families?
2. How did the school closings shape the context for African American women in Farmville to respond, organize, and address the educational crises they faced during the 1956-1963 time frames?
3. How did the voices of the women who were interviewed for this study reflect and illustrate the broader education context? What were their epistemological frameworks and how did these change over time? How are those frameworks reflective of the larger community and broader implications of these events?

The multiple data sources for this study provided the research for using mixed methods. Niaz (2008) explains this importance maintaining that employing mixed methods within a single research project increases the scope, improves the quality of findings, secures research design, and augments the explorative process. When used in combination qualitative, quantitative, and historic methods complement each other and allow for a more complete analysis. Mixed methods research also expands research designs that are rooted in one tradition into designs that incorporate or interface with the other tradition (Mayoh & Onwuegbuzie, 2015). Additionally, mixing opens possibilities

for researchers to uncover a more profound understanding of a research problem (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007), and encourages multiple world views or paradigms rather than the typical association of certain paradigms for quantitative research and others for qualitative research (Creswell, 2003).

The research questions guided the theoretical perspective, and the historical research included the use of archival data from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data included eyewitness accounts and public records, and secondary sources textbooks, journal articles, and newspaper accounts of the school closings.

To answer the research questions it was necessary to collect data that: 1) explored how loyalty to place and educational disruption impacted the Farmville community, particularly women; 2) defined how this event shaped the roles/activities/participation levels of the respondents and female family members; and 3) data that illuminated the epistemologies of the respondents, female family, and kinfolk. Qualitatively the data were collected through narrative inquiry. This phase was the face-to-face and telephone interviews and respondents questionnaire.

Our understanding of narrative is defined by Bamberg (2010) who tells us that story gives 'narrative form' to experience and positions "characters in space and time and, in a very broad sense, gives order to and makes sense of what happened-or what is imagined to have happened" (p. 1). He continues that narratives provide a portal into two realms: "1) the realm of experience, when speakers lay out how they as individuals experience certain events and confer their subjective meaning onto these experiences; and 2) the realm of narrative means (or devices) that are put to use in order to make sense" (p. 1). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) argue "experience happens narratively. Narrative

inquiry is a form of narrative experience” (p. 19). They maintain a “story has a sense of being full, a sense of coming out of a personal and social history... Experience ...is the stories people live. People live stories and in the telling of them reaffirm them, modify them, and create new ones” (1994, p. 415).

The formal face-to-face interviews were designed around several broad categories: a) resilience and each respondents understanding of it; b) education historically and contemporarily; and c) childhood memories. From these broad categories the voices of the respondents were able to flow. What emerged were the following themes: a) education; b) community; c) family; d) the school closings as a phenomena; e) race relations; and f) religion. The questionnaire and historic documents added support to the respondent’s narratives. In analyzing the narrative data it became clear that telling a story about oneself also involves telling a story about choice and action “which have integrally moral and ethical dimensions” (Liamputtong & Ezzy 1999, p. 26). Narrative is believed to have the potential to transform the participant’s experiences. While this may be true in some situations it was certainly not true when the respondents discussed the school closings. Using the narrative form brought into sharp focus childhood memories of the trauma of the closings and how it affected individuals, families, and the Black community in Farmville, Virginia. Respondents were asked to recall memories of the school closings and its impact. For several respondents the emotional and the psychological pains attached to those memories were areas that were only briefly discussed.

Because this study is rooted within a particular historic time frame it was possible to review newspaper articles and PEC School Board notes to gather data to inform the

study. The data collection process at this point was simplified because it was possible to establish the historic background for the school closings. Analysis of PEC School Board notes revealed prior to *Brown vs Board of Education* the systemic resistance to integration was ground into Virginia ideology. The position taken by the School Board echoed a court decision written by Judge Albert V. Bryan in 1952 “the centrality of school segregation is signaled by the fact that it is the only racial segregation direction contained in the constitution of Virginia”<sup>11</sup>. This stance resonated throughout the School Board notes.

I chose narrative as the qualitative part of the methodology for several reasons. I was curious about how the stories Black women tell illustrate their ways of knowing and the role resilience played in their lives. Bruner (1990) explains that narrative is important because “people narrativize their experience of the world and of their own role in it” (p. 115). It is through these stories that we begin to understand the views of this particular group of women and how their experiences shaped those views. Additionally, there is a limited amount of narrative research available on the experiences of this particular group of African American women and resilience.

### **Selecting the Participants**

The selection process began with two exploratory letters (Appendix H and I) sent to twenty women in Farmville. Their names had been mentioned in articles published in the *Farmville Herald* Newspaper from 1960-2000. The first letter sent in 2007 was to twelve women; the second in 2011 was to the remaining eight. In the letter one of the

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<sup>11</sup>*Davis v County School Board, Prince Edward County, Va.*, 103 F. Supp. 337 1952

critical questions was “To whom should I speak?” The letter also explained who I was, why I wanted to talk with them, and what I wanted to learn.

From the original twelve there were five responses: two respondents declined (they had participated in other dissertation projects) and they were not interested in participating in any other projects. One of the women who chose not to participate wrote on the top of her returned correspondence that “I want to tell my own story now, I’ve told it over and over to other people now it’s my turn.” She intends to write a book of her experiences without a filter. This particular respondent, who requested anonymity, is one of the more high profiled spokespersons on the school closings. Privately she expressed her resentment and bitterness, but publicly she wears the “mask” of reconciliation. I was able to get this respondent to talk with me briefly but, she was not forthcoming with any additional or new information. Despite the two original contacts choosing not to participate, they each sent a list of recommended names (one four names, the other, three names) of women who had had limited or no previous contact with researchers and they felt these women might be interested in talking with me. This sample selection “snowballing” is a procedure that typically allows a researcher to locate key informants, a hidden population, who are information-rich (Bailey, 1994; Patton, 2002). The eight women recommended received a second letter and responded. Five agreed, creating a pool of eight women. The following table presents respondent demographic and interview data:

Table 1. Respondents Demographics and Interview Summary

	Race/Ethnicity	Education		Gender	Age
Respondent Amber	African American	Bachelor's Degree		Female	60
Telephone Interview	8/2 & 10/22/07 2- 1 ½ and ½ hr.		Face to Face Interview	8/2/07 - 1 ½ hr.	
Respondent Beryl	African American	Bachelor's Degree		Female	65
Telephone Interview	10/20 and 10/29/07 2-1 ½ and ½ hr.-		Face to Face Interview	8/1 & 10/1/07 2 - 1 hr. ea.	
Respondent Ruby	African American	Master's Degree		Female	55
Telephone Interview	10/3/07 1 - 1 ½		Face to Face Interview	9/2/07 - 1 - 2 hr.	
Respondent Kelly	African American	PhD		Female	61
Telephone Interview	10/3 & 10/24/07 2-1hr. ea.		Face to Face Interview	9/2 & 10/3/07 2-1 ½ & ½ hr. ea.	
Respondent Jade	African American	Bachelor's Degree		Female	58
Telephone Interview	10/20-10/29 & 11/2 3 - ½ hr. ea.		Face to Face Interview	8/1 -8/2 & 10/1/07 3 -1 - ½ & 1 ½ hr. ea.	
Respondent Olive	African American	Bachelor's Degree		Female	76
Telephone Interview	10/1 & 10/20/07 2 - 1 hr. ea.		Face to Face Interview	8/1 & 10/1/07 2 - 1 ¼ hr. ea.	
Respondent Coral	African American	High School		Female	59
Telephone Interview	10/2 & 10/23/07 2 - 1 ½ hr. ea.		Face to Face Interview	8/2/07 1 - 1 ½ hr.	
Respondent Iris	African American	High School		Female	55
Telephone Interview	10/2 & 10/24/07 2 - 1 ½ hr. ea.		Face to Face Interview	9/2/07 1 - 1 ½ hr.	

The small sample size proved advantageous and I was able to secure commitments, establish trust and collect data from these eight women using a questionnaire, as well as face-to-face and telephone interviews.



Figure 1. Qualitative Research Graph

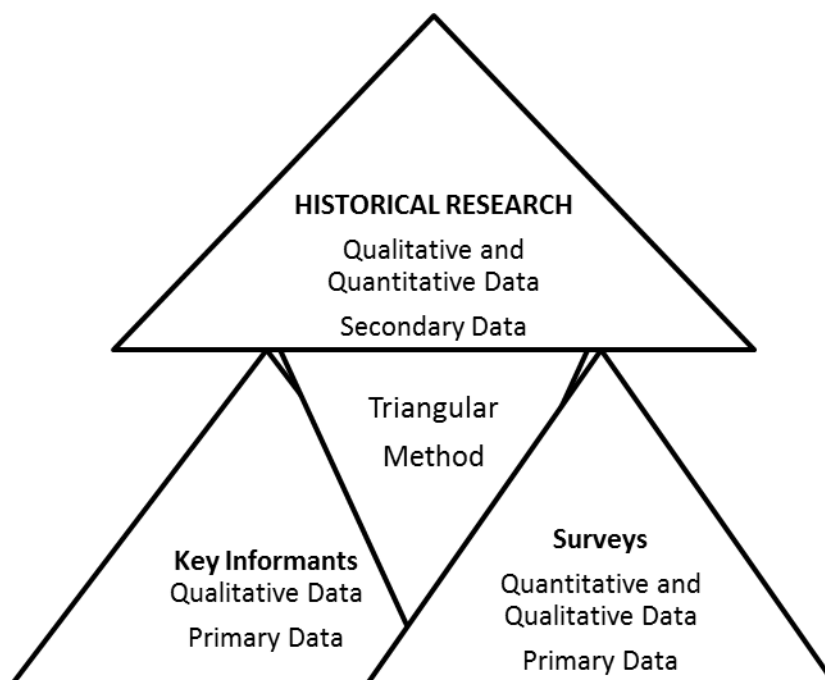


Figure 2. Historical Research

### **The Questionnaire:**

In designing any instrument the initial step is deciding what you want to learn and establishing the goals of the project (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002). This was done after reviewing instruments developed by Gomez-Harvel (2002) and Barnett (1993). The questionnaire created was presented in two parts: Appendix J and Appendix K. Both were qualitative and used questionnaires to collect data. Closed ended questions force a response, code quickly, and are easy to evaluate. Open ended questions allow the participant to provide more complete or comprehensive responses with those responses often providing specific and meaningful information (Arhar, Holley, & Kasten, 2001). The questionnaire was designed to capture demographic data (e.g. age, marital status, income) and several broad areas: 1) religious belief (personal and organizational); 2) community participation; 3) professional attainment; and 4) political activism. For

descriptive and explorative purposes other questions were included in the questionnaire and may be used for future study such as political ideology, gender and race consciousness. Many of these items were only tangentially related to the dissertation topic but a few (church affiliation and attendance) were included in the data. The data were collected through a self-administered questionnaire, which took approximately 20-25 minutes to complete. Each questionnaire had a self-addressed envelope attached, and instructions on how to complete were provided in the cover letter.

Additionally, respondents were also asked to complete a one page questionnaire (L) with a sequence of five different questions that illustrated participation of known females. A list of participation roles the women/girls of Farmville engaged in was presented to the respondents for their comments (M). There were also Consent Forms for Permission to Audio, Video, and Photo (N) and Consent Forms (Appendix O) for participation which were required of each participant.

### **Face to Face and Telephone Interviews:**

Each of the eight respondents was interviewed in a face-to-face or telephone interview. At the beginning of the interview I discussed any issues the women may have had concerning anonymity or confidentiality. I explained who would have access to their responses and how those responses would be analyzed, the format of the interview, both in-person and telephone, and gave the respondents my telephone number and email address if they had any additional questions or concerns. Face-to-face interviews were approximately 1-2 hours long and have the advantage of enabling the researcher to establish rapport with participants (Leedy & Ormrod, 2012). The time frame allowed the researcher to clarify ambiguous answers and seek follow-up information. Face-to-face

interviews generally began with an open ended question e.g. Can you describe your first feelings when you knew you could not go to school? A closed ended question ended the interview. Did you like participating in this research? Researchers Chan, Fung, and Chien (2013) generally agree the during face-to-face interviews “the direction of the questions and the manner in which the researchers ask them during the interview affects the way the participants tell their stories” (4).

A separate protocol was used for the telephone interviews, with unstructured conversations with few prepared questions or predetermined lines of investigation (Boyce & Neale, 2006) lasting from fifteen minutes to one hour were used. These interviews were conducted after rapport had been established between me and the respondent. This was accomplished and participants were able to discuss and compare different narratives of the past, previously held understandings and assumptions, and perceptions that create the insider/outsider paradigm. This relaxation of formalities made the telephone interviews particularly important because the women were able to use Black women’s talk, their everyday vernacular as it comes through folk expressions, downhome talk, and “home language which are all part of their ability to speak in two languages, what is considered standard English and Black English vernacular” (Boylorn, 2009, p. 44).

### **Coding of the Interview Data**

The coding phase for this project began by combining data for emergent themes, ideas, and categories. For the interview stage I used Lofland and Lofland’s (1994) unit of analysis-the encounter. I chose this unit based on the small number of respondents. “an encounter is a tiny social system formed when two or more persons are in one another’s immediate physical presence and strive to maintain a single (ordinarily spoken) focus of

mutual involvement” (p. 105). An encounter is one of the most micro-level units of analysis that a qualitative researcher can study, ranging from a duration of a few minutes to not more than a few hours. Lofland and Lofland (1994) suggest that there are three aspects to encounters – the cognitive, the emotional and the hierarchical. The cognitive aspect refers to “the meanings embedded in or associated” with the encounter that “make up the participants’ view of reality and which define their own and other’s actions” in the encounter (p. 113). This definition includes ideologies or worldviews that attempt to explain cultural rules or norms. The emotional aspect of the encounter addresses feelings: “Humans ubiquitously, routinely, and simultaneously “*feel as well as think*” (p. 117) {emphasis in original}. The third aspect in this unit of analysis is the hierarchy in encounters and relationships, described as “inequalities” (118). Data were coded to identify categories/themes that corresponded to the three research questions:

1. What were the impacts of the confluence of education disruption and place on the Farmville community and on specific women and families?
2. How did the school closings shape the context for African American women in Farmville to respond, organize, and address the educational crises they faced during the 1956-1963 time frame?
3. How did the voices of the women who were interviewed for this study reflect and illustrate the broader education context? What were their epistemological frameworks and how did these change over time? How are those frameworks reflective of the larger community and broader implications of these events?

**Data coding was a three-step process:***Step 1.*

Following each encounter/interview I transcribed my notes and summarized each participant's narrative in her own words. When transcribing the interviews, it was necessary to record the data word-for-word indicating any pauses, laughs, or interruptions. This consistency provides the reader with a truer picture of the interview, stimulates the interviewer's memory to any unusual nuance. During this process word repetition, common phrases, metaphors, analogies, and similar philosophical beliefs began to emerge. I coded these summaries into themes and subthemes using respondents own language to describe each theme, highlighting "quotes" and pulling out one phrase to represent each respondent. The analysis of the text involved several steps: (1) winnowing themes to a manageable few (i.e. deciding which themes were important, (2) building hierarchies of theme, and (3) linking themes into theoretical models (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). I read my notes several times, noting impressions of what was going on for the respondent, for me, and between us as the narrative unfolded. Cavendish (2011) argues that the interviewer should not have preconceived notions of what one expects to hear, the goal of the researcher should be what can be learned from the stories told. I noted my thoughts and insights about each respondent and attached it to the respondent folder. It should be noted here that themes are:

abstract (and often fuzzy) constructs that link not only expressions found in text but also expressions found in images, sounds, and objects. You know you have found a theme when you can answer the question, "What is this expression an example of?" (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 87).

I was able at this point to identify broad themes e.g. social class, participation, the importance of education, religion, loss, and race relations across the stories told and what part of what emerged was a consistent response to the research questions.

As I analyzed the interviews, I asked myself several questions. For example, how would the respondents change their experiences? Have they been able to reconcile with family and community? Would they be able to? Did the respondents remake their realities as their narratives unfolded?

### *Step 2*

I first conducted initial coding as I reviewed the interviews. Initial coding according to Cavendish (2011) is defined as what was happening in the data. What did the data actually show? This involves a close reading of the data and mining them for ideas as grounded theory coding (Charmaz, 2006; Glesne, 2011). After categories were established I created codes based on repeated words, similarities in expressions, descriptions. Codes were also established for nonverbal communications, important for attaining deeper shared meanings between the interviewer and interviewee. Nonverbal communication and speech often interact in a way that increases *Verstehen*, with nonverbal communication (facial expressions, hand gestures) clarifying the meaning of words spoken, and words clarifying the meaning of nonverbal communication (Kelly, Barr, Church & Lynch, 1999). Examples of initial codes are strategies, adult affiliations, and community associations. From these codes categories were narrowed, refined, and grouped by topic. During the code clean-up process, related codes were developed that addressed core categories. There were also codes that proved unusable and were discarded. To further assist with coding organization, I pulled from Creswell (2003) who

suggested possible code types, such as setting and context, perspectives held by subjects, and relationship and social structure codes which were useful during the recoding process.

### *Step 3*

A cache of PEC School Board notes, housed among the AFSC Papers Special Collection in Philadelphia, and Longwood College in Farmville, Virginia, was analyzed to determine if there were areas that could be coded to align with either data from interviews or questionnaire. While the coding did not align exactly there were areas that presented patterns that would mesh with the preliminary coding established. The most obvious were the discussions on race relations in Farmville, Virginia and community responses and reactions. For example, prior to the school closings the School Board openly expressed their hostility to the idea of integration stating “it is not only impractical, but it will be impossible to operate a non-segregated school system...” (May 21, 1954). When schools reopened while the views of many remained entrenched, the Board presented a different public perception insisting “every member of the School Board is a moderate in his racial views...” (January, 1964). The narrow scope of the School Board analysis allowed additional time for coding of other data collected.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Since the topic of this dissertation presented potential ethical issues, care was taken throughout to ensure that all ethical guidelines were met. These included the following (using ethical guidelines as outlined by McNamara (1994) :

1. The first ethical guideline is that researchers must make sure participation is completely voluntary....however voluntary participation can sometimes

conflict with the need to have a high response rate. This means that low returns can introduce response bias.

For this study and because the target population was small, my attempt to mitigate this was to make two initial contacts.

2. The second ethical guideline is to avoid possible harm to the respondents.

This includes embarrassment or feelings of uncomfortability about questions.

While the questionnaire did not contain invasive questions, the face-to-face interview did elicit unexpected responses in both their emotion and racial candor. There were responses and language used that generationally, are generally spoken only in intragroup settings.

3. Third ethical guideline is to protect respondent identity. This can be accomplished by exercising anonymity and confidentiality. A questionnaire is anonymous when a respondent cannot be identified on the basis of a response, and confidential when a response cannot be identified with a subject.

The questionnaire did identify the respondent, but each respondent was assigned a name along a color spectrum which was designed to protect their privacy.

4. The fourth ethical guideline is to let all prospective respondents know the purpose of the research and who is sponsoring it.

This was accomplished in both contact letters where the purpose of the research and the institution were identified.

### **Limitations**

To reduce this topic to a manageable size and to facilitate continuity, I imposed the following limitations: this dissertation analyzed the pathways created and utilized by

African American women who became activists, and were capable of organizing strategies through self-reflection, creativity, optimism and humor, being flexible and able to act with responsibility and ethical awareness (Tempski, Billodi, Paro, Enns, Martins, & Schraiber, 2012, p. 343) to end a corrupt education system. I did not address directly the millions of dollars of loss in potential income because education was derailed for five years; the emotional, psychological, and social disruption in the lives of those children who were forced to move away from their family and community; and finally the loss of human potential and the talents of individuals and families that could not abide the ruinous effects of the school closures and moved out of Farmville. Each of these areas would stand alone in their examination, and while each is vitally important they are not the concentration of this dissertation.

### **Researcher's Positionality**

Behind the methods, theories, and analysis of qualitative research stands the personal biography of the researcher. Each researcher speaks from a particular social class, gender, racial, cultural, and ethnic community perspective (Denzin & Lincoln 2000). Within these perspectives are the multiple identities of the researcher's-religious, political, sexual, familial (Costello, 2005) standpoints. African American researchers, who generally approach their communities "in command of a special commodity, namely culturally nurtured insights" (Alridge 2003, p. 25), do so understanding that Black researchers also run the risk of being categorized and stereotyped by concentrating inquiry in their community. Boylorn (2009) argues that there are two significant reasons Black women should be among the primary investigators of Black women's lives. First, Black women researchers can offer information about Black women that others can't.

Second, Black women's studies by Black women allow Black scholars to respond to earlier interpretations of their lives with their own perspectives. And Tidwell (1982) previously argued that Black researchers often run the risk of being "compartmentalized as researchers who deal chiefly with variables of key relevance to Blacks" (p. 244). She worried however, that this may diminishes the importance of the research. bell hooks (1989) provides a bridge of explanation between these positions. She writes:

as subject, people have the right to define their own reality, establish their own identities, name their history....As objects, one's reality is defined by others, one's identity created by others, one's history named only in ways that define one's relationship to those who are subject (p. 42).

These concerns arise in the study of groups or communities whose members are either perceived of or labeled as deviant, and many of them stem from the prevailing tendency to view persons in a labeled group as uni-dimensional or mono-roled (Bridges, 2002; Sawyer, 1998). As an African American female researcher, I have experienced the kind of spirit numbing racism that chills the soul and can cripple intellectual development and creativity. I stand beside the women in Farmville as they opened up about the early impacts of racism and how the school closings affected their sense of who they were, and their sense of who they could be. We also share familial educational expectations, and a sense of ethnic and community loyalties. Hill-Collins (1991) describes this as "outsider within" status (p. 35) assigned to African American female researchers. Within this status are shared epistemology, empathy, group identification, and a special "standpoint on self, family and relationship to society" (p. 37). Despite the fact that I was a Black woman interviewing Black women, I never assumed that I would be granted "insider" status.

As an African American female, I work within a distinctive methodological climate that fuses two worlds and two agendas. John Hope Franklin (1963) describes the

complexity of the research environment that envelopes Black scholars. He maintains that the African American researcher is “forced, first of all, to establish his claim to be a scholar, and has had somehow to seek recognition in the general world of scholarship” (p. 27). Tidwell (1982) supports this adding:

Investigators...need... to be recognized as a “competent” professional prompts an investigator to adopt a level of sophistication in their work which is more consonant with the requirements of the investigative community than with the capacities or needs of those who must ultimately use the results (p. 245).

The conditions and dilemmas of the Black scholar are multifaceted and complex. Despite the complexity and the often convoluted nature of research, the variety of available research strategies can create and provide environments to investigative areas that make it possible to find group identity support, encouragement to speak, and courage to voice concerns and hesitations about the limits and possibilities of the research process (Miller, 1992).

Hill-Collins (1991) adds another dimension to the notion of complexity. There exists a context in which groups of peoples who define themselves as “disempowered resist the intrusions of researchers from outside their own communities” (p. 38) in spite of the commonality of race, gender, or ethnicity. Additionally, there are also multilayered cultural issues that African American researchers may wish not to expose. The researcher’s positionality then must question how much of your multiple identities and sharing can and should be revealed. There are no clear, definitive answers, responses, or resolutions to this dilemma.

In an attempt to develop ideas about my role as an African American researcher, three authors have been particularly instrumental. Through Franklin (1963) and Dubois

(1944) the notion of “distance” when studying the Black community is brought forward. Each author maintains that for the Black researcher: 1) it is important to embrace the research in a manner that improves the conditions of Black people; and 2) adopt objectivity that recognizes Black scholars connection to their community. The issues of “racial uplift” and connectivity are part of a continuum that has infused African American communities from slavery. Given the dual weight of uplift and connectivity, and establishing academic credentials, while not unique to African Americans, it is the “peculiar” nature of our experiences that has set this research apart.

Both authors expressed an on-going concern around the notion of research compatibility, the constant need to satisfy the White research community which has at times discounted the merits of Black researchers.

Finally, Patricia Hill-Collins (2000) who argues that Black females conducting research in Black women’s communities are in jeopardy of “being discredited as being too subjective and hence less scholarly” (p. 19). She points out: 1) the difficulties faced by Black women who need to maintain their standing in both the academic *and* home community; and 2) the need for reflexivity in order to understand their distinct positions and identities.

As a qualitative researcher, in incorporating these multilayered standpoints, I am interested in describing and analyzing the “what is” (Miller, 1992). Also, there is the need to establish a cooperative research environment not co-opting a community’s power, instead allowing participants in disempowered communities to become collaborators.

Bridges (2002) argues:

Researchers seeking collaboration with participants in disempowered communities have essentially two forms of appeal—to their self-interest or to their generosity. Either they need to see some benefit to themselves which is at least roughly commensurate to the effort that is required of them (or in some cases the value of what they have to offer); or they need knowingly to contribute out of their own benevolence towards the researchers or others whom they believe the research will benefit (p. 80).

Consequently, according to Stake (1999) “qualitative researchers are guests in the private spaces of the world and their manner should be good and their code of ethics strict” (p. 103).

This was my first long term, extended study. Like many novice researchers I had perhaps unrealistic expectations of the levels of participation and data collection. I did not however, anticipate nor did it even occur to me that the memories of the school closings would engender such sadness/bitterness or elicit remembrances that remained intact, vivid and still very close to the surface after fifty plus years. I did expect conversations (because of ethnic, familial, and geographic commonalities) that would fall outside the demographic and biographic data. It was these conversations that provided tidbits of additional insight (i.e. northern relatives of Olive urging her family to move to Ohio where “this crap don’t happen – and you still live with them crackers?”). Some members of her family had left Farmville before the school closings but she and her parents had remained. Eventually the children were educated between classes at home and the Farmville Free School.

In centering the research through various lens (culturally nurtured insights, outsider within status, and ethical behavior) it becomes possible to broaden the investigation environment that also allows for a narrower focus on community and the women being studied.

**Change does not roll in on the wheels of inevitability but comes through continuous struggle. And so we must straighten our backs and work for our freedom. A man can't ride you unless your back is bent.**

**Martin Luther King, Jr.**

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **FINDINGS**

#### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings of the study and to answer the research questions. Through a compilation of analysis from face-to-face and telephone interviews, participant questionnaires, and an examination of historic documents a clearer picture of the impact the school closing policies had on the Farmville family, community, and individual develops. The complex notion of resilience is one of the key findings of this study. All eight respondents noted that the resilience they witnessed from the women in their lives served to strengthen and keep them motivated during the school closings. Additionally, all of the respondents noted their reliance in family, community, and spirituality to keep them grounded.

When I began research into the development of resilience among the African American women in Farmville, I expected to read and hear stories of heroic behaviors, courageous decision making, and daring among these women. While I did read and hear the stories of women who stepped out of their comfort zone to tackle the issue of education disparity, what came through in the research more than any other issue was the sense of loss. Aside from the emergent themes of education, community, family, and the individual responses to the school closings, there was a pervasive sense of loss that

permeated the individual stories. During the analysis I discovered that in searching for the ‘truth’ of how resilience develops among marginalized women when their community is under stress, this community embodied many truths.

There are many aspects of reliance on resilience in the Black female community including mothering, mentorship, problem solving and social responsibility. For the purpose of this study resilience included: religious commitment, educational involvement, community affiliations, and personal identity. These characteristics correspond to themes that developed during data analysis. Several of the women in the study reported that many of their adult skills, political awareness, civic and educational commitments were a result of the resilience they witnessed as young girls. While the research questions:

1. How did the school closings shape the context for African American women in Farmville to respond, organize, and address the educational crises they faced during the 1956-1963 time frame?
2. How did the voices of the women who were interviewed for this study reflect and illustrate the broader education context?
3. What were their epistemological frameworks and how did these change over time? How are those frameworks reflective of the larger community and broader implications of these events?

were not answered in a linear manner, the analysis of the data produced themes and sub-themes that corresponded to the questions. The major findings of the study were then based on these analyses, questionnaires, and historic documents. My goal as a researcher

was to learn from the respondents their childhood impressions of resilience and how the school closing policies affected their lives during the closings and as they matured into adulthood.

Narrative inquiry provided the format for the analysis of face-to-face and telephone interviews. Conducting the interviews was based on recommendations from narrative researchers (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Webster & Mertova, 2007) who maintain that the interviewer should be careful to not interrupt the participant allowing the narrative to emerge naturally from conversation (Creswell, 2007; Glesne, 2011). Phillion (2002) expands this notion of listening adding narrative is “almost always about people’s lives, their interests, concerns and passions” (p. 17) this was evident in the interviews as the school closings encompass each of these aspects. Expanding the importance of narrative Spector-Mersel (2010) argues “narrative...combines both a philosophical stance toward the nature of social reality and our relationship with it” (p. 206). An added dimension in this study was the glimpse into the multiple roles of the women of Farmville, their lives and experiences as they encountered an oppressive education system. Another goal of the project was to determine if narrative inquiry would generate the data, as Bamberg (2010) states narrative, “gives order to and makes sense of what happened-or what has imagined to have happened” (p. 1).

Because of the sensitive nature of the school closings and its effect on the education of these women, I made the decision to begin each interview with “small talk,” loosely defined as informal talk or conversations about things that are not important, often between people who do not know each other well (Cambridge Dictionary Online). The interview format was provided by Boyce and Neale (2003):

- 1) Unstructured interviews – these were conversations with no prepared questions or predetermined lines of inquiry. These were primarily the initial “getting to know you” conversations. They were introductory, informal, and generally lasted 15-45 minutes;
- 2) Structured interviews – consisted of a set of predetermined questions that were asked from each interviewee. Every attempt was made to ask the questions in the same manner and sequence. These questions were posed in face-to-face interviews and the interviews lasted from 30 to 60 minutes;
- 3) Semi-structured interviews – included elements from unstructured and structured interviews. These mini-interviews conducted with women who were not part of the dissertation cohorts provided areas to clarify, areas that needed further development, and areas that required greater researcher sensitivity. The semi-structured interviews were perhaps the most influential in developing the second questionnaire. Using semi-structured interviews expanded by understanding of participant mobilization, resource availability, and participant stability.

In the data collection process the use of narrative becomes “in part a shared construction and reconstruction through the inquiry” (Connelly & Clandenin, 1990, p. 5). Concurring, Bruner (1987) adds “a life as led is inseparable from a life as told – or – a life is not ‘how it was’ but how it is interpreted and reinterpreted, told and retold, certain formal properties of the life do not change easily” (87). MacKeracher (2004) extends the idea of the narrative to adult experiences that “cannot be played out as they are in childhood; to organize and make sense of one’s self and one’s life, the adult is likely to make extensive use of the narrative form” (p. 36-37). However, as a researcher, I felt that

it was essential not to exploit the women who were part of the study by opening certain wounds. Instead, I looked for previously printed memories of the school closings. As memories were recreated as accurately as possible, it became apparent that in the minds of many of the respondents as children they began to understand that an identity of meaning, who they were and their education future, was being shaped alongside their impressions of the abilities of the adult women in their lives.

Just as there are different perspectives, the stories shared were never about one thing. The questions may have started on the importance of the school closing policies and would veer to the family, community, religion. These stories within stories are an important feature well known to African American culture (Booker, 2005). In 1994 Lawrence-Lightfoot discussed the perspective of narrative in the African American community. She asserted that narrative presentation or storytelling continues from Africa, where stories were filled with adventure, entertainment, culture, knowledge, and custom. In offering a brief biography of the women interviewed, the dominant themes that emerged through the analysis of their responses is presented.

### **Respondent Biographies**

*Jade* is the most reserved of the women interviewed. She is a single woman who volunteers in her church, at the community senior center, and works with the NAACP education fund. As a high school teacher her adult life has been devoted to teaching and mentoring young adults. She left Farmville after college at the encouragement of her parents and returns only periodically to visit family.

*Kelly and Ruby* lived within the city limits of Farmville and were childhood friends with Beryl who lived outside the city on a farm. The sisters were sent north

through the AFSC program to prevent any interruption in their education. They are both college educated and educators by profession. They have fond memories of their early years with stable families and friendships. They were unified in their contempt for the community that supported the school closings. However, one sister was able to reunite with the community – Kelly, while the other - Ruby did not return to Farmville for nearly thirty years.

*Amber* Is a 60ish, married attorney residing in Pennsylvania? She and her brother were home schooled by parents who were small business owners in Farmville. She is quietly vocal in her offense at the time lost by many of those children who were locked out of school. She is forthcoming about the strain on some relationships with those who were not afforded an education. She did not return to Farmville after college but did keep in touch with several childhood friends. She is a devout Christian who volunteers in her church and is an active sorority member.

*Beryl* is a recently retired Federal employee and mentions how much she “loves” retirement. She spends a great deal of time volunteering at her church, with seniors, and teaching a monthly Bible class. Her parents made the difficult decision to keep her in Farmville while siblings were sent north to continue their education. This created tensions that “lasted for years.” She is an outspoken education advocate and has returned to Farmville periodically to visit the Moton Museum and family.

*Iris* is a 55 year old homemaker who married and began her family at the age of nineteen. She is not as articulate as other respondents but has “ticked off” a list of things she knows she missed out on because schools were closed: her ability to work in the field of nursing, a college education, earning more money, moving from working to middle

class. She loves her husband and as parents they made many sacrifices to ensure that their two sons went to college. Both boys never missed a day of school and graduated from college.

*Coral* is a small business owner, a stylish 59 year old beautician who was out of school for the entire length of the school closings? Because she was so far behind when schools reopened she was nearly 20 when she graduated high school and with the support of her family she did graduate. She wonders often what her life would have been like had her education not been interrupted. She is independent and successful but she works very hard. Now that her children are adults she intends to take advantage of the scholarship fund set up for those who were affected by the school closings.

*Olive* is the oldest of the respondents and her narrative is different from other respondents. She left Farmville by the time schools were closed in 1959 and was already in college. She is a widow and a retired Federal employee. Her memories of Farmville are based on the entrenchment of Jim Crow in the rural south. She did not return to Farmville after college graduation moving to Washington, D. C. where she married and raised two sons. She had younger family members who were affected by the school closings and understands the lasting bitterness. She has worked frequently with the Moton Museum and the youth program.

**Themes: School Closings**

In Farmville, the public school you attended was designed to shape your identity. The Black community understood that the deficiencies in the existing school system discredited their children. Stokes (2008) recalls watching people passing by asking, “Who owns the chicken farm? When they found out the buildings were part of a school,

some would take pictures to show the people back home how backward we were” (p. 69). This powerful imagery was only one of the elements that would inspire the Black women in Farmville to combine their sense of resistance, to their sense of identity, with their commitment to place and forge them as powerful allies in a time of crises as the school closings continued year after year.

Farmville parents would begin to understand that the failure of schools to open in September 1959 was predicted as early as 1955 when Garland Gray,<sup>12</sup> in response to the Brown decision, said “the Brown decision was monstrous, I have nothing against the Negro race as such, and I have lived with them all my life, but I don’t intend to have my grandchildren go to school with them” (Bonastia 2012, p. 53). The school closings would have a spillover effect in the lives of Farmville’s Black children. While many in Farmville’s White community knew that the Black schools were inadequate, they wavered between two competing beliefs: a) that Blacks were attempting to the “rush things”; b) or the protests were a violation of Blacks remaining in their “proper place.” These beliefs were the first level in controlling social aspirations and social transformations. They established moral values for a community who then established the community ‘proper’ norms. It is at this level that the “moral conceptions of social life” (in this instance the social possibilities of education) are given formal expression through...mandates” (Clark, 1984, p. 196). It would ultimately become clear to the Black women in Farmville that education equity would exact a high price as they reshaped the mandates for the education of their children, both inside and outside of their community.

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<sup>12</sup>Garland Gray was a State Senator from the Fourth District and an ally of Senator Harry S. Bryd. In 1954 he was appointed head of the Virginia Commission on Public Education, later called the Gray Commission.

In examining the PEC School Board minutes and *Farmville Herald* newspaper articles from 1951-1963 the deep-rooted nature of the resistance to integration and the laissez-faire attitude toward the school closings among White Farmvillians were exposed. The battle lines for the eventual closings were drawn on April 27, 1951. Days after the school walkout, led by Barbara Johns, J. Barrye Wall, in a front page editorial in the *Farmville Herald*, wrote dismissively “the apparently student inspired mass hookie should not influence the present plans of the authorities, it was an ill-advised tactic of immature youth and should be considered as such.” In the years between the 1951 walk-out and culminating with the school closing in 1959, the people in Farmville were bombarded with newspaper articles cementing White opposition. In 1954, the PECBS passed a resolution stating “it is not only impractical, but it will be impossible to operate a non-segregated school system in the Commonwealth of Virginia...the said Board intends to use its power, authority and efforts to insure the continuation of a segregated school system in the Commonwealth of Virginia.” As the conflict deepened so did the rhetoric.

*The Farmville Herald* would keep the pressure on the population. In a series of editorials Wall would write the following: “Negro parents, under the misguided leadership...chose to follow leadership which has no background of doing anything for the upbuilding of the community in any field instead of accepting a possible solution for continuing an educational program offered by people who had lead this community in its many accomplishments” (September 20, 1957). By the end of the 1950s Wall would make a connection between the economy and the segregated school system in an editorial writing, “No outside industry has come to Farmville since 1932...We wonder if public

schools kept industry out of Farmville...” (May 12, 1961). Wall and the PECSB could not have known or been interested in how his editorial and their position on integration impacted the lives of Farmville’s Black children and their parents as they simultaneously championed the school closings.

The study participants were only marginally aware of the conflict created by the White School Board and frequently aided by local and regional newspapers. They were, however, unanimous in their assessment that during the closings Black families provided each other the necessary external support to sustain their participation in protesting the lack of educational facilities. Simultaneously, they were involved in creating church and recreational activities that would fill the space of the closed schools. When schools closed Parent-Teacher meetings were lost, the student-teacher bond was broken, career planning no longer existed for those students entering the borders of adulthood, and most critical for Black Farmvillians, the fact that “intact families were broken up,” for some family gatherings became infrequent, and were gone.

Amber quietly said that the sense of loss she felt was because “I have no idea what life would have been like if I had grown up without the school closing.” She believed that the Black people in Farmville were more gentle and tolerant, and that White Farmvillians “just hated Black people in general.”

There is both pain and bitterness in her voice and she mentions again how she had to pray to rid herself of the bitterness. At one point she says “when I was first asked to talk about the school closing I would begin in tears, it took a while before I stopped crying.” She remembered with a special fondness the Black female teachers in the Farmville schools. “The teachers in those segregated schools were superior, they had

your interest at heart. This was one of her brightest conversational moments. “They cared about you and pushed you to excellence. We were expected to perform to the highest standard. Special attention was put on math, science and the classics. There was a sense of jealousy in the White community.” She ended the interview with “it’s shameful that what happened in Farmville is not more well-known, that it’s not taught as part of American history. Shameful!”

Olive’s interview was not centered on the concepts of resilience. She was much more interested in providing context and the “feeling” in Farmville as the school closing atmosphere developed. I made the decision to allow her to talk freely and to express herself in the manner she was most comfortable. The longer we talked about the school closings the more animated she became. “It’s hard to fathom, hard to believe, it made no sense. The children were worthless. I really think they hated us – the Black people. We knew as little kids we were different, we couldn’t go certain places and had to stay in certain areas, we couldn’t go to the White parts of town, you just ‘felt it.’ My Grandmother taught us to never mistreat White people – turn the other cheek. For a long time I was bitter and had to pray about it. As I grew older I became more and more militant, until my son married a White girl and then I had to soften a little. My militancy transformed into a different kind of activism.”

Narratives are perplexing and conflicting. They are incomplete, ambiguous, and contradictory. I strove for coherence across the stories however, each of the stories added complexity and historical context to the school closings. They provide what Tamboukou (2011) defines as “portraits of moments” (p. 3). In this context a complete story is not

possible, so they were not analyzed in terms of closure, but as an agential cut in making meaning out of the 'lives of others' (p. 3).

Jade is the only child of one of the most prominent Black families in Farmville. She was the youngest of the women interviewed when schools closed. Like other respondents very early in the interview she expressed the damage sustained in the Black community by the school closings. "The school closings caused some families to separate and migrate to other parts of the country to live with various cultures" (Jade explained that she used 'cultures' to describe Whites). "Black families were basically united with a strong sense of community and how wrong the school closings were.". The dislocation and anxieties confronted in the community affected *all* the children as adults when the issues surrounded race/ethnicity.

Participants, at times, engaged in a synthesis of their past and present. Beryl remembered that her lifelong learning process is a result of "knowing that I always had to be smarter." During a telephone interview with one respondent she recounted how her mother, who only had a fifth grade education, "continuously stressed the importance of getting back to school so she could go to college." She learned very early that the Black women in Farmville would enter a public world where familial intimacies and interpersonal relationships would become interwoven with their pursuit for equal education.

As they recalled the school closings the respondents began to revisit their early childhood education and the experiences of their families. They shared their commitment to 'pulling all of their strengths together'; they believed in the importance of faith and spirituality; and the joy they found in their lives through their lifelong commitment to

learning. We also discussed their views on their adult educational experiences as well as contemporary education; and their views on class and race. Several of the findings of the study indicate that community, for African American women, is fostered through cultural socialization often sororities and female friendships, affirmation individually and culturally, and optimism and faith in God. Several of the participants interviewed also indicated that a combination of spirituality, religious attendance, and a positive outlook served to strengthen their perseverance and provided a level of psychological protection during the upheaval of the school closings. The parents, teachers, and students in Farmville had their lives dislocated for five years as education, social mobility, and talent were suspended in education limbo. African Americans regarded education as the best strategy for racial process but, in 1959 they would experience a new educational norm - no education.

The Black community, beginning with the slave trade, had always understood that Whites had the luxury of knowing that they played the dominant role in any contentious event. Any retelling of the school closings, whether verbal or written, would be told to reinforce their White hegemony. Beneath this communal understanding however, ordinary Black women would construct their own narrative of resistance. Amy Tillerson (2010) writes of a group of Black women who ran four schools in the Prospect district of Prince Edward County; in three of them the women instructed “their students in the same manner that they would have in their own classrooms” (p. 12). She continues that,

Black women in Prince Edward County attempted to sustain their communities by continuing to educate their children while public schools were closed. Black children who did not re-locate for educational opportunities attended schools taught by local Black women in facilities ranging from home basements to grocery store storage rooms. At least one “grassroots school” operated in each magisterial district in Prince Edward

County, in some cases for as long as four years. As early as 1959, women throughout Prince Edward networked to meet the educational needs of their own children and children in their neighborhoods (p. 1)

What follows is a breakdown of respondent schooling behavior before and after the school closings:

Table 2. Respondent Demographics at Time of School Closing/Opening

	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	#8
Age at school closing	10	8	5	11	8	5	9	X
Grade at school closing	4	2	--	6	2	0	5	X
Age at school opening	14	13	10	16	13	10	14	X
Grade at school opening	9	5	3	11	7	4	9	X
Years lost due to school closing	1	3	3	5	0	0	0	X
Number of siblings in HH affected	2	4	1	5	5	1	4	X
Born between 1940-1945								X
Born between 1946-1951	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	X
Where educated during closings	1	1	1	1-2	2	2	1	X

HH=Household

Respondent mean age = 65.5

Mean age at closing = 9.1

Mean age at opening = 12.9

Educated during closing 1 = Elsewhere in Virginia 2 = Mid-Atlantic States

### Race Relations

A commonality among the participant questionnaire responses was the recognition that despite their young age there was a limited understanding that racism was at the heart of the school closings. Sisters Kelly and Ruby indicated that their

parents rarely “discussed the real reasons schools were closed.” However, as adults several respondents had extensive discussions in their families about why schools were closed. Participants also spoke and wrote of their parents, especially their mothers, who helped them find their way and stay focused academically and socially. This particular finding supports ideas from Black feminism that argues that Black families are categorized as places of collective effort and networks (Collier-Thomas, 1984; Hill-Collins, 2000; Hine, 1984).

Amber indicated that she had a grandmother, aunts and cousins who were all very active and vocal during the public school closings. They raised money, protested and picketed segregated businesses, spoke publicly, canvassed locally and regionally for support, and set an example for others in the community. Amber also spoke of an aunt who for two years organized a weekly fish fry. She said, “She was what today we would call a ‘born again Christian’.” “She believed in God above all things and Jesus was her Lord”. Her aunt “helped teach when she could, babysat when she could and prayed everyday schools would reopen.” It was surprising to learn that even as a child she was aware that family members were not impacted because they were not employed in white households. Because of racial consciousness, she knew (“in her gut”) or was made cognizant of the possible repercussions female members may encounter.

Jade was forthright in her opinion on race relations in Farmville. She felt that race for her, and many of those affected by the closings were problematic for them as an adult because of their childhood experiences. This is true whether they stayed in the community or left. As an adult she said “when I entered the work world and found myself

the only minority in the place I began to deal with the issue of racial identity and having to interact with diverse groups forced me to reassess racial consciousness.”

There were times during my interview with Olive when she seemed to interview me as she asked me direct questions “how did I learn about Farmville?” “Did I have family in town?” These instances provided moments where I re-experienced occurrences from my life. I first discovered the story of the school closings in Farmville during a trip to research my family’s maternal history. I decided to take the Greyhound bus from Philadelphia to Farmville. The bus arrived at the gas/bus/taxi station at approximately 11:10 PM. The owner-operator reluctantly called a taxi for me (my northern arrogance required that he provide this “normal” service). I was unconscious of the deference he expected. After combing through court records for family history the next day, I came across an article, misfiled, on the school closings. At this point family history no longer commanded my attention, I found my dissertation topic! Suddenly I remembered my mother collecting books to send south “where children couldn’t go to school.” My parents were civil rights activist, but I thought how much fun they must have every day - nothing but play. My memories combined with the article pushed me to begin asking the Whites that I came in contact with about the school closings. The responses were no responses – silent stares with eyes that glazed over, shrugged shoulders or just pretending that I didn’t ask. Each time I asked a question I could feel the tension rise in those I attempted to talk with.

When asked about the reaction in Farmville today regarding the school closings Olive supported the non-acknowledgement I experienced as still exhibited by many White residents. Olive said, “Whites are not willing to talk about it, like it never



Respondents were also asked questions about family demographics during the closings, and where they were educated. These questions produced additional themes: religious observance began in childhood and continued into adulthood, familial discussions on race, and the necessity for education beyond high school.

Through a series of open ended questions all of the respondents shared a comprehensive perspective on the importance of education in their lives. The school building not only provided an education, it was a theatre of socialization (Goffman, 1959). The teachers and staff at the Black Farmville schools were role models, mentors, advisors, and often surrogate parents. Respondents recounted with sadness, disappointment, and nostalgia that when schools closed their community began the slow process of disorientation. A sense of disconnectedness rose in the community as their sense of belonging and continuity was eroded. Parents, teachers, and children were without one of their fundamental anchors – the school. The school was part of Black community life and within its classrooms students learned what Bonastia (2012) says is the process of “education and freedom each requiring self-activity, each requiring a complex interplay of individual choice and assertion with collective action and interaction” (p. 154). Replying to a question on influences, Olive wrote “my younger sister Kelly was very smart and our mother must have known, I understand now as an adult how she knew, that her daughters had to go to school and there were sacrifices she and my father had to make.” Amber looked to her grandmother for constant words of wisdom and reassurance. She always told me that I “was the smart one and I had to live up to the standard she set for me.” Jade spoke of several women (grandmother, mother, and aunts) who provided her with life insights that as an adult broaden her perspectives.

Of the many gifts she received from the women in her life the greatest she says was “curiosity.”

Jade was one of the original plaintiffs in the 1964 lawsuit *Griffin vs School Board of Prince Edward County*. The ruling in favor of Prince Edward County was that the county must allocate tax monies to operate public schools (Bonastia, 2012). “It was during that time that I was taught that I was equal to anyone. No race is better than the other.” Today in Farmville she said “it’s heartbreaking to talk to those who didn’t get a chance to go to school for all those years. Some of the people can’t articulate themselves very well and are ashamed that they didn’t get an education. They were offered scholarship to go to college and some returned to school in their late 50s and some refused because of their age. They were too old to sit in classrooms with 20 year olds they felt – they were kids.”

Olive’s parents insisted, encouraged, and sacrificed to provide college educations for their children. She and her three brothers were commuter students at Howard University, an older sister was at Spelman. Her Mother had dreams that her daughters would attend a prestigious northern college. “We lived in this small town about 30 miles from Farmville – Darlington Heights. My Mother got it into her head that she wanted us to go north for college and she had her heart set on Vassar. I don’t know how she thought she could pay for it but she wanted it for us. We were farmers’ kids and my father barely could eke out a living for us. We could not understand as little kids how she had such high education aspirations.”

The following table represents the participants educational attainment:

Table 4. Respondent Educational Attainment

	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	#8
High School	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Bachelor's Degree		1	1		1	1	1	1
Master's Degree		1	1		1			
PhD		1	1		1			
Other		1		1				

The families of these women all had high expectations and nothing and no one was to stand in their way of success.

### *Family*

The participants in this study responded to questions regarding immediate and extended families, and their church communities that provided nurturing and support during the school closings. Olive spoke of the importance of self-respect in the face of adversity. She said, “we were taught to be respectful to all adults, it didn’t matter who they were.” Kelly spoke lovingly of her family and how close they were, their visits to extended family and how visits to her grandparents were the highlight of her week. Jade explained that her parents “made sure that we read magazines especially National Geographic” and she laughs at how they would “pile up.”

The development of resilience among these women, regardless of their familial or community status, grew out of their everyday lives. Amber understood through her extended female family the importance of Black female teachers who played a critical

role in the formation of solid, intact racial identity in Farmville's Black children. However, Amber saw how "people of my race were rejected" and the fact that their identity was shaped before schools were closed was a buffer to the discrimination that spilled into their daily educational life, but "was an issue she was too young to understand." There was an atmosphere of pride and "value in their rich heritage." One of the most powerful takeaways from Amber was her belief that what happened in her community "had a tremendous impact on education and lifelong learning in my life."

Jade was 5 years old when schools closed in 1959. Her parents could afford to send her outside the county. She live with extended family during the week from 1960-1963, grades 1 through 3, coming home to her parents on the weekends. She explained that "her parents weren't pressured, they voluntarily participated" in the education struggles. When prompted to talk about the women in her family and their participation in Farmville, she said that they "communicated the concerns of those affected by the school closings and were able to set an example for others in the community." She was also exposed to teacher who taught in church schools during the closings.

Her family attended "First Baptist Church under the leadership of Rev. L. Francis Griffin, who led the community's struggle to open schools. First Baptist was the main location used for public meetings concerning the school situation. My father and Rev. Griffin were close friends, there were a lot of meetings/discussions at my home."

Olive is the oldest of those interviewed, she is 76. She graduated from high school in 1955, four years before the schools were closed. She and her family (her parents and three brothers) moved from Farmville to Washington, D. C., where her mother worked and her father, worked odd jobs around the City. When asked who had

the most influence in her young life she said “my paternal grandmother. Before we all moved to Washington, my mother worked there during the week and came home on the weekends, we lived with my grandmother during the week. She was spiritual and I believe she passed on those values. Whenever I had a problem I talked it over with her, she always encouraged me to do my best. Both my mother and grandmother were adamant about our education. Moving to Washington meant that I could go to Howard. I was a commuter student but I really wanted to live on campus like all my friends but we couldn’t afford it. It’s my only regret that I couldn’t live on campus. When my sister went to an HBCU, my aunt helped pay her tuition, room and board that’s how she was able to go away.”

Beryl is a 65 year old recently retired Federal Government employee who currently resides in Farmville. She was a 10 year old 4<sup>th</sup> grader when schools closed in 1959, and a 14 year old 8<sup>th</sup> grader when they reopened in 1963. She and her younger brother lived with extended family and were educated outside Prince Edward County during the closings. She is reluctant to discuss the how, who, or the circumstances around her being outside the county. She is more forthcoming about how the school closings separated families causing them to break up and some “not able to recover. Black families were a unit and loved their community.” The children were affected by the school closing in one of three ways she says: “they stayed in the county with no formal education; they left the county and returned in 1963; or they left the county and never returned at all. This destroyed us.”

The women Beryl came in contact with in Farmville, whether family or extended, were active in the education movement. While she was too young to have an active role

in community events, the women that surrounded her organized and coordinated community events and were behavior examples for other women. Because they were economically middle class in 1959 (she admits that maybe this was a rarity among Southern Black families) her parents did not fear repercussions in their participation. Their social class status afforded them a certain protection.

### *Community*

As adults, several women agreed that their decision not to return to Farmville was based in part “due to the school closings” (Amber, Jade) and “the sense of community that was shattered...as families were separated and people left (Beryl).” Joan Johns Cobbs (younger sister of strike organizer Barbara Johns) in a PBS interview<sup>13</sup> recalled that the “Black community as a whole was severely weakened by the instability brought on by the closings because those who could leave town did so. She continued:

The family would reunite in the town during the Christmas holidays. We would have a regular kind of Christmas and everything. But, in fact, we were like a fugitive class... When you went back to the town, it was really like a town that had been hit by a neutron bomb. Everything was standing but nothing was going on. The intellectual infrastructure, the whole educational infrastructure...was sort of vacuumed out of the town...For all intents and purposes, black Farmville died you know, during this time.

As children several of the participants had a wide array of friendships through school and religious clubs and did not have to distinguish between peers because of differences in beliefs, values, or geography. Beryl lived on a small family farm while sisters Kelly and Ruby within the city boundary yet they were ‘best friends’. Most of the families monitored their friendships and playmates and their community group activities often mirrored their familial beliefs, values, and mores. This study underscores the

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<sup>13</sup> Interview in *The Rise and Fall of Jim Crow* air date October 13, 2009.

importance of exploring Black women's perceptions of their individual and collective experiences within scholarly discourse.

Table 5. Respondent Adult Participation Behavior

	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	#8
Cultural/Educational	1	4	1	1	2	2	4	1
Mentoring	2	3	2	2	1	2	4	2
Senior/Health Care	1	2	2	2	2	2	4	2
Civil Rights	1	2	2	1	1	3	4	2
Church organizer/participant	2	2	3	4		1	4	3
Non-profit fundraising	3	4	4	3		1	4	3

1-Chair

2-Volunteer

3-Yes

4-No

Amber spoke candidly about Farmville. “Although I was too young at the time, after reaching adulthood, I chose not to reside in Farmville, mostly due to the school closings.”

Despite having family that remained in Farmville, she felt no compunction to return. Her first return, for only a short visit, was in the late 1990s for a class reunion. Amber is 60ish (she decline to identify the exact year - with a laugh ‘look it up’) year old attorney who currently resides outside of Philadelphia. She comes from a family of educated, self-employed men and women who were active not only in their churches, but in the community. When asked if there was a sense of racial consciousness among the females in her family, she responded forcefully that “we knew we had to be the best at whatever

we chose to do because just being Black, we were expected to fail. Our lives and our safety depended upon us being aware of racial difference.”

Amber’s parents owned their own business and their financial independence allowed them to homeschool her and her four brothers during the school closings. By the time schools reopened in 1963, her parents moved from Farmville, Va., to Philadelphia, Pa., where from grades 6 through 12 she was educated in the Philadelphia School System. She believed her parents did this because they were invested in their children’s future. The move however, created a sense of loss and disconnectedness from family, and their church community. “Many professional Blacks moved due to closing of public schools...the economic dimension of this tragedy impacted the town and businesses. The sense of community was shattered. Families were separated and people left and never returned.”

Beryl indicated that she had a grandmother, aunts, and cousins who were all very active and vocal in the community during the public school closings. They raised money, protested and picketed segregated businesses, spoke publicly, canvassed locally and regionally for support, and set an example for others in the community. It was surprising to learn that even as a child she was aware that family members were impacted if they were employed in White households. Because of racial consciousness, she knew (“in her gut”) or was made cognizant of the possible repercussions female members may encounter in the White community.

For Jade the childhood experiences of a fractured community created a lifelong commitment to both church and the African American community. As an adult she is a

lifelong member of the NAACP, contributes regularly to the United Negro College Fund, and is a member of one of the most prestigious Black female sororities. She volunteers in her church and in the community mentoring young women and conducting various educational and cultural programs. She has organized events, chaired committees, and helped in fundraising. Like the other women interviewed Jade exhibits the same air of melancholy when discussing the school closings; she is not openly bitter but there is a sense that at any moment a torrent of emotions could come tumbling out of her. She is quiet in her demeanor but energetic when she discusses the school closings.

### ***Religion***

As adults, several of the participants responded to questions regarding their religious attendance and involvement in church activities. They attributed their continued faith as part of what Beryl said was her “forgiveness process.” Beryl explained that her strength and motivation as a young girl came from a Higher Power. She asserts that with God and her family she was able to “quiet her fears.” Kelly shared that the support and strength she received from her mother, as well as the spiritual strength she developed as a child, was following the example of her older brothers and sister. Coral, despite having only a high school diploma and not being as articulate as other respondents, was an optimist and radiated a personal strength and commitment to improve herself “no matter how long it takes.” All of the women remembered Sunday as a day dedicated to spirituality and thanksgiving.

From the questionnaires, I learned that there is a strong interconnectedness between adult African American women’s participation in church and community. The foundations of these connections are particularly important for young African American

girls who, during their developmental years, are often able to experience their female elders in positions that emphasize their cultural values, the development of broad social support networks, flexible family roles, strong kinship bonds, positive group identity, and a high level of psychological and emotional hardiness (Harvey & Hill, 2004; Mattis, 2004; Miller, 1999; Nobles, 2004). Religious participation follows:

Table 6. Respondents Church Attendance Childhood/Adult and Religious Affiliation

	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	#8
Church attendance as a child	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1
Church attendance as an adult	1	3	1	1	2	1	3	1
Religious affiliation	B	B	B	C	C	B	E	B

1-Weekly

2-Monthly

3-Occasionally

Religious affiliation B=Baptist C=Catholic E=Episcopal

Through the lens of womanism informed by social movement theory I was able to view the experiences of these participants by listening, recording and learning as I analyzed portions of their lives. While these women had similar experiences growing up, their experiences cannot be categorized into neat groups to explore the larger issues of education, identity, community, and religion. Connections are full of complexities. Black families and Black churches encouraged values and beliefs that fostered and nurtured success while maintaining connections with the Black community. Social class, which had not been a particular issue in Farmville's Black community prior to the school closings, became one as access to continued schooling from 1959 to 1963 often depended on one's parents or family position to move out of the county or state. The research also

found that the respondents held strong faith in their abilities and were determined to succeed. They credited family and church for their strength. This strong faith in self and a Higher Power supported and sustained these women as they confronted issues as children in new schools, finding new friends, and for a few being uprooted from their community.

### **Loss**

The purpose of this section is to examine the unforeseen theme of loss as it pertains to: community, religion, education and the sub-theme of identity. During discussions with respondents what emerged was a deep sense of loss. To more fully understand this sense of loss each area will be examined through its lens. As respondents began to articulate the profound sense of resentment and disaffection they experienced as the strength of the Black community began to erode, as religious attendance assumed a political posture, as identity (family, community, religious) came into question, and as family interconnectedness frayed under the weight of the school closings, it became clear that loss was a critical and unanticipated finding.

#### ***Identity and loss***

There is an African proverb that says, “I am because we are, and, because we are, therefore, I am.” This proverb underscores the findings of this study that not only was flexibility for African American women fashioned through familial, community, and religious associations, it is also how areas of identity were constructed, the “*I am because we are.*” Another aspect of this perspective is that one's identity is tied to a body larger than the self. It was this larger body that established identity in this community of women. As women in the Black community of Farmville recognized their embryonic

abilities, they also began to understand that their participation was fluid, non-static, and multifaceted. All of the respondents agreed that while commitment was vital to sustaining the movement and that spirituality strengthened their perseverance, it was the profound sense of loss of community cohesion and community identity that had the most lasting impact.

Among the participants there was the recognition of racism and how it played out across the development of their young lives. All but one of the respondents spoke candidly, emotionally, and profoundly about the childhood trauma racism inflicts on African American children. Beryl wondered “what are the effects of racism on Whites? Doesn’t it hurt to have so much hate?” These women, as children, watch the women in their lives encounter racism and they would eventually developed an understanding of how it was writ large across an entire education system. As the women in their lives displayed their developing leadership abilities, as they confronted the oppressiveness of a education system that did not serve their children, as they lived with a superior form of “managed race relations” (Bonastia, 2012, p. 16) they demonstrated what Hill-Collins (2000) described as the “ongoing interplay between Black women’s oppression and activism” (p. 290). However, these respondents, as young girls, were learning to live without the consistent support of family, community, and church. Several of the respondents (Jade, Amber and Beryl) agreed that they did not want to “idealize” their racially segregated community. After fifty years they were each able to identify a specific incident from their childhood that created a lasting bitter memory. However, they were equally protective of the feelings of nurturing and of knowing who they were in the community that became sporadic the longer schools remained closed.

Amber spoke of the pride she felt when she “sat in class and got the answers right.” She attributed this to the constant reinforcement she received in her classroom, at her church, and in her community. Black women’s identity historically has been analyzed from a problematic framework (Bell Scott 1997), but the young girls in Farmville developed in opposition to this analysis. The women in their lives may have been unaware that the scholarly literature was beginning to examine the interconnectedness of race, class, and gender that would for generations determine their status in United States society as subordinate. Respondents agreed that they were provided a protective solidarity with their peers and that they were instilled with a sense of racial pride. Pheterson (1989) defines both pride and solidarity in relationship to identity. Pride is the “self-acceptance and self-respect in particular, respect for one’s identity, one’s heritage, and one’s right to self-determination” (p. 148), while solidarity is “knowledge of, respect for, and unity with persons whose identifies are in certain essential ways common with one’s own (p. 149).

Seven out of the eight respondents had mothers, aunts, female cousins, and extended female family whose education generally ended between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade. As this group of women came of age their world and their identities were redefined from a perspective of resistance to oppression and they developed creative methods of expanding the parameters of old gender and racial struggles. The respondent’s generation of Black women would refuse to be silent as they become role models, mentors, and community activist like their mothers and foremothers.

The families of the respondents were an essential part of the matrix of identity formation. With a historic pattern developed during slavery, the African American

family was influenced by African institutions, the slave experience, and the political, social, economic, and cultural conditions that were part of being of African descent in the United States. The Farmville extended family functioned as an institution of education and detailed what the social and community behaviors of its members should be.

The women in Farmville did whatever was necessary to insure that the movement for education equality was sustained and supported. The mothers of the women in this study also were champions who were self-aware and self-disciplined in protecting their children's rights to continue their education. As adults these women had an appreciation for the personal sacrifice (family, loss of identity, silence) engendered by the women in their lives. While this dissertation was able to discern resilience and how it developed in this rural southern community, it was the unanticipated discovery of loss that captured my attention.

### *Education and loss*

There was an understanding and appreciation among the respondents that despite schools in PEC possessing meager resources and inadequate physical facilities there was a cohesiveness that could not be duplicated or replaced. The school family existed prior to the school closings and was held together by extraordinary teachers who guided their students toward academic excellence. Teachers were mentors who directed academic lives and instilled in their students a lifelong love of learning. One respondent became a teacher, "because of a teacher." Black teachers were the lynchpins between school, family, and community. They were men and women who taught their students to be productive citizens, inspired them to develop an imperative to uplift the Black community as they rose, and provided the core influence for social justice. Teachers were important and respected people within the Black community and the loss of their

daily contact, when schools closed in PEC, left a tremendous void in the educational life of the community.

The *Brown* decision would create great optimism and possibility in many Black southern communities, but the inevitability of the unknown effects of desegregation loomed. Banks (2007) argues that Black students were handicapped because despite their teachers being dedicated to their success there were few if any efforts to prepare “students to function within a desegregated society” (p. 39). He maintains the *Brown* decision had no real world meaning in rural communities in the isolated South until Black residents organized and took on the White education power structure.

All of the respondents, as adults, understood that they became the visible representation of educational injustice in America. The Black community placed a moral value of fairness as the base principle for educating their children. However, the decision to confront the effects of a morally bankrupt segregated education system in Farmville had unintended consequences, the most devastating of which was the fragmentation that took place in the Black educational community. Families who were forced to make education decisions for their children naturally behaved differently. Bonastia (2012) writes that “it was not unusual for some children to live away from home to continue their education while one or more of their siblings remained at home out of school” (p. 192). While this was not the experience of these respondents, it was a characteristic in many Farmville homes.

To comprehend the sense of education, community, and familial loss The Faith and Politics Institute conducted a Congressional Pilgrimage to Farmville, Virginia, in 2002. It was attended by Senator George Allen (R. VA), Rep. John Lewis (D. Ga.), Rep.

Bobby Scott (D. Va.), Rep. Tom Allen (D. Me), Rep. Virgil Goode (R. Va.) and Governor Tim Kaine (D. VA.). During the conference sisters Joan Dungee Hawkins and Hettie Hawkins recalled their experiences during the school closings. Hettie said,

“They told us we were no longer welcome in a town where my parents had worked and paid taxes. I will never forgive the state of Virginia, I will never forgive the federal government for waiting five years to put their foot down. It tore our family wide apart. I don’t think we ever recovered from that. Prince Edward threw us away! (Congressional Pilgrimage)

And Joan remembered that in the first year she received sporadic instruction at makeshift Schools set up in PEC. The next year, she was snuck into school in an adjacent county. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> year their parents were forced to sell their home in PEC to move to New Jersey while Joan (her sister Hettie) and three brothers were sent to live with relatives in Baltimore. “It was devastating our parents were hundreds of miles away. I forgave because God told us we had to forgive. But, one of these days they’re going to have to come to apologize to us if they want to be right in their hearts.” And Joan Johns Cobb, younger sister of Barbara Johns spoke of healing. “If we are going to portray the history of Farmville, we need to tell the stories of the deep hurt and pain we have felt over the years. We may be able to forgive, but we will never forget.”

While this dissertation sought to determine whether resilience developed organically in Farmville or whether or not there were inherent characteristics among the African American women that informed their participatory activities, what ultimately materialized and what unexpectedly emerged was the extraordinary pain that has lingered for fifty years.

### *Community and loss*

Family was extremely important to all the participants. They each spoke of their parents, especially their mothers, who helped them find their path, and helped them stay focused academically and personally on their goals. One respondent credited *both* her mother and grandmother's guidance in her academic and spiritual life. Her grandmother provided her with the strength to question her surroundings and to not sit quietly in the light of injustice. All of the women attributed their strength in the face of oppression to the women in their childhood. The support of family permeated home, education, and community associations across the Farmville landscape. The women in these systems would not only exercise resilience across these varied environments, they recognized the importance of family support across the systems. The significance of family is supported in the literature on the Black family (Franklin & Wilson, 1997; Hall, 1999; Staples, 1999) that categorizes these institutions as sites of collective efforts, supports, and actions.

From the narratives there was a strong interconnection between the African American family, community, and spirituality particularly as females develop within systems of oppression. Hill-Collins (2000) found that "Black communities as places of collective effort (with) more fluid boundaries characterizing the relationships among households, Black family networks, and Black community organizations such as Black churches" (p. 53). The participants in this study shared stories where their immediate family, extended family, and community attempted to foster continuous support during the school closings.

When asked about their homes, respondents believed that their home environments were constructed in such a way that their permanence was unassailable.

All of the participants discussed how their families maintained structured home environments and being in their friend's home "was just like being at home." Their friends were family, sisters, brothers, cousins and they were expected to conform to certain behavioral models. Each of the respondents recalled the influence of their family, church, and friends in teaching them who they were. According to Whaley (1993) "the individual's sense of self is shaped by the perceptions of significant others in their social world" (p. 408), the school closings would tear a hole in the security of these young lives. However, as women they would become vocal in their repudiation of the white community's behavior during the school closings. Beryl again questioned "how is it possible to live with such hate?"

There was a commonality among the women whose families sent them outside PEC to continue their education during the school closings. The women, who were between 6 and 10 years old when they left the security of family, school and community, were unanimous in their expressions of sadness and the sense of isolation they experienced in the absence of consistent reassurances in their young lives. As intact Black families were forced to make decisions about how to continue educating their children, the psychological damage of community disintegration was taking root.

Part of what was critically important in the educational life of the families in Farmville was the knowledge that education opened the door to upward mobility. There were family expectations of academic excellence, success in school meant success in life. McAdoo (1978) suggests that lacking wealth, the greatest gift a Black family could give to its children was the motivation to succeed in school. For many mothers in Farmville academic success meant their children, particularly their daughters, would have lives

different from their own. College attendance and professional occupations were goals among the parents in Farmville. Out of the eight respondents – six obtained a college degree and two had advanced degrees. Entire families, both immediate and extended, were willing to make sacrifices to provide support for academic success. Beryl's sister was able to remain in college hundreds of miles from Farmville because a favorite "Auntie" gave her parents the necessary funds to transportation, room and board.

As families confronted the difficult choices about the educational lives of their children, they did so under the weight of losing the essential components in their community-the school, its infrastructure, and community cohesion. One very poignant story of how the closings affected a young life is recounted by Theresa Clark, who today is an Assistant Professor of Social Work at Longwood College in Farmville. Ms. Clark remembers being "spirited into neighboring Lunenburg County-30 miles away-by teachers, her mother's friends, and for a time, a group of men traveling to their jobs at a lumber mill" (p. 1). She was almost caught one day when her second grade teacher asked each student to verify their home address. At only seven years old she gave the address she knew, it was not in the county. The teacher's response was that she should verify that address with her mother. Ms. Clark recalls that "it was at that moment, in essence, *that I really was taught to lie*" (p. 2).

Each of the participants in this study was a young girl who had dual experiences. They watched the women in their lives develop the skills required to confront a segregated education system while simultaneously experiencing the incomprehensible loss in their community, familial, and education structures. However, their pride in their academic success was tinged with resentment at the positions they were placed in as

children. “Who had to make these kinds of decisions about their kids” Jade said. Amber said “all I wanted was to go to school.” The literature (Hill-Collins, 2000; McAdoo, 1978) confirms the importance of education in the lives of Black women, but these women had been caught in a political, legal and racial quagmire. Talking with these women fifty years after their experiences there are traces of bitterness, anger and, most understandable, the sense of what they were deprived of during the school closings.

When we think of loss it is generally in relationship to the physical absence of someone. Rarely do we consider the intangible components of community and ecclesiastical spaces. As people in a modern society we rarely if ever, mourn the loss of community as we do people. The Black community understood that *Brown v Board of Education* meant that their children would attend school with White children. What they did not calculate or anticipate was that the quest for education parity would also mean sacrificing their community and that their families would suffer under the weight of the school closings.

### ***Religion and loss***

What a friend we have in Jesus  
 All our sins and griefs to hear  
 What a privilege to carry  
 Everything to God in prayer<sup>14</sup>

In the African American community the validity of the Black Church has gone unchallenged for generations. Its strength has rested on its ability to meet the demands made of it as an institution of social prominence. Despite cultural and socioeconomic systems that consistently defined the Black community as dysfunctional, the Black church was instrumental in constructing alternative narratives of Black possibilities. The

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<sup>14</sup> Words to the spiritual by John Scriven, 1855, music by Charles Converse 1868.

development of the church in the Black community Wingfield (1988) argues can be interpreted as meaning that the Black community is “one of the most, if not the most, religiously dedicated populations of the America society (p. 128).”

All of the women were regular church attendees as children and this habit continued into adulthood. While their religious affiliation may have changed (one from Catholic to Baptist; another from Baptist to Catholic; and another from Episcopalian to Baptist), religiosity was a main component in their families lives. The Black women in Farmville whether Catholic, Baptist, Methodist or any other denomination shared the traditional values of religion as defined by Mattis and Jager (2001) which is “a shared system of beliefs, mythology and rituals associated with god or gods’ (p. 522).

Baker (2006) writes that the “African American women’s spiritual base provides internal skills to adapt to changes and situations that occur in life.”(p. 186). Bridgforth (2000) argues that religious faith was largely responsible for our ancestors’ ability to sustain themselves through the many atrocities of our cultural history” (p. 54). Among the women interviewed there was a consensus that this initial foundation for religious and spiritual life was established in the Black family. It was in the families of these women that they first learned their religious values. Mattis and Jager (2001) posit that linkages can also be seen in the language of the Black community who “thrives on such aphorism as the family that prays together stays together” and reference to their ‘church family’ (p. 529). The churches in Farmville provided a sense of connectedness to extended family, neighbors, peers, and others who were concerned with the school closings. These real or perceived connections to others, particularly to the church, have been shown to enhance the well-being of children as they grow into adolescence (Mattis & Jager, 2001).

As the school closings lingered from year to year (the community clung to the hope that each year would be the last) several of the women mentioned the changes in their religious community norms as they were exposed to people from different backgrounds. There were religious differences (Quakers and Jews), social class differences (upper and middle class); geographic differences (North, East and Western). These differences were drawn to Farmville's religious spaces to support the community during the school closings. One of the more interesting revelations from the respondents was their ability to realize that they were able to observe and practice as children the relational values that were important links between their religious community and their family life. Across their young lives they were able observe and to put into practice the resilience patterns they were being taught in the community and through their religious beliefs.

During the school closings many of the Black churches in Farmville were not only places of worship, they became the conscience of the protest movement. There is agreement that religious concepts, values, and structures impact the believer's view of the world and his/her activity in it (Mattis & Jager, 2001; Peck, 1982; Wingfield, 1988). The political activities and their importance in the southern Black church cannot be overestimated. The church, particularly the Baptist church, had a history of responding not only to the religious needs of the community, but also to the educational, social, and economic concerns that were inherent in African American communities in the South. As churches became the nexus of political protest for Black people, it adhered to the functions of religion as outlined by Houf (1945). He maintained that religion helped to negotiate during times of crises; portrayed the nature of existing problems; assist in

gaining mastery over oneself; shaped individual and group life; and supported sound moral values. In Farmville, central to the linkages between religiosity, church, and children were the women of Farmville. Among the families in Farmville faith was an integral part of maintaining the collective sanity of those affected by the school closings. As the church became the central political institution for Black people, it allowed families and the community at large opportunities for self-expression. Church and religion filled the lives of this community with what Yasso (2005) defines as:

aspirational capital the ability to maintain hope and dreams for the future even in the face of real and perceived barriers. This resiliency is evidenced in those who allow themselves and their children to dream of possibilities beyond their present circumstances” (p. 72)

The Black churches in Farmville provided refuge for the Black community in a town becoming more and more hostile as the school closings dragged from year to year. In this environment it was essential the church community was not seen as an entity separate from the community at large. In these spaces women would hone their abilities to organize, to provide education outlets for their children, and to maintain a sense, no matter how fragile, of continuity in their community, and their children were witness.

**Don't cry because it's over.  
Smile because it happened.  
Anonymous**

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCLUSION**

#### Introduction

Farmville, Virginia, 2015 is a small, quiet, neat, well-kept little town just this side of quaint. As you walk down Main Street, stop for your latte at Starbucks before you continue to Green Front the large furniture outlet, linger with friends at one of the outdoor cafes with a biscotti, scone, or sweet roll, people watch, or browse in one of the handicraft or fine arts shops. In this country town, which has a population that is 72% White, 23% African American, and 2% Hispanic (United States 2010 Census) you have access to two colleges who sponsor plays and concerts and in summer co-sponsor the annual summer festival which draws crowds from miles around. In Farmville today there are few reminders of the decade long struggle for education parity that took place here.

This study was born out of a need to more fully understand what happened in Farmville. Why were the schools closed in 1959? Who was responsible? What did the children do? What did they think? Where did they go to school? How did parents react? Considering the wide range of subject matter to investigate I narrowed and shaped my focus to examine the lives of African American women in Farmville, Virginia. It became necessary to constrict even further the parameters of my research and the decision was made to flesh out the notion of resilience in ordinary African American women in a community under pressure, to examine their epistemologies, and the impact of the closings on the individual, family, and community. What evolved was a project to

reconstruct community, religions, family and education intersect in the lives of African American women in the rural South. Given the restrictions of custom, geography, social class, and gender, the research sought to examine Black women's perception of how identity, community, education, and religion encouraged and promoted resilience.

Consequently, the overriding purpose of this study was to examine the emergence of resiliency patterns among the African American women in Farmville, Virginia from 1951-1963. To accomplish this goal it was necessary to establish some prerequisite goals: determine how resilience develops in African American women; determine what resiliency means and how it developed in relationship to Black women in their community, how it assisted in identity construction, how it defined their religious participation, and how they prioritize the educational aspirations of their children. Using these goals it was possible to answer the research questions with some adequacy. It was also possible to corroborate and support previous research on adaptability and resilience (Barnett, 1993; Bobo, 1995; Ellis 1991; Gomez-Harvell, 202; Miles-Turner, 2004) among African American women and how community, kinship, religion, and identity independently and jointly act as support beams. This chapter reports the conclusions and recommendations that resulted from that study.

In narrative form this dissertation argues that the struggles for empowerment, analyzed through a womanist perspective, allowed the conscious agency of the African American female voice to materialize. Through a thorough engagement with the literature and using that to anchor the voices of the women interviewed, a portrait developed of how opposition manifests itself in a community under pressure. This perspective illuminates the resiliency, courage, dignity, and strength developed by the Black women

in Farmville. While they were often challenged by White community and political leaders and African American men both in their homes and in their churches because of race and gender, these women “pushed onward from the margins and skillfully use the space created” (Fry, 2010, p. 268) to argue for education rights.

Throughout the South there was an entrenched, well-oiled segregation engine primed to pull Virginia back into the past. Bartley (1969) maintains that by mid-century the Southern states represented the sociological concept of “cultural lagging” – it was well behind the rest of the nation in industry, civil rights, and education. Racial issues, especially in the realm of education, dominated the southern United States as they had not done for half a century. Hohl (1993) maintains that words like States rights, racism, sacred duty, prejudice, honorable fight, and interposition, separate but equal, and massive resistance would be used to confine Virginia to her past.

In Farmville, and across many Southern states, any change in the overall segregated education system would necessitate a redesign of the fixed caste system. The southern system continually assaulted African American men, women, and children with their inadequacy. In Farmville despite the *Brown* decision, the African American community was not expected to protest the continued insufficiencies in their children’s education.

There was little acknowledgement among the Whites in Farmville that there were huge cracks in the systems established over three centuries of slavery, segregation, and Jim Crow. There was little evidence to suggest to them that there would ever be any institutional, social, or political breakdown. Segregation was an intrinsic and intimate part of Virginian society dating as far back as Jamestown. Farmvillians, Black and White,

would be given a new reality through the legal actions that resulted from both the school walkout in 1951, and the school closings in 1959. The struggle for education justice would transform many of the lives of the African American women in Farmville as they rebelled against the southern education system.

A new stage was set and the opportunity to commit to a cause came alive in the lives of Black women. To the fight for educational justice, they would bring a “holistic” approach to their lived experiences (Hill-Collins, 1990; hooks, 1981). Their commitments did not take place in a vacuum. Many of the Black women in Farmville were armed with astonishing strength from religion, family, kinships, and community which would give rise to social consciousness as they gained voice in confronting the issues of education, gender, hierarchy, and race (Robnett, 1996). This gift of consciousness was passed on to daughters who would commit as adults to education, religiosity, and community service.

### **Implications for future research**

Resilience is experiential and this concept creates one of many pathways for future studies in Farmville. Scholars might examine the female children of the women in this study. Further investigation would provide generational information on identity, religious activity, community affiliations, and the educational aspirations of women affected by this historic event.

This project provided a critique of the literature on African American women’s roles in social movements, religion, education, and in their communities. The literature highlighted that, as in previous research, the women in this study were multifaceted and frequently described as persons of strength, respectability, and independence. Like their

predecessors, the women of Farmville were seen as capable leaders in the families, in their churches, despite habitually being underestimated by men, and in their community where their counsel was sought. However, one of the limitations of past research, across the fields, is the lack of studies that look at the essential nature of ordinary women who use resilience as a strategy. This opening produced one of the most unforeseen results of this research, the embedded culturally based belief that African American women have in their ability to lead. This belief stems from women who see commitment (without calling it out) in the women in their community.

While this gap in the literature is slowly closing, part of what remains under-examined is how these women, and frequently girls, formed their commitments, established their resolve to engage in education liberation, and develop skills that would sustain the movement.

The lives of this particular group of ordinary women have not been thoroughly examined against the *why* of their commitments. What we know is that the education crises in Farmville produced women who were able to cross boundaries between the public life of their struggle and the private spheres of adherents and potential constituents. This work aims to expand the research environment to include the women we do not know, while building on a solid intellectual tradition. The women I interviewed in Farmville are linked by traumatic childhood experiences, being locked out of school, being educated outside their home community, and being behind when school reopened. However, those experiences did not retard their almost reverential belief in and understanding of the power of education to transform.

A few of the stories the women told I will carry with me. Beryl who left Farmville but began college a year late persisted until she caught up, graduating with honors. Olive's optimism that she credits to her Christian beliefs; Amber's unfailing faith in education and the reason she became a schoolteacher; and while Jade's bitterness is just below the surface of her conversations, she possesses an infectious sense of humor that made us both laugh. These women, their mothers and grandmothers were in their homes, churches, and community not only instrumental in propelling the grassroots movement forward for education parity, they were then and now the life blood of the female community in Farmville.

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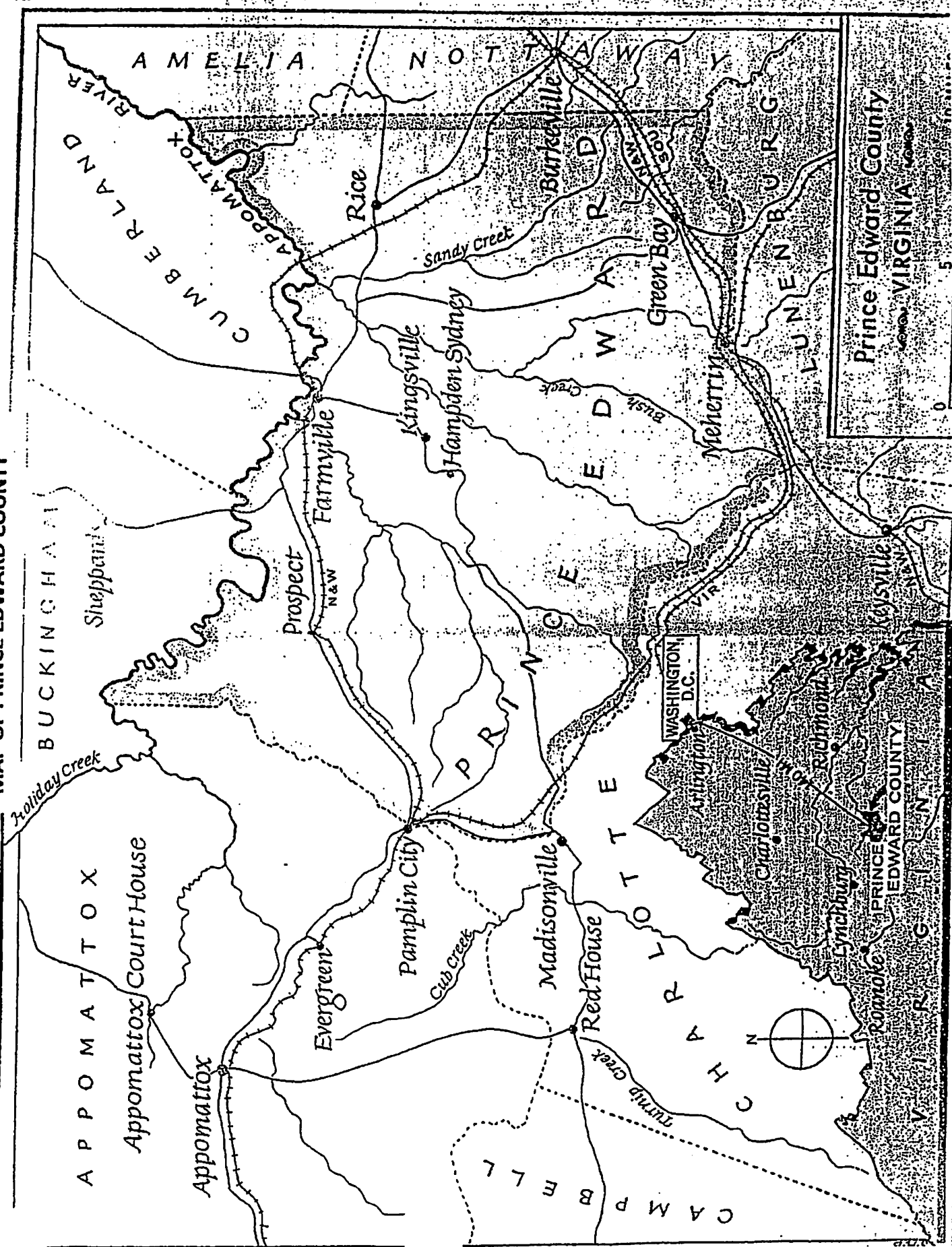
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APPENDIX A  
MAP OF PRINCE EDWARD COUNTY

MAP OF PRINCE EDWARD COUNTY



Prince Edward County  
VIRGINIA

0 5

## APPENDIX B

AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILDREN ENTERING THE FREE SCHOOL  
AT THE MARY E. BRANCH SCHOOL, S. MAIN STREET AND GRIFFIN  
BOULEVARD, FARMVILLE, PRINCE EDWARD COUNTY, VIRGINIA  
AND COSENT LETTER

African American children entering the Free School at the Mary E. Branch School, S. Main Street and Griffin Boulevard, Farmville, Prince Edward County, Virginia





July 1, 2013

Alicia Pennington  
337 E. Sharpnack Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19119

Dear Alicia Pennington:

Thank you for your request to reprint the "Prince Edward County" map from BOUND FOR FREEDOM by Neil V. Sullivan, Thomas L. Maynard and Carol L. Yellin

Little, Brown and Company has no objection to your using this material in the manner you have described in your letter to us dated June 10, 2013, not to be reprinted, sold or profited from. We would, however, appreciate credit being given to our author, book title, and Little, Brown & Company as publisher.

We appreciate your interest in our book. Please let us know if you have any further questions.

Sincerely,

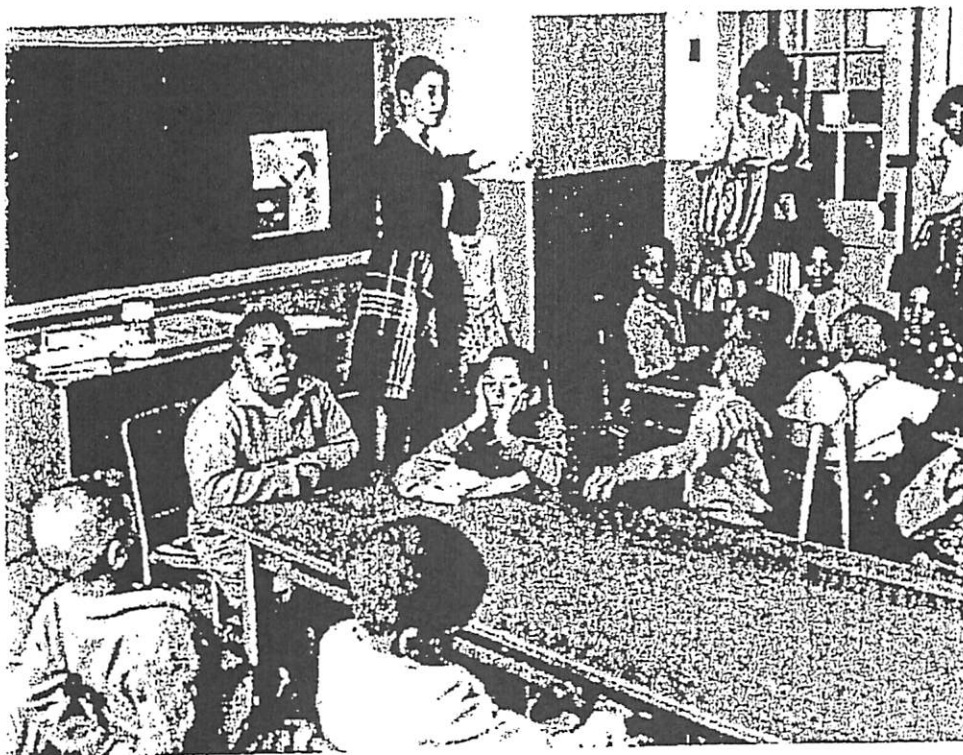
A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Meghan Tillet'.

Meghan Tillet  
Permissions Department

APPENDIX C  
PRINCE EDWARD FREE SCHOOL

## Free School Class Room


 ENCYCLOPEDIA  
 VIRGINIA  
PUBLISHED BY UV



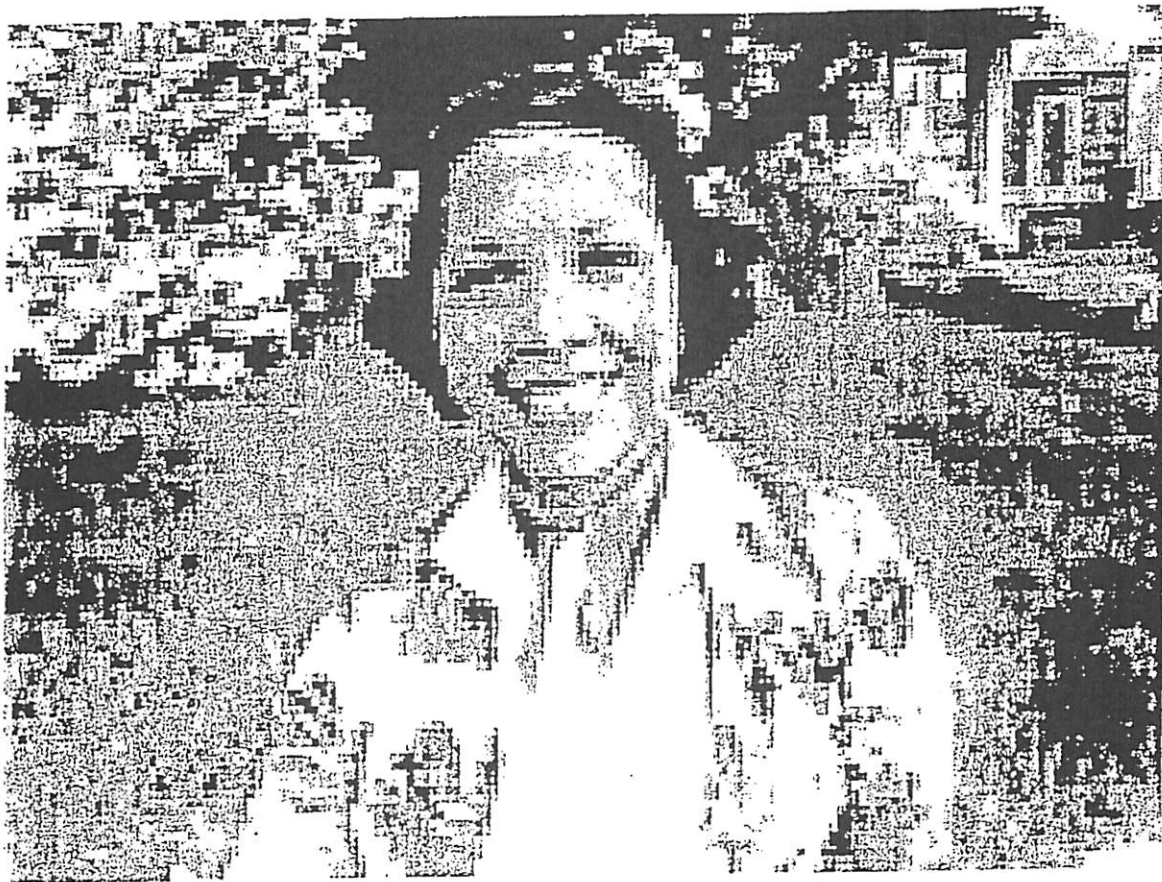
7 »

## Prince Edward Free School

While Virginia ended its statewide policy of Massive Resistance to school desegregation in 1959, school officials in Prince Edward County chose to close schools instead of integrate. While white students quickly moved into Prince Edward Academy—a new private school supported by state-approved tuition grants and donations from ardent segregationists—black students were left without any educational facilities. In 1963, nearly 2,000 black students of Prince Edward County were invited to return to formal classes

APPENDIX D  
PHOTOGRAPH OF 16 YEAR OLD BARBARA JOHNS  
AND CONSENT LETTER

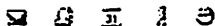
PHOTOGRAPH OF 16 YEAR OLD BARBARA JOHNS



Search Mail

Search Web

panniwes



Compose

- Inbox (3)
- Drafts (15)
- Sent
- Spam (332)
- Trash (36)
- ▼ Folders (41)
  - cultural geography
  - geo fall 2010
  - kennys stuff
  - Notes
  - personal stuff (41)
  - Synced Messages

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LifeCellSkin  
74-Yr-Old Outsmarts Doctors.  
Reduces Her Wrinkles.

← ← → | Delete Move Spam More

Re: Photographs

Jan 2  
To Me

Dear Ms. Pennington,

Happy New Year to you and your family - as well. It is a coincidence that your ancestors are from Farmville. Yes - you have my permission to use the photograph of Barbara. Thank you for your kinds comments - and good luck on your PhD.

Sincerely,

Joan Johns Cobbe

On 01/01/14, alicia.pennington@panniwes@yahoo.com wrote:

Show message history

Reply, Reply All or Forward | More

Click to reply all

Send

Text formatting icons: Bold, Italic, Underline, Link, etc.

### Reverse Mortgage Payouts Near Highest in Years

Select your age to start

≤ 61	62	63
64	65	66
67	68	69
70	71	72
73	74	75
76	77	78
79	80	81 ≤

NewRetirement.com

## APPENDIX E

ATTORNEYS FOR BROWN VS BOARD OF EDUCATION  
AS ATTORNEYS FOR THE NAACP, SPOTTSWOOD W. ROBINSON II AND  
OLIVER HILL REPRESENTED PARENTS AND STUDENTS IN CASES  
THROUGHOUT VIRGINIA. ROBINSON, GEORGE LEAKES, ELAINE BOWEN,  
AND HILL. 1953 NAACP PAPERS, LIBRARY OF CONGRESS. LC-USZ62-118180



As attorneys for the NAACP, Spottswood W. Robinson III (far left) and Oliver Hill (far right) represented parents and students in cases throughout Virginia. Robinson, George Leakes, Elaine Bowen, and Hill. 1953. NAACP Papers, Library of Congress. LC-USZ62-118180.

APPENDIX F

TARPAPER SHACKS/PLAINTIFFS EXHIBIT

PHOTOGRAPH FILED IN DOROTHY E. DAVIS ET AL. VERSUS COUNTY  
SCHOOL BOARD OF PRINCE EDWARD COUNTY, VIRGINIA. CIVIL ACTION

NO. 1333

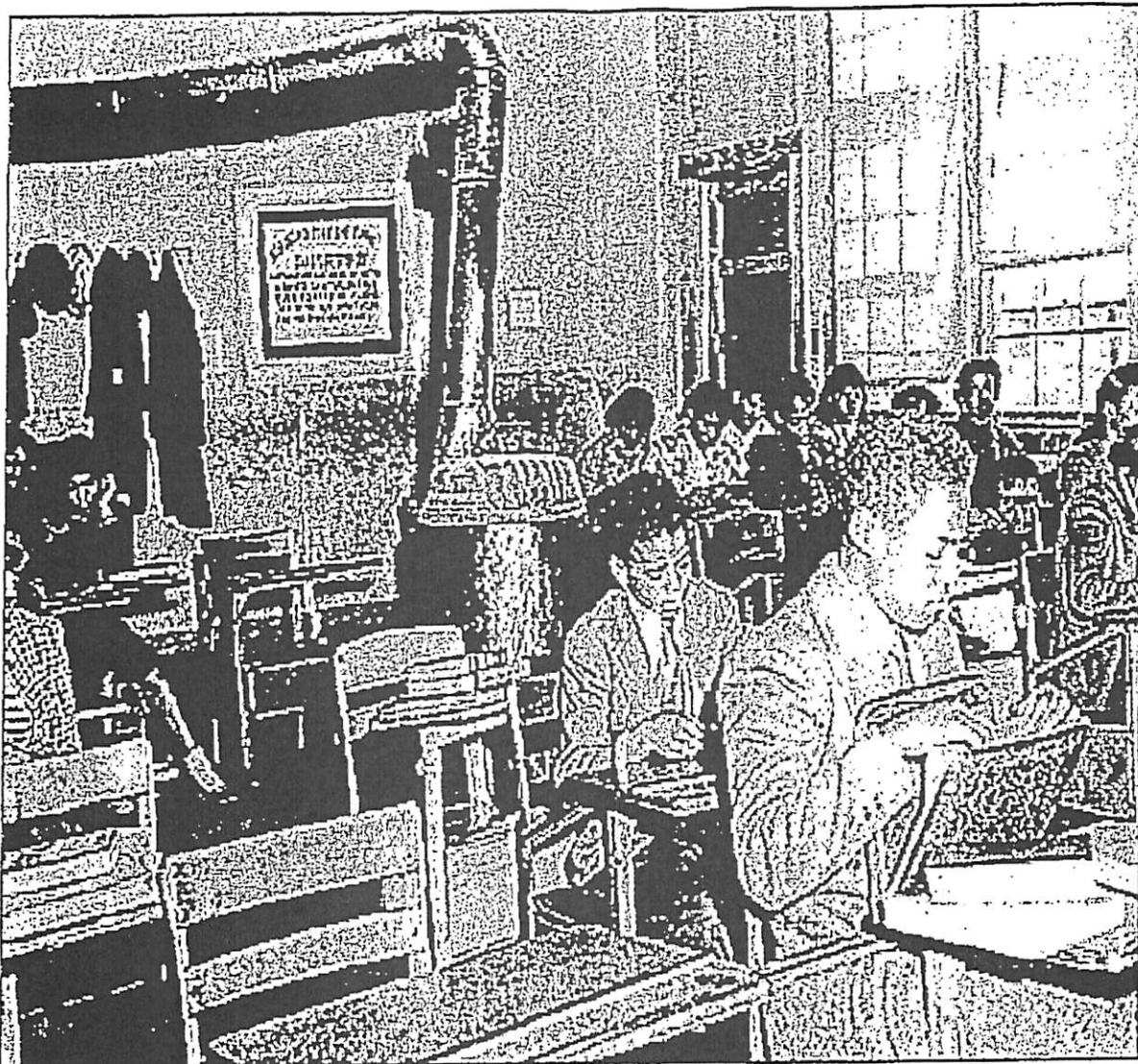


Plaintiffs' Exhibits:  
Photograph filed in  
*Dorothy E. Davis, et al. versus*  
*County School Board of Prince*  
*Edward County, Virginia,*  
Civil Action No. 1333

## APPENDIX G

## POTBELLY STOVE/PLAINTIFF EXHIBIT

MISS WEST'S ENGLISH 9 CLASS IN MOTON, VIRGINIA. DEFENDANTS'  
EXHIBITS – PHOTOGRAPHS FILED IN DOROTHY E. DAVIS, ET AL. VERSUS  
COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD OF PRINCE EDWARD COUNTY, VIRGINIA, CIVIL  
ACTION NO. 1333. PHOTO COURTESY NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS  
ADMINISTRATION'S MID ATLANTIC REGION, PHILADELPHIA,  
PENNSYLVANIA.



Miss West's English 9 class in Moton, Virginia. Defendants' exhibits—photographs filed in *Dorothy E. Davis, et al. versus County School Board of Prince Edward County, Virginia*, Civil Action No. 1333. Photo courtesy National Archives and Records Administration's Mid Atlantic Region, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

APPENDIX H  
LETTER OF INTENT



TEMPLE UNIVERSITY  
A Commonwealth University

Dear

I am a doctoral candidate student at Temple University in Philadelphia, Pa., beginning my field research in Farmville in early March. There has been, as I'm sure you are aware, a renewed research interest in the school closing from 1959-1963. Most of that research has focused on white resistance, legalities, and on the impact on students' lack of educational opportunities. My focus however, is on the women and girls of Farmville and the patterns of leadership that emerged during the school closings. My research has led me to your name, and the possibility that you might agree to a brief interview.

Based on your knowledge and experiences, your assistance would be extremely helpful in discussing and determining how and who participated in leadership among the African American women and girls.

Within the week I will contact you by telephone to arrange a mutually convenient time for a lengthier conversation. I understand that you may be extremely busy, and will keep our initial telephone conversation to 15-30 minutes. If you would like to speak with me before our meeting you can reach me at 267-979-6854 or via email at [apenning@temple.edu](mailto:apenning@temple.edu) or [penniwes@yahoo.com](mailto:penniwes@yahoo.com).

Thank you so very much for your consideration.

Respectfully,

ALICIA PENNINGTON  
Temple University  
Urban Education

APPENDIX I  
LETTER OF INTENT



TEMPLE UNIVERSITY  
A Commonwealth University

Dear

I am a doctoral candidate student at Temple University in Philadelphia, Pa., and in March 2007, I began my field research Farmville. I am continuing my research and would like to inform you that I am returning to Farmville in June. As I'm sure you are aware, there has been a renewed research interest in the Farmville school closing. While most of the research has focused on white resistance, legalities, and on the impact on students' lack of educational opportunities, my focus is on the women and girls of Farmville and the patterns of leadership that emerged during the school closings. Your name was referred to me by Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_, she suggested that you might be an excellent respondent for the type of information I am collecting. It is my hope that you will consent to a brief initial interview in April when I return to Farmville.

Based on your knowledge and experiences, your assistance would be extremely helpful in discussing and determining how and who participated in leadership among the African American women and girls.

Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_ gave me your number and within the next week I will contact you by telephone to arrange a mutually convenient time for our initial conversation. I understand that you may be extremely busy, and will keep our conversation to 15-30 minutes. If you would like to speak with me beforehand, you can reach me at 267-972-7717 or via email at [apenning@temple.edu](mailto:apenning@temple.edu) or [penniwes@yahoo.com](mailto:penniwes@yahoo.com).

Thank you so very much for your consideration.

Respectfully,

ALICIA PENNINGTON  
Temple University  
Urban Education

APPENDIX J  
PARTICIPATION QUESTIONNAIRE



College of Education  
 Educational Leadership and Policy Studies web www.temple.edu  
 2nd Floor Ritter Hall (003-00)  
 Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19122

## QUESTIONNAIRE

### DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

This questionnaire will be held in the strictest confidence.

SECTION 1. First Name Only \_\_\_\_\_

1. What is your age group?  50-54  55-59  60-64  65-70  71-74  75+
2. What is your religious affiliation?  
 Christian (Please indicate denomination) \_\_\_\_\_  
 Catholic  Muslim  Other \_\_\_\_\_
3. What is the name of the church you and your family members attended in Farnville?  
 \_\_\_\_\_
4. How often did you attend service?  Weekly  Monthly  Holidays
5. Do you continue to attend religious services?  Yes  No  
 If yes, please indicate Where \_\_\_\_\_  
 How often?  Weekly  Monthly  Holidays
6. Are you  Single  Married  Widow  Separated  Divorced  Living Alone  
 Living with Partner?
7. Do you have children? (Please indicate number)  Male \_\_\_\_\_  Female \_\_\_\_\_
8. Are you currently employed?  Yes  No  Retired
9. What is the range of your annual income?  
 \$15-20,000  \$21-30,000  \$31-35,000  \$36-40,000  \$41-45,000  
 \$46-50,000  \$51-55,000  \$56-60,000  \$61,000+
10. How would you describe the field in which you are employed?  
 Education  Private Industry  Government (City, State, Local)

Self-Employed  Social Service (Public/ Private)

Other \_\_\_\_\_

11. What is your education level?

High School  Some College  BA/BS  MA  PhD

12. Are you currently a member of any social/community/religious organizations?

Yes  No

If yes, please name.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

13. How would you describe your current social class

Working  Lower  Lower Middle  Middle  Upper Middle  Upper

#### Education Experience

1. Was the importance of education discussed in your home as a child?  Yes  No

2. Was education important to both parents?  Yes  No

3. What was the reaction of your parent(s)/guardian(s) to the school closings?

None  Shock  Acceptance  Tolerance  Understanding

Other, please explain \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4. Were you geographically stable until the school closings?  Yes  No

If no, please briefly explain \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

5. How many school age children were in your home when schools failed to reopen in Fall, 1959?

Please include yourself in the number.  Male \_\_\_\_\_  Female \_\_\_\_\_

6. Please indicate your age group and how old were you when schools failed to reopen 1959? Please indicate age.  
 Age Group 5-9 10-14 15-19 Age \_\_\_\_\_
7. How many school age children were in your home when schools reopened in 1963?  
 Please include yourself in the number. Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female
8. Please indicate your age group and how old you were when schools reopened in 1963? Please indicate age group and age.  
 Age Group 5-9 10-14 15-19 Age \_\_\_\_\_
9. What was your grade level in 1959?  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12
10. What was your grade level in 1963?  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12
11. Were you able to continue your education in any of the "*schools*" established in Farmville during the public school closings 1959-1963? Yes No  
 If yes, indicate where, if in more than one location, grade(s), and time period(s).  
 Location \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_ Duration \_\_\_\_\_ 1959  
 Location \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_ Duration \_\_\_\_\_ 1960  
 Location \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_ Duration \_\_\_\_\_ 1961  
 Location \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_ Duration \_\_\_\_\_ 1962  
 Location \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_ Duration \_\_\_\_\_ 1963
12. Were you educated "*outside*" Farmville? Yes No If yes, please indicate where, if in more than one location, grade(s) and time period(s)  
 Location \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_ Duration \_\_\_\_\_ 1959  
 Location \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_ Duration \_\_\_\_\_ 1960  
 Location \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_ Duration \_\_\_\_\_ 1961  
 Location \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_ Duration \_\_\_\_\_ 1962  
 Location \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_ Duration \_\_\_\_\_ 1963

**LEADERSHIP**

1. Did your family feel community pressure to participate in the education struggle?  
Yes No  
 If yes, please explain \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

2. Did the women in your family feel any particular pressure to participate in the education struggles? Yes No

3. From whom? Family Church Friends Community

Were your parent(s)/guardian(s) employed during the school closings?  
Yes No

4. Was their employment affected by their participation in the struggle for education parity? Yes No If yes, please briefly describe  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

5. Which female members of your family participated in the education struggles in Farmville? Please check all that apply.

Mother Sister(s) Aunt(s) Cousin(s) Niece(s)

Other \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

6. How was female participation generally viewed in the African American community?

Positively Negatively Apathetically Not Sure Other, please explain.  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

7. Were you old enough to participate in any of the activities around the educational struggles in Farmville from 1959-1963?
- Yes  No If yes, please check any and all that apply.
- Raised Money  Lead or direct student activities
- Defined or set student goals  Mobilized or persuaded students
- Acted as example/role model to other students/ participants
- Organized/coordinated student activities
- Other \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_
8. In what ways did the women in your family participate? Please check any and all that apply.
- Lead or directed community action  Defined tactics and strategies
- Raised money  Taught in "*schools*"
- Outlined concerns and needs of participants (locally, regionally, nationally)
- Mobilized and/or persuaded participants
- Organized/coordinated participant action(s)
- Taught/educated/trained participants
- Spoke publicly/privately to participants/advocates/supporters
- Canvassed for support (locally/regionally/nationally)
- Organized/coordinated activities (locally, regionally, nationally)
- Communicated concerns of those affected by school closings
- Lead/obtained/maintained support (outside community)
- Lead/obtained/maintained support (in the community)
- Set an example for others (in the community)
- Set an example for others (outside community)
- Coordinate/organized/maintained activities/relationships between groups
- Mobilized local community

9. Did any female participant, in your family in Farmville or the surrounding communities, experience the loss of employment because of their involvement in the struggle for education equity?  Yes  No  
If yes, please indicate in which areas. Check any and all that apply.  
 Manufacturing  Agriculture  Domestic  Clerical  Public Sector  
 Private Sector  Other \_\_\_\_\_  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_
10. Are/were you aware of other female participants, in Farmville or the surrounding local communities, who suffered a loss of employment because of their involvement in the struggle for education equity?  
 Yes  No If yes, please indicate in which areas. Check any and all that apply.  
 Manufacturing  Agriculture  Domestic  Clerical  Public Sector  
 Private Sector  Other \_\_\_\_\_
11. Was *your* Church actively involved in the education struggles in Farmville?  
 Yes  No
12. Were there politically active female role models in your Church?  Yes  No  
If yes, please indicate activity. Who \_\_\_\_\_  
Activity \_\_\_\_\_
13. Did the women who assumed leadership roles during the school closings, reflect Farmville's class and socio-economic diversity?  Yes  No  
If yes, please indicate Social Class/Economic Class  
 Working  Lower  Lower Middle  Middle  Upper Middle  Upper
14. Was *your* Church actively involved in the education struggles in Farmville?  
 Yes  No If yes, please briefly describe \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

15. Were there cultural elements, valued in the community, that were lost during the school closings? Yes No If yes, please briefly describe\_\_\_\_\_

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16. Were there social elements, valued in the community, that were lost during the school closings? Yes No If yes, please briefly describe\_\_\_\_\_

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**RACE, GENDER, AND SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS**

1. If you no longer reside in Farmville, did the school closings affect your ultimate residential choice? Yes No If yes, please briefly describe\_\_\_\_\_

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2. Was there a sense of racial consciousness among the females in your family? Yes No If yes, please briefly describe\_\_\_\_\_

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3. Was race discussed in your home? Yes No If yes, please briefly describe\_\_\_\_\_

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4. Did both parents/guardians discuss racial issues? Yes No
5. In the past forty-five (45) years how often have you and your friends thought about the school closings?  
Almost never Occasionally Fairly often Very often
6. In the past forty-five (45) years how often have you and your friends discussed the school closings?  
Almost never Occasionally Fairly often Very often
7. During the school closings did you ever write a letter to a public official expressing your views on education equity?  
Yes No
8. Have you given money in the past forty-five (45) years to any organization concerned with education/racial equity? Yes No  
 If yes, please indicate name(s) of organizations.  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
9. Were your ideas about *your* racial identity formed during the school closings?  
Yes No If yes, please explain briefly \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
10. In the years since the school closings, have you reassessed your racial consciousness? Yes No If yes, please briefly explain. \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
11. Have you remained a resident of Farmville? Yes No
12. Are you concerned about race relations in Farmville?  
Very concerned Somewhat concerned Not very concerned  
Not at all concerned

13. In your opinion, after the schools reopened in 1963 how would you define the state of race relations in Farmville?
- The same   Somewhat improved   Not at all improved   Worse
14. Was church a regular part of your social and cultural life?   Yes   No

APPENDIX K  
OPEN ENDED QUESTIONNAIRE

## QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What were you told about the school closings. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Did your family discuss the possibility of you being sent away to school? YES\_\_ NO\_\_  
If yes what were you told. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Were you frightened by the school closings and the possibility of being sent away from home? YES\_\_\_\_\_ NO\_\_\_\_\_
4. What are your earliest memories of leaving home at such a young age? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Did you miss your friends? YES\_\_ NO\_\_
6. Did you have peers to share your school stories with? YES\_\_\_\_\_NO\_\_\_\_\_
7. What was it like when schools reopened? Please be as detailed as you feel comfortable.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

8. Can you describe a typical day when schools were closed? \_\_\_\_\_

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9. Did you talk about the school closing with your peers? YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

10. Was it difficult to understand the change in the female community members regarding education access? YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

11. Did you know any community activist outside your familial circle? YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

12. Are you an activist now? YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

13. What kind of leadership did you/do you understand then and now?

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Among the women/girls you knew in Farmville, were any of the possible characteristics below evident or on display during the school closings?

Yes = 1

No = 2

1. Articulated/expressed concerns and needs of followers \_\_\_\_\_
2. Defined/set goals \_\_\_\_\_
3. Formulated tactics and strategies \_\_\_\_\_
4. Initiated actions \_\_\_\_\_
5. Mobilized/persuaded followers \_\_\_\_\_
6. Raised money \_\_\_\_\_
7. Organized/coordinated actions \_\_\_\_\_
8. Taught/educated/trained followers/leaders \_\_\_\_\_
9. Led or directed action \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX L  
COMMUNAL PARTICIPATION



## COMMUNAL PARTICIPATION

No.	Item	Response Code
	As a result of your childhood experiences during the school closings, as an adult were/are you involved, in any of the following activities. Indicate your level of involvement	Chaired/Organized = 3 Participated/Volunteered = 2
1.	Cultural Program	_____
2.	Educational Program	_____
3.	Recreational Program	_____
4.	Mentoring Program	_____
5.	Senior Citizen Program	_____
6.	Health Care	_____
	As an adult, did the school closings create an incentive for you to participate in any of the following organizations	Yes = 1 No = 2
1.	Youth groups or associations	_____
2.	Cultural associations/organizations	_____
3.	Social service agencies/organizations	_____
4.	Sorority	_____
	Within the past year have you been an active member of:	Yes = 1 No = 2
1.	A neighborhood/community organization	_____
2.	Civil Rights group (NAACP/Urban League, etc.)	_____
3.	Woman's group (Sorority, church group, etc.)	_____

APPENDIX M  
CHURCH ACTIVITY PARTICIPATION



### CHURCH ACTIVITY PARTICIPATION

No.	Item	Response/Code_____
	As an adult, have you done any of the following activities for your church/religious institution or community organizations	Yes = 1 No = 2
1.	Helped organize an event or activity	_____
2.	Participated in a decision-making group (e.g. as a committee member)	_____
3.	Made a presentation/speech to the congregation	_____
4.	Helped with a fundraising campaign or program	_____



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### CHURCH RELATED SKILLS

No.	Item	Response/Code
	Were you, as an adult, able to use any of the skills learned or developed in your church or religious institution during school closings	Very Much = 1 A Fair Amount = 2 A Little = 3 None At All = 4
1.	Administrative	_____
2.	Clerical	_____
3.	Fundraising	_____
4.	Teaching	_____
5.	Working with other organizations, committees or groups outside your own church	_____
6.	Public speaking	_____
7.	Writing letters, pamphlets	_____



**POLITICIZED MINISTERS/CHURCHES**

No.	Item	Response/Code
	Did your Minister or religious leader ever encourage members of your church or religious institutions to register to vote, vote on Election Day or get involved in the politics of the school closings	Yes = 1 No = 2
	Did any of the following activities take place at your church or religious institution during the school closings	Yes =1 No = 2
	1. Announcements about a political election, candidate or issue	_____
	2. A speech by an candidate, NAACP/Urban League or other civil rights representative to the congregation or small group	_____
	3. Distribute petitions or literature on the school closings	_____
	4. Organize volunteers to drive children to schools outside Prince Edward County, serve as teachers or act in any capacity to assist in the continuing education of the children who were not in school	_____

APPENDIX N

PERMISSION TO AUDIO, VIDEO, PHOTO FORMS



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College of Education  
Educational Leadership and Policy Studies web www.temple.edu  
2nd Floor Ritter Hall (003-00)  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19122

**Permission to Audiotape**

Investigator: Christine Woyshner, Principle Investigator  
Alicia Pennington, Student Researcher

Department: Curriculum, Instruction, Technology and Education

Dissertation Title: A Thumping From Within Unanswered By Any Beckoning From Without: The Emergence of Leadership Among African American Women, Farmville, Va. 1956-1963.

Subject: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Log # \_\_\_\_\_

I give Christine Woyshner/Alicia Pennington/Temple University permission to audiotape me. This audiotape will be used only for the following purpose (s):

EDUCATION

This audiotape may be heard by education professionals outside Temple University for educational purposes. At no time will my name be used.

RESEARCH

This audiotape may be used as part of a research project at Temple University. I have already given written consent for my participation in this research project. At no time will my name be used.

Marketing/Public Information

This audiotape may be used to promote further education research to educational professionals, referral sources, and/or the general public. At no time will my name be used.

WHEN WILL I BE AUDIOTAPED?

I agree to be audiotaped during the time period: January 1, 2007 to December 31, 2010.

HOW LONG WILL THE TAPES BE USED?

I give my permission for these tapes to be used from: January 1, 2007 to December 31, 2010.

This data will be stored for three years.

WHAT IF I CHANGE MY MIND?

I understand that I can withdraw my permission at any time. Upon my request, the audiotape (s) will no longer be used. This will not affect my care or relationship with Christine Woyshner/Alicia Pennington/Temple University in any way.

I understand that I will not be paid for being audiotaped or for the use of the audiotapes.



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Educational Leadership and Policy Studies web www.temple.edu  
2nd Floor Ritter Hall (003-00)  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19122

### Permission to Videotape

Investigator: Christine Woyshner, Principle Investigator  
Alicia Pennington, Student Researcher

Department: Curriculum, Instruction, Technology in Education

Dissertation Title: A Thumping From Within Unanswered By Any Beckoning From Without: The Emergence of Leadership Among African American Women, Farmville, Va. 1956-1963.

Subject: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Log # \_\_\_\_\_

I give Christine Woyshner/Alicia Pennington/Temple University permission to videotape me. This videotape will be used only for the following purpose (s):

EDUCATION

This videotape may be used by education professionals outside Temple University for educational purposes. At no time will my name be used.

RESEARCH

This videotape may be used as part of a research project at Temple University. I have already given written consent for my participation in this research project. At no time will my name be used.

Marketing/Public Information

This videotape may be used to promote further education research to educational professionals, referral sources, and/or the general public. At no time will my name be used.

WHEN WILL I BE VIDEOTAPED?

I agree to be videotaped during the time period: January 1, 2007 to December 31, 2011

HOW LONG WILL THE TAPES BE USED?

I give my permission for these tapes to be used from: January 1, 2007 to December 31, 2011

This data will be stored for three years.

WHAT IF I CHANGE MY MIND?

I understand that I can withdraw my permission at any time. Upon my request, the videotape (s) will no longer be used. This will not affect my care or relationship with Christine Woyshner/Alicia Pennington/Temple University in any way.

I understand that I will not be paid for being videotaped or for the use of the videotapes.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:**

If I want more information about the videotape (s), or if I have questions or concerns at any time, I can contact:

Investigator's Name: Christine Woysner  
Department: Curriculum, Instruction, Technology and Education  
Institution: Temple University  
Street Address: 13<sup>th</sup> Street and Cecil B. Moore Avenue  
City, State, Zip: Philadelphia, Pa 19122  
Telephone: Office: 215-204-6147

Student Researcher: Alicia Pennington  
Department: Urban Education  
Institution: Temple University  
Street Address: 13<sup>th</sup> Street and Cecil B. Moore Avenue  
City, State, Zip: Philadelphia, Pa 19122  
Telephone: Office-215-204-2117 Home: 267-979-6854

This form will be placed in my records and a copy will be kept by the person(s) named above. A copy will be given to me.

**PLEASE PRINT**

Subject's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Subject's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Subject: cannot sign because: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ but consents orally to be videotaped under the conditions described above.

Witness Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Witness Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_



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 Educational Leadership and Policy Studies web www.temple.edu  
 2nd Floor Ritter Hall (003-00)  
 Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19122

### Permission to Photograph

Investigator: Christine Woyshner, Principle Investigator  
 Alicia Pennington, Student Researcher

Department: Curriculum, Instruction, Technology in Education

Dissertation Title: A Thumping From Within Unanswered By Any Beckoning From Without: The Emergence of Leadership Among African American Women, Farmville, Va, 1956-1963.

Subject: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Log # \_\_\_\_\_

I give Christine Woyshner/Alicia Pennington/Temple University permission to photograph me. This (these) photograph(s) will be used only for the following purpose (s):

EDUCATION

This (these) photograph(s) may be used by education professionals outside Temple University for educational purposes. At no time will my name be used.

RESEARCH

This (these) photograph(s) may be used as part of a research project at Temple University. I have already given written consent for my participation in this research project. At no time will my name be used.

Marketing/Public Information

This (these) photograph(s) may be used to promote further education research to educational professionals, referral sources, and/or the general public. At no time will my name be used.

WHEN WILL I BE PHOTOGRAPED?

I agree to be photographed during the time period: January 1, 2007 to December 31, 2011

HOW LONG WILL THE PHOTOGRAPH(S) BE USED?

I give my permission for this (these) photograph(s) to be used from: January 1, 2007 to December 31, 2011

This data will be stored for three years.

WHAT IF I CHANGE MY MIND?

I understand that I can withdraw my permission at any time. Upon my request, the photograph(s) will no longer be used. This will not affect my care or relationship with Christine Woyshner/Alicia Pennington/Temple University in any way.

APPENDIX O  
CONSENT FORM

College of Education  
 Educational Leadership and Policy Studies web www.temple.edu  
 2nd Floor River Hall (003-00)  
 Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19122

### CONSENT FORM

**TITLE: A Thumping From Within Unanswered By Any Beckoning From Without: The Emergence of Leadership Among African American Women, Farmville, Va. 1956-1963.**

**Investigator(s) Name(s):** Christine Woyshner, Principal Investigator/Advisor  
 Curriculum, Instruction and Technology in Education  
 Alicia Pennington, Student Researcher-Urban Education

**Department:** College of Education/Urban Education

**Telephone Number(s)** 215-204-6147 C. Woyshner, CITE  
 267-979-6854 A. Pennington, Urban Education

**Purpose of Research:** We will engage in a study of African American females in Farmville, Va. and emergent leadership patterns during the school closing from 1959-1963. It is the intent of this research project to examine the various patterns of leadership that emerged through participation and activities of African American women.

**Subjects:** It is anticipated that 10-15 letters will be mailed to female residents/former residents of Farmville, Va. There is an anticipated response of 7-10 women. The women selected for the mailing are: 1) African American; 2) between 56-80 years of age at the time of mailing; 3) had their names previously published in newspaper or journal articles, and dissertations. This letter will request participation in an examination of emergent leadership patterns among African American women during the school closings in Farmville.

**Confidentiality:** All information you provide will be recorded anonymously and your participation and anything you say during this interview will be held in the strictest confidence.

**Disclaimer/Withdrawal:** All subjects are free to decide whether or not to participate or not participate, this will not prejudice any further interactions with the Investigator(s) or Temple University. The subjects will not be coerced for participation or coerced not to withdraw from the research.