

“You Got to Have a Heart of Stone to Work Here”:
Coaching, Teaching, and “Building Men” at Eastside High

by

Micah Gilmer

Department of Cultural Anthropology
Duke University

Date: _____

Approved:

Lee D. Baker, Supervisor

John L. Jackson

Orin Starn

Mark Anthony Neal

Karolyn Tyson

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy in the Department of
Cultural Anthropology in the Graduate School
of Duke University

2009

ABSTRACT

“You Got to Have a Heart of Stone to Work Here”:
Coaching, Teaching, and “Building Men” at Eastside High

by

Micah Gilmer

Department of Cultural Anthropology
Duke University

Date: _____

Approved:

Lee D. Baker, Supervisor

John L. Jackson

Orin Starn

Mark Anthony Neal

Karolyn Tyson

An abstract of a dissertation submitted in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of
Cultural Anthropology in the Graduate School
of Duke University

2009

Copyright by
Micah Charles Gilmer
2009

Abstract

This dissertation is the first study of this length to examine the ways adult African American men build community. It is also a new attempt to describe the pedagogical approaches these men use as educators, and to theorize how their life experiences and personal style impact their work in the classroom. The study centers on a group of African American football coaches, and expands from that critical site to the personal and professional lives of the educators on that staff.

Though Black men are often assumed to be emotionally inexpressive, I find that the coaches I work with expressed their most intimate emotion to select groups of trusted partners. These individuals actively built communities of love and support through processes of racial vetting and personal character evaluation, and took extended periods of time to develop close friendships. After reviewing the ways in which the social sciences have generally regarded Black males with varying degrees of contempt, fear and pity, I examine the ways the game of football and the “consensual violence” the football community fostered help build, rather than deconstruct, personal bonds. I use examples of roughhousing and interpersonal confrontation as ways to talk about how, contrary to much of the scholarship on violence in sports, aggression can lead to intimacy.

In similar fashion, the coach-educators of Eastside High approached teaching as an exercise underpinned by a need to be brutally honest, or “real,” with their “kids.” I found that these coaches were critical of their colleagues that insisted upon anything but honesty with students, and championed realistic expectations for students as a key to effective

pedagogy. These educators also articulated the importance of engaging students from a communal perspective, particularly in an educational environment that at times can be openly hostile to “at risk” students. While these teachers and staff were often critical of youth culture in very specific ways, they also tried to create spaces for their students to express themselves, even in counter-cultural ways. Lastly, the coaches of Eastside High postulated teacher burnout as a pressing issue that should be at the center of considerations for educational reform. They argued that the testing regime had reduced their work as teachers to a numbers game, and insisted that the support of teachers should be central to systemic reform.

Dedication

To Jamaica. My love. Always and Forever.

Contents

Abstract	iv
Acknowledgements.....	x
1. Introduction.....	1
1.1 The Coaches Meeting.....	1
1.2 Why? and How?	2
1.3 Method.....	4
1.4 Approach.....	7
1.5 My Site	11
1.6 Chapter Summary	11
2. Don't Tell Nobody This, but I Love Y'all: The Not-So-Secret Discussion of Feeling Among Black Men	17
2.1 "Intimate... Like That".....	17
2.2 "No Discussion of Emotional Issues".....	18
2.3 The Cost-Benefit of Disclosure.....	20
2.4 Racial Vetting.....	23
2.4 The Importance of Context	24
2.5 These Three Words	25
2.6 The Work of Love	28
3. Like a Prison for Your Mind: Black Males and the Promotion of Fear and Pity	30
3.1 African Americans and Social Scientific Writing.....	30
3.2 Attempts in Economic Discourse to Get Beyond Pathology: The Case for Racism	34
3.3 Pity and Fear.....	36
3.4 Escaping the Pity Trap.....	41

3.5 Boys to Men: The (Re)Creation of the Black Male Monster	42
3.4 No Fear: Counteracting the Discourse of Danger	46
4. “Football Don’t Give a F* about Your Feelings”	50
4.1 Coaching for Brian Moss.....	50
4.2 About Football.....	53
4.3 Win. Win? Win!	62
4.4 Winners and Losers	65
5. A Football Family: Wrestling with Community.....	73
5.1 Intentional Community.....	73
5.2 Through the Fire: Creating Community	77
5.3 Conclusion	86
6. A Cute Little Violent Edutainment Machine: High School Athletics.....	87
6.1 What Do We Think About Football?.....	87
6.2 In the Shadow.....	95
6.3 Violence and Athletics at Eastside High.....	99
7. Imagining School: School Reform and the Burden of Education.....	104
7.1 No Child Left Behind.....	105
7.2 So Much Reform... ..	108
7.3 Pressed Down, Shaken Together and Overflowing:The Educational Burdens.....	109
7.4 Innocent Children and “Grown Up” Accountability.....	113
7.5 Framing Change: Heartwork and Heartworkers.....	115
8. Real Problems. Real Solutions? Educators Talk About No Child Left Behind	118
8.1 I Got My F*ing ABC Check Today.....	118
8.2 I’m 72% Thomas	120

8.3 “Like Going to War with Two Bullets”	123
8.4 I Testing the Teachers.....	125
8.5 Getting Rid of Bad Teachers	130
8.6 Double-binds.....	131
8.7 I’m Done.....	135
9. Barack Obama’s Skinny Jeans: Youth Culture, the Prime Directive, and the Need for Social Change	141
9.1 Cultural Relativism and the Final Frontier.....	141
9.2 Barack Obama Y’all: A Presidential Hopeful and the Hip-Hop Litmus Test(s)	145
9.3 Boas vs. BooBoo: The Limits of Progressive Education Scholarship	154
10. Sincere Teaching: “I’m Real with Those Kids”	165
10.1 The Case for Real Teaching.....	165
10.2 Realness in Classroom Management	171
10.3 Life’s Really Unfair: Debunking the Myth of Fairness	177
10.4 Real Talk.....	181
10.5 Real Costs.....	188
11. “You Got to Have a Heart of Stone to Work Here”	189
12. Conclusion.....	197
Works Cited.....	198
Biography	208

Acknowledgements

Jamaica, thanks for supporting me through the last 5 years and keeping me from floating off into the world of ideas, never to return. Graduate school is a terrible way to begin a marriage, but we made it work for us. I've enjoyed the last half decade, and look forward to our lives together.

Dad, Mama, Jared, Brittany, Daniel, Chanel, Karis, Caleb and Joy, you taught me how to love and how to lead. I am so thankful for your support, for the times when I was at the end of my rope and you helped me just a couple steps farther. Thanks to my grandparents, aunts, uncles, godparents and cousins for letting me stay with you, sending me birthday money, and otherwise making me feel like I had a community before I knew what community was.

Marcus and Ryan, you have been more than partners and collaborators. You have been my secret weapons, my constant support. And after all you put up with from me, you both have the kindness to think I'm smart and worth it. Bianca and Tami, thanks for being institutional support. We did it. (In your face!)

John, I'll never forget the way you responded to my "epiphany" when I decided to change my dissertation topic. I needed you to say "cool," and that's what you did. You've been utterly supportive of both my good and bad ideas, and kindly critically engaged with both. Lee, lots of folks give advice. You do that well, but are also willing to put your own social capital to work for me and for all of your students, even when you stand almost

nothing to gain. Thank you. Orin, Mark and Karolyn, thanks for believing in me, being hard on me when you needed to and giving me such great ideas (for free).

Loren and Al, thanks for letting me work with you on such cool projects, and being so generous and thoughtful in considering what I have to say. Drs. Darity, Curtis, Hildebrand and Adams, thank you for being the sort of undergraduate mentors I dreamed of. The talks in your offices, the books you had me read, the thoughtful comments you gave to my early writing laid the foundation for my love of ethnography, and the heartwork it entails.

To my football family: you all are the reason I made it through grad school. You have been the real brains behind this operation. Thanks for putting up with me. To all the players I had the joy of coaching, thanks so much for making Eastside such a special place. “Brian,” you are a visionary leader with a “heart the size of John Q’s son,” don't ever stop being involved in the lives of young men. The black shirt bandit, I still don't know how you do it, but I'm impressed. Thanks for teaching me so much football and helping me have a great time doing it. Mr. Perfect, you're right, we will always be friends. Thanks for being there for me and making it seem easy. Hotboy, thanks for making competition so much fun, even though air hockey is the only thing you ever beat me at. Mad Dog, thanks for cutting my hair when I was flat broke and being so funny without trying to. Big Checks, I like your style, keep knocking the stew beef out of 'em. Oxon Hill's finest, thanks for the encouragement, stay professional and positive. “I believe I can, therefore we will.” Head Coach, keep doing what you do, go 'Heels baby. Raleigh Rebel, thanks for being positive and always offering me a ride home, even when you knew I was too stubborn not to ride my

bike. Talk of the Town, thanks for always having a funny story when I was feeling down, I hope you stop losing my number and call me sometime. Virginia Beach brothers, thanks for believing in the program and always being involved. The Richmond crew, I wish I would have gotten to know you all better, I respect each of you as educators and men. NY's finest, thanks for being involved with all you had going on. I still remember being up in the booth with you in '06 talking trash. Call me when you get a phone Eastside 05, I miss hanging out. Finally, thanks Wolfpack for being such a great support and mentor.

1. Introduction

1.1 The Coaches Meeting

They don't play too much hip-hop at the Ale House. They don't play too much funk, or soul music neither. When there isn't a big game on, they like to play rock, or some soft pop, as if they know the sounds of jungle music are a recipe for disaster. But it's Monday night, and just like every Monday night (and most Friday's too), in this particular Ale House, we're in there, dang near a dozen large negroes sitting smack in the middle, right in front of the big projection screen by the bar.

There's always a table full of food: fifty wings, a plate of nachos, cheese fries, pitchers of Michelob Ultra and Sprite. Food ordered family style, everybody picking up a couple items on their tab, and sharing with the rest. A couple folks are broke and eat for free, a couple folks have money and pick up double their share of the bill.

The music is steady proclaiming loudly that we aren't welcome, but we are here still. Big, Black, and loud.

A table full of football coaches, but nobody's watching the game. Monday Night Football is an excuse, not a reason, to go out. We don't watch the game. We talk. We talk about Michael Vick and his dogfighting, we talk about Barry Bonds and his steroids, we talk about Barack Obama and the ridiculous amounts of money he is raising in the summer of 2008.

But on most nights, on this night, we wind up spending most of our time talking about our kids. "We don't have any leaders." "We have to *make* leaders." "We practiced that play, if they keep messing up that same thing over and over again, that's on them." "It's on

us, that's our job as coaches, if they aren't getting it, we have to do it another way." "These kids don't want to do what it takes." "These are the kids we got, if we want to win, we got to make them do it." Frustration leads to accountability, leads to hope, leads to frustration. As we take steps backwards and forwards over the course of the season, the "coaches meeting" (wink) becomes the time when we put our heads together, try to figure out new strategies to reach kids, new motivational techniques.

What that community accomplished for me as person was support that looked the way I needed it to look: support that wasn't full of complicated or corny declarations of value. What it accomplished for me as researcher was a weekly impromptu focus group, dedicated in large part to the interrogation of teaching and coaching techniques. Our conversations served as a referendum on the national news, a seminar on effective education, and a task force on mentoring. Some of those insights are gathered here.

1.2 Why? and How?

Football is a cruel mistress. I played from 8th grade through high school, and sank all my eggs, at least emotionally, into the basket of athletic success. I always got good grades, school was easy for me. But I lived and died with how I performed on the football field (and in the hurdles during track season). I played varsity for a couple games as a sophomore, which was a pretty big deal for me. I was supposed to be good, but things never really came together. I made a few plays my senior year, but not soon enough to get seriously recruited by any but the smallest schools. Along the way I suffered recurring shoulder separations in both arms. My senior year I had a total of 13 "events" on my shoulder, especially my right one. I still wanted to have surgery and play at one of the small schools in South Florida

interested in me, but when UNC offered me the Morehead-Cain scholarship, I decided it was time to focus on what I did best. I talked to the then-coach about walking on, but I knew that I wasn't going to anybody's NFL, and that working hard to *maybe* be a special teams player wasn't the way I wanted to spend my college years.

But I missed football terribly. Although I became active in student life, and continued to be involved in the lives of other youth as a teacher and mentor, I missed the camaraderie that comes from the protracted time and emotionally charged journey of a football season. So when I was looking for a field site to study Black males and the educational system, high school football was a natural fit. While I understand the importance of doing Anthropology and other social science in the "outside" world, I also believe in doing work that was firmly rooted in, and accountable to, community. What I mean by that is that work should be intelligible to the people that are "worked on" or with, and should be in some way reflective of their chief concerns and issues.

This project represents a first attempt (for me) to apply that ethic to a traditional ethnographic project. My desire to sincerely be in conversation with my informant/colleagues informed every step of this dissertation project. In particular it shaped my desire to do fieldwork in a community I desired to be a long-term part of, and to choose a venue where I would be called upon to act as a full and needed participant rather than simply a "fly on the wall," outside observer, or even listening ear and friend. For several reasons, my love and knowledge of the game of American football provided the perfect excuse to pursue that goal (or maybe the other way around). Unlike classrooms, in which a teacher and perhaps one other adult are the norm, football coaching staffs include anywhere

from three to ten or more coaches. As a result, coaches represent a community that develops strategy, instructs technique and motivates players as a unit. That group is the center of this project.

I had no idea how to go about getting a coaching job, but a good friend who worked for the school system pointed me in the direction of the county athletic director. Meanwhile, two now-married friends of mine from undergrad kept telling me about some guy at their school, a young Black coach who really cared about his players. I gave a resume to Brian Moss, came down all dressed up to meet him, and he said I could join the team.

1.3 Method

Over that first year I began to realize what a rich site of research I had stumbled upon. The team was nearly all African American, the staff 100%. The coaches came from a diverse set of backgrounds, from teacher's aids working to finish their undergraduate degrees to several educators with Master's degrees, to upper-middle-class business executives. Of the professional educators, two worked on the "fringes" of the educational system, dealing with students discarded from "regular" classrooms either as behavior problems (for in-school suspension) or as learning or emotionally challenged students "best-served" in a special school environment. The staff also had four teachers working in the heavily tested core-subject areas, with their own challenges. Three other coaches served as substitutes and bus drivers, working in nearly every school in the entire district. Many of these men also worked on and off part-time as mentors, working for private companies to provide companionship and life-skills to youth given state or federal dollars for extra care. This incredible diversity of experiences lent incredible richness to our frequent conversations about working with

“troubled youth” (AKA bad kids). These men truly were “experts” in working with kids, professionals who were constantly learning, debating, and creating new techniques to sharpen their skills.

Likewise, the group of coaches I worked with came from a diversity of personal backgrounds. Some grew up in urban poverty in housing projects or the ‘hood. Others experienced rural challenges in double-wide trailers or pre-fab “Sears & Roebuck” houses. Most had seen a little of both. On the other hand, college education and middle-class wages also exposed nearly all of our coaches to wealthy individuals and significant opportunity. Two of the coaches worked full-time in the private sector, one as a regional manager of cell phone stores, the other as an executive of a major technology firm.

I knew that doing the sort of work I was interested in would require developing relationships of trust over a long period of time. I understood that it would be important for me to establish a bond with the team before I began my formal research. So I “stole” an extra year in the field by beginning to coach in my third year of graduate school (when I was supposed to be focused on writing grants and passing my preliminary exams). I’m not sure what impact this had on my academic success in graduate school. I would argue the additional emotional support the camaraderie of the team provided was the only thing that gave me the strength to go on in an institution that I perceived as hostile to the core of my being. I can say with even more certainty that this extended period was absolutely critical to this project. That first year, without the pressure of “research” field notes and the like, gave me the chance to develop real and deep relationships with my fellow coaches.

Methodologically, the choice to “steal” extra fieldwork time was probably my most significant decision.

This study is focused on the coaches themselves, and the vast majority of the original material in this project came from impromptu conversations, staff meetings, and hanging out outside of games and practice. Most of the coaches were professional educators, and all of us were interested in getting better at working with Black males. As such, conversations about pedagogy, classroom management, and relating to students in various life circumstances made up a significant amount of our time. These discussions were second only to football in terms of preferred conversation topics. I will spare the reader most of those conversations, as I’m not sure the finer points of the zone running game, vertical passing against a two-high look, or multiple front defense are of interest to just everybody.

Informal interviews were used to clarify particular points, but the wide availability of material from everyday conversation greatly reduced my reliance on these more directed communications. I generally didn’t drive conversations on education. Often I actually tried to avoid them, as they could at times be quite depressing. I conducted one focus group with a set of coaches focusing on educational reform. I also had each of the coaches review an earlier draft of the dissertation, after which they suggested (mostly minor and kind) corrections to the data gathered here.

I obtained clearance, both from Duke’s Internal Review Board and the public school system, to do research with students, simply because it is impossible to tell the story of the coaches without the players entering in some ways. I did not do interviews with players, but

their actions, and their insights (often voiced matter-of-factly in the midst of conflict or conversation) have been critically important to this project.

1.4 Approach

This text is intended to serve as a resource in helping educators, scholars, direct service practitioners, philanthropy and policy advocates better understand the complex ways in which Black male educators and mentors engage with their younger counterparts. It is not intended to be a policy brief advocating for a particular solution to the challenges detailed here. In fact, I will argue that there is no one solution, no magic bullet for the myriad issues facing African American and other disconnected youth. Similarly, it is not intended to serve as a resource guide to inform specific direct-service programs, although that is also a conversation I am thoroughly interested in. Rather, this piece is the first study of its kind, focused on detailing the complex ways in which Black male educators and coaches build community, and the specific analyses and approaches they bring to the classroom, mentoring and athletic competition.

Much of my ongoing work outside (but intimately related to) this dissertation project has focused on helping philanthropy and the non-profit community better serve African American and other marginalized males, and to engage work through a lens that views both race and gender as important reference points for social change efforts (Gilmer, Littles, & Bowers, 2009; M. Littles, Bowers, & Gilmer, 2007; M. J. Littles, Bowers, & Gilmer, 2008). This project represents a departure from that work in several significant ways. One of the foremost is that this dissertation intentionally and explicitly focuses on “existing” as opposed to “innovative” structures for engaging Black youth. In my work with some of the nation’s

leading non-profit organizations in engaging Black males I have encountered numerous promising and novel ways to engage Black youth around issues of identity, economic participation, democracy and anti-violence. (Oakland's Leadership Excellence, The Mentoring Center and Youth Uprising are all excellent. Other examples include Chicago's M.A.G.I.C., New York's Brotherhood/Sister Sol and Baltimore's Center for Urban Families). However, I am also aware that because of the limited resources of the philanthropic institutions that support this work, there are simply not enough dollars in the non-profit sector to effectively impact even a substantial minority of Black males currently living in the U.S. As such, this project is focused on a point of intervention that is neither innovative nor new. There are exponentially more young men involved in public school activities than in non-profit programs. Marketing firm Sports Business Research estimates that over half of all children ages 6-17 participate in organized team sports, and over 7 million high school students participate in school sports (quoted in Greenwood, 2007). That amounts to roughly 55% of all high school students competing (Carlson & Scott, 2005). That is not to say that the cutting-edge work pioneered by non-profits is not critically important. It is! Rather, this project represents an assertion that the insights gathered in these efforts can only be maximally effective when applied in the broader context of existing governmental systems, like public education and its largest out-of-school time (OST) program, athletics.

This effort also represents a significant departure from the way the issues of gender and identity are engaged in much of the peer-reviewed literature on the subject. Some of my work outside this dissertation has examined sexually diverse and "queer" populations as a

critical site to understanding more fully the entirety of the Black family (Bowers, Gilmer, & Littles, 2009). Similarly, important contributions to the field of gender studies have nearly always focused on alternative or ground-breaking understandings of sexuality (Butler, 1990; Halberstam, 1998; Tucker, 2004). This study breaks from that tradition in examining Black men who self-identify well within the “mainstream” of heterosexual Black masculinity. That is not to say that the ways these men think about sexuality are not incredibly complex. Rather, in a move similar to my insistence on the mundane site of a public school, I am seeking to assert that the insights of the gender studies explosion have their maximum effect when applied to the populations who self-identify as the largest segment of society.

I am an anthropologist. I have had to explain that particular choice of training and approach to research countless times over the course of my fieldwork. What I can say most concisely about my approach is that I consider the intimate, nuanced relationships that can only happen over extended periods of time to be the best place to examine the challenges and opportunities our society faces. The work recounted here represents that belief.

I am also a social change worker. I was this before I was ever an anthropologist. While, as I have stated above, this work is not designed to be directly impactful of the material reality of Black males, I must admit I am woefully unable and utterly unwilling to divorce myself completely from that goal.

Anthropology that has social change as an outcome has been done under a variety of banners. “Activist” anthropology, often focused on both the study and support of social movements, has directly and implicitly utilized the research process to aid particular causes or social outcomes (Lutz & Enloe, 2009). Similarly, “Applied” anthropology has sought to

mobilize ethnography to immediate practical application. Some of the very best work focused on African American males has come out of or been informed by this tradition (Gayles, 2005). Here at Duke I have been a part of our “Public” anthropology initiative, which has largely been focused on conducting a seminar in a federal prison. Those experiences have informed the way I think about these issues, and the other thinkers in that classroom have helped push and crystallize the ways I think about race and class. But I don’t think this project falls neatly into any of those categories.

This project is in intimate conversation with each of these approaches, but is most directly related to the long tradition of the anthropology of education. This tradition, unlike some of the more nebulous notions of engagement with the “public sphere,” has long been engaged in direct conversation with educators and educational leadership at every level, from the classroom to Capitol Hill. I am not a great believer in “speaking truth to power” in the way I often hear the phrase used. I do not feel that externalist critique, in and of itself, has the most effective and efficient impact on the creation of public policy. Ideas and perspectives that circulate among the “liberal elite” public spheres (NPR, academia, etc.) has at best a sort of Reaganist “trickle down” effect on policy, which in turn indirectly impacts the lived experience of real people (which to me was the point, after all). I am not at all interested in intellectual self-pleasuring, or of any sort of “group thing” of that kind. Rather, I am interested in engaging with the real people who are doing the really messy work of the gray, complicated every-days of education.

1.5 My Site

This study was conducted in a medium-sized city in North Carolina. Though relatively economically viable, this city in many ways faced challenges typical of the American South, and of urban centers with significant Black populations across the country. The neighborhoods surrounding Eastside high were certainly residentially segregated, but not exceptionally so. The city in many ways reflected a larger trend of (re)segregation taking place across the South (Boger & Orfield, 2005). Like many older cities, the community surrounding Eastside was home to an old Black community with a history of a solid middle-class, in some ways starkly separated from its working and underclass counterparts, and in others inextricably linked. It was also home to a growing Latino population, experiencing parallel but intricately different problems in areas of health, education and opportunity. These populations existed alongside majority-White communities that varied from “traditional” conservatives to a group of progressive educators and community activists with long and strong roots of their own.

1.6 Chapter Summary

In keeping with this desire to foreground the everyday, messy lives of real people, I have gently desecrated the standard Anthropological dissertation form. Rather than opening with a lengthy literature review, I dive immediately into the intimate conversations of my fellow Black male coaches in Chapter 2. I attempt to trouble the myth of the emotionally inexpressive Black male by demonstrating that Black men, in fact, do have conversations about their emotions, even those emotions that may be stereotyped as “weakness” in other scholarly literature (Anderson, 1999). However, these men do carefully select partners for

sharing intimate details that have demonstrated their trustworthiness, often over a length of time. In fact, far from primarily expressing a discomfort with feeling, several coaches articulated the ways in which love in particular was a key ingredient to success, both in football and in mentoring more generally. Working with youth, these men assert, is *heartwork*, requires emotional investment.

Given the ease and frequency with which these men talk about emotion, the caricature of the emotionally inept Black male only makes sense in light of the long history of problematic representations of African Americans in the social science literature. In Chapter 3, I detail the limitations of the way social science has been able to frame conversations around African Americans in general, and men in particular. From Du Bois to Moynihan, social scientists have struggled to portray Black communities as anything other than pitifully poor or contemptably pathological. Economists have demonstrated the connection between present-day employment discrimination and continuing economic inequity. Yet, scholars documenting the “cultures of poverty” have often traded in stereotypes that portray aggressive and dangerous forms of Black masculinity for the voyeuristic pleasure of their readers. The result is a culture of fright surrounding Black men and even students, a culture the coaches of Eastside High actively combat by counteracting fearful discourse.

In Chapter 4, I talk at length about the Eastside football program as a unique, virtually all-Black, all-male space, a sort of space that hasn’t yet been studied in any of the available literature on education and athletics. I tell the story of the football program’s development, and rise to success (at least in terms of wins and losses and college

scholarships for players). I also provide some background on the sport of American football, and detail the intense and grueling program of conditioning and weight training players underwent. I talk some about the dreams of the players for collegiate and professional football success (which have been widely discussed), and at even greater length about the dreams of the coaches themselves to move on “to the next level,” a prospect that is highly improbably in the overwhelmingly race-biased world of NCAA football coaching. I examine the dangerous allure of winning, the way addiction to victory was a constant threat to the larger goals of player development and academic opportunity.

Chapter 5 is focused on the sorts of social fabric the “football family” that the coaches and players of Eastside High developed. Contrary to scholars who DeGaris notes assume “aggression in personal relationships prohibits intimacy” (DeGaris, 2000, p. 90), the *consensual violence* of roughhousing actually builds community through mutual vulnerability. Likewise, difficult, even confrontational moments under the pressure of competition have the potential to build, rather than tear down, friendships.

While the consensual violence of the coaches and players represents a form of community-building work, the jury is in many ways still out on the helpfulness of athletics, and the structured violence it entails. In Chapter 6 I examine the contours of these debates. Local, state and federal education departments all support the importance of athletics to education, but little empirical research exists to support that claim. On the other hand, even less evidence supports the notion that athletics undermine the academic performance of individual athletes. While the inequity of the NCAA cartel’s relationship to players, and the perceived threat the admission of athletes poses to the educational ideal both present

problematic challenges, the critiques of high school athletics are in many ways much less tangible, or even intelligible. On the one hand, critics rightly point out that athletes receive extra social support in the form of (mostly volunteer or virtual volunteer) coaches. On the other, I conceive of an appropriate response as the development of similar extra-curricular programs to provide community support to the 45% or so of students who don't participate in sports. Likewise, early anti-athletics scholarship painted all athletic participation with a broad brush of increased violence, more nuanced work has demonstrated that only particular athletic values and identities, or *cultures*, are tied to social violence. As such, I propose that an appropriate intervention would center on the promotion of less violent cultures within athletics, rather than a move toward abolition.

Chapter 7 sets the stage for a more intentional engagement with the coaches who teach school for a living. I first attempt to place the No Child Left Behind era my study focuses on in context by examining the long history of educational crisis and reform that it represents only the latest incarnation of. Reformers have been various combinations of two often-conflicting orientations, the one seeking to create environments for the positive development of “innocent” children into “responsible” citizens, the other seeking to create workers capable of nationalistic economic competition in a rapidly changing world. Neither of these perspectives won conclusively, but each placed additional burdens on the plate of educators. Next, I examine the institutional and interpersonal barriers to reform articulated by Charles Payne’s important recent contribution. I conclude this framing chapter by arguing that successful policy implementation must consider the emotional impact upon teachers and administrators that policy changes will have.

These emotional costs are explored in greater detail in Chapter 8. My thought partners, coaches who are also active, certified teachers, articulate the ways in which the accountability regime has undermined their value as educators. The over-emphasis of standardized testing has reduced teachers to a mere number, skewed the way administrators evaluate staff, and created nonsensical paradigms for what constitutes a “good” or “bad” teacher. Similarly, conflicting messages from local leadership and bureaucracy have created double binds in which teachers feel they are asked to do two jobs. Ultimately, these teachers feel the system treats them as disposable, even as high turnover in struggling schools increases demand for teachers.

Chapter 9 begins a turn from the discussion of how teachers are impacted by the educational system to the unique ways they are impacting their classrooms. I begin a broader discussion about teaching and youth development technique by first unpacking the baggage of Black generational and class disconnect. A cultural relativist tradition with (unabashed) celebration of youth expressiveness embraced by progressive wars with the need for social and behavioral change for disconnected youth. Barack Obama, as an exemplar of the Black respectable tradition, serves as a stand-in for the complicated sorts of relationships “respectable” Black people (including Eastside’s coaches) have with expressive youth culture. In Obama’s (awkward) embrasure of hip-hop and his simultaneous rejection of baggy pants, he attempts to carve out a space that allows both for alliance and critique. Similarly, social scientists committed to social change have grappled with embracing versus critiquing youth culture. Even the most progressive education scholars have dogmatically

advocated for the use of (White) standard English. Similarly, the coaches of Eastside High each stake out different ground with respect to language, baggy pants, hats and timeliness.

In Chapter 10, I explore the nuances of the pedagogical approaches my thought partners engage. I propose sincere or “real teaching” as a way to conceptualize the emphasis on honesty and interpersonal vulnerability these educators champion. I talk at length about the high value for transparency and direct communication these teachers felt was essential to teaching kids of color. I also, following the discussion in Chapter 9, talk about the specific points of solidarity and critique each of these educators carved out, postures that fit with their own personalities and personal styles. Lastly, I propose that this form of teaching, and the vulnerability it requires, is *heartwork*, is a job that can only be done with emotional engagement.

Chapter 11 is about the cost of heartwork, the little and big ways educators and coaches get their hearts broken. I talk about the difficult end to my time at Eastside high, and ways in which the “football family” ultimately experienced a level of rupture. Chapter 12 rounds out this dissertation by suggesting some of the implications of what I found at Eastside for those interested in education, youth development and the issues facing Black males. Ultimately, this study confirms the incredible emotional investment teaching requires, and the extraordinary affective strain that heartwork places on teachers. If educational change is to get off the merry-go-round of crisis-and-reform, leaders must recognize that the thoughts and concerns of those getting their hands dirty in the messy work of investing in students must be a guiding principle and not an afterthought.

2. Don't Tell Nobody This, but I Love Y'all: The Not-So-Secret Discussion of Feeling Among Black Men

2.1 *"Intimate... Like That"*

Matt Sapp is a huge dude. He played defensive end in college at 6 foot 4, 250 pounds. He's well over 300 now. He's sitting with me and the rest of "the boys," all the coaches from Eastside High. We're all in my living room on November 4, 2008, watching Barack Obama put a beat down on John McCain, drinking rum punch and talking trash. Coach Sisco is telling dirty stories.

Matt's also sitting next to his fiancé, Kim. Between poll closings, they are both talking to my wife about doing their wedding pictures.

"I hate pictures. I'm a big ass dude, I can't be doing no corny pictures. Like I'm in a White tux just looking into your eyes. My boy Rob took pictures like that, I killed him on that for at least a year. We can't have no corny pictures"

Kim responded, "yeah, it's tricky though, because you know you're posing for pictures, but you don't want to look posed. And we're not like that, all showy and stuff, we have to have pictures that are like *us*."

Matt Sapp continued to mock his friend's "corny ass" pictures in a way only a hilarious, intelligent large Black man can. A way full of funny faces and chuckles that I don't have the skill to translate. But after a few minutes he continued more seriously...

"I want something real, something natural, you know, intimate. You know, like *that*?"

Matt pointed to a 3x5 picture on our mantel of my wife and I, our favorite picture of us together. It was taken when we were dating. I was in town for the weekend, and we were

getting ready to go to church together. She was fixing my tie. Her sister took the picture. It's blurry, and a little grainy. It's black and white. It's soft and unabashedly intimate.

So Matt mocked the staged intimacy of "Glamour Shots" couple photography, a move that fits in with all the stereotypes of Black male inexpressiveness, of mannish emotional ineptitude. But then, Matt embraced an extraordinarily emotive picture, an image that evoked a candid and warm love.

All of the coaches, all of the Black men that tease and wrestle with Matt on an almost daily basis were there in that room. And no one was surprised by what Matt said, no one seized upon it as one of the 50 or so things we would tease each other about that night. What Matt said was typical of Matt, and typical of much of our conversation. Adamant and vocal rejection of "staged" or "corny" emotional displays were almost always paired with equally firm embrace of "real," raw and candid displays of respect and love.

The lived reality I experience during 3 years of contact with the Eastside High football coaching staff, including a year and a half of formal fieldwork, directly controverts the conventional wisdom around how Black men feel, and how they talk about (or don't talk about) those feelings.

2.2 "No Discussion of Emotional Issues"

This prevailing sentiment is adequately expressed by Anderson J Franklin, chair of Boston Colleges' Department of Counseling, Developmental and Educational Psychology. Franklin is an African American man with 30 years of experience of therapy with Black men. He was educated at Virginia Union and Howard University, two historically Black universities (before receiving his PhD in Clinical Psychology from the University of

Oregon). No one can claim more expertise in working with Black men, and indeed I find his work both informative and helpful to my own understandings of the men and boys I work with. Yet, Franklin articulates an opinion of Black male inexpressiveness directly at odds with the lived practice I just described:

Like most men, most African American men do not talk about personal issues or share vulnerabilities with each other... Black men are wary of 'genuine talk,' which exposes uncharacteristic emotions, immobility, struggle with weaknesses, or lack of knowledge. There is almost no discussion of emotional issues among Black men because they see such talk as a weakness that runs counter to the image they seek to project" (Franklin, 1999, p. 5).

This chapter challenges that caricaturization by examining the intimate and vulnerable discourses of 12 African American high school football coaches. Members of this close-knit "football family" have regular, intensely emotionally conversations on friendship, romance, sexuality, career development, and family. So the explicit purpose of this chapter is to advance a conversation around the specific ways Black men engage emotionally with others. Admittedly, the meta-purpose is to challenge simplistic notions of Black male ineptitude. I argue that Black men regularly share intimate conversation, but only with trusted partners and within specific social contexts.

Black men are in vulgar social scientific terms doubly pathological, both as *Black* – a racio-cultural label that has from Powell to Moynihan to Cosby been understood as fundamentally incapable of success in mainstream society, and as *men* – a category that has transitioned from normative functionality in early social science to a much more complex view following feminist, womanist and queer theoretical critique. If males in general are at times understood as problematic, male *athletes* lie at the extreme of that spectrum.

Laurence DeGaris notes the way studies of male athletes of all races have generally characterized male relationships as misogynistic, homophobic, and marked by aggressive struggles for dominance (DeGaris, 2000). DeGaris cites Joyce Carol Oates, who argues “that boxing appeals to an innate male misogyny in that boxing repudiates femininity” (88). In what may be read as a sort of internalization of patriarchal norms, aggression is understood as fundamentally masculine. Likewise, aggression and intimacy are understood as a mutually exclusive binary. In other words, “aggression in personal relationships prohibits intimacy” (DeGaris, 2000, p. 90, quoting Rubin 1983). As a result of this narrow view of what constitutes intimacy, “cooperative elements” in sport are marginalized. Contrarily, argues DeGaris, male relationships in the boxing gym that serves as his field site are characterized by intense interpersonal intimacy. While this intimacy is at times, in the words of Michael Messner “*covert intimacy*, an intimacy that is characterized by *doing* together, rather than by mutual talk about their inner lives,” this “*somatic intimacy*,” (DeGaris’ term) also translates into the more normative forms of “intimate” talk (discussing relationships, etc.). Chapter 4 of this dissertation is dedicated to horseplay and other forms of somatic intimacy, but I first want to focus on verbal intimacy, and the settings and partners which allow its expression.

2.3 The Cost-Benefit of Disclosure

In terms of developing partners for intimate conversations, the Black coaches I worked with thoroughly vetted friends and associates over an extended period of time before choosing to engage in intimate conversation. For example, approximately two months after I first joined the football coaching staff in 2006, Coach Sisco asked me if I was married. When I said I was, he said, “I’m on the other side of marriage – divorce.” His joke

volunteered personal information, but also made clear it wasn't an entrée into an extended conversation. Likewise, his question to me indicated that he was interested in getting to know me, but he also chose to let me dictate the terms and depth of our conversation. My short response was received as an acceptable level of interaction for people who had "just met" two months prior.

Two years later, a similar conversation had significantly more depth. Sisco described to me in detail the circumstances of his marriage, the financial strain a layoff placed on their relationship, and the sense of loss and failure that accompanied the end of the relationship. Sisco had similarly intimate exchanges with other coaches on the subject, as I found out as such conversations were referenced when we talked in larger groups around the subject of romantic relationships. In other words, even at the point of our initial, rather shallow conversation, Sisco was in fact very comfortable talking about a painfully emotional subject. He just wasn't sure, at that point, that it was a conversation he wanted to have with *me*.

The transition from associate to confidant is accomplished through a thorough vetting process. This process takes *time*. Even the intense, emotional bonding that coaches and athletes experience, while accelerating the process, does not completely circumvent it. As coaches in the course of our first four months together, we stayed together in hotels for team travel, drank together at local watering holes, attended each other's weddings, buried players and their parents. Yet at the end of the first season, a coach communicated to me his discomfort with what he felt was an inappropriately intimate question from a fellow coach: "I just met that dude in July, I don't know him like that."

Had I written this dissertation after a year, or even two years of work with the football team, my analysis around just how much “intimate talk” coaches engage in would be drastically different. Even Coach Sapp’s unabashedly romantic declaration mentioned above happened only in the context of friends that he knew intimately or, like my wife, trusted by association. The bonds he shared with me, the casual friendship of his fiancé and my wife, all created a web of trust that allowed nakedly vulnerable conversation.

Time allowed these men to see their peers deal with life as circumstances change, to see how they responded to crisis, how they valued or betrayed the confidence of others. This vetting process over time allowed these men to set particular boundaries of intimacy with particular friends. Over the course of three years together, some members of the coaching staff proved to be loyal confidants capable of keeping private discussion to themselves. Others proved to be a bit less careful in exercising discretion with the secrets of others. These sorts of distinctions in character are not necessarily different from the general population. Some people are discreet; some people like to gossip. I think the difference among “non-expressive” Black males, if there is one, is that many of them take the time to find out who is who before engaging in vulnerable conversation.

When Coach Sisco shared the more intimate version of his marital problems with a group that included Coach Moore and myself, we both learned that Sisco had had that conversation with each of us. We also learned that each of us had not shared the conversation with anyone else, which of course was a point in each of our favor in terms of trustworthiness. These are the sort of snippets of information that inform what might be called the cost/benefit analysis of disclosure.

2.4 Racial Vetting

A pivotal part of this vetting process for African American men is a determination of political outlook and race politics. Franklin, in his discussion of the challenges of Black male focus groups, in my view incorrectly understands this process of racial vetting as some sort of cover to avoid intimate conversation. Rather than discuss “emotional,” “genuine,” and “personal” issues, Franklin argues that Black men prefer to “talk about how their skin color, physique, and physical and psychological presence determines their acceptance, both within the African American community and in society as a whole” (Franklin, 1999, p. 5). Franklin in my view incorrectly assumes that “skin color, physique,” and “acceptance” are not emotional issues.

In fact, racial subjectivity was an intimate and important part of the way these Black men experienced the world. A group interaction between coaches and a player revealed just how central those realities were to lived experience. One of our players came to the staff. He had been teasing one of his teachers in a way similar to the way players and coaches tease one another, a way that he intended to be a humorous sign of affection. The teacher felt intimidated, and threatened him with disciplinary action. The incident came to nothing in terms of consequences, but the player’s feelings were clearly hurt. “I was just joking coach,” he said. Coach Sapp put his hand on his shoulder.

Rod, you got to understand the big Black man rules. Didn’t nobody ever tell you about the big Black man rules, but I’m telling you now because you have to live by them. See, you say something like what you said to your teacher to me and I’m going to laugh. And if you weren’t big and Black you could probably have said that to your teacher. But you say something like that to him, and he thinks you are trying to ‘intimidate’ him. So you can go through life wondering why everybody is misunderstanding you, or you can just start

living according to the big Black man rules. I have to live by them, you've got to live by them.

Matt Sapp understood his world as fundamentally shaped by his bigness, his Blackness, and his maleness. Thus anyone who had a hope of possibly understanding him must also understand that his world was fundamentally shaped by that reality. What Franklin interpreted as a reticence to talk about “real” issues may in fact have amounted to a process whereby his clients were seeking to assess his own racial politics in helping determine his trustworthiness, and that of the other group members.

2.4 The Importance of Context

While such concerns may have impacted the particular group Franklin describes, perhaps an even larger hurdle was presented by the inappropriateness of direct venues for emotional conversation. During the course of my years with the football team, intimate conversations often took place in contexts which are intimate precisely because they are not prescriptive of intimacy. For most of the coaches, prescriptively intimate mediums like phone conversations were reserved for the conduct of business: the discussion of coaching points, the resolution of conflict and the like. Text messages were used to coordinate logistics and to communicate messages of inspiration. While these messages were often emotional in content, they were not always *intimate* in terms of vulnerability and depth.

The vast majority of the intimate conversations I had took place within three contexts: taking a ride, having a beer, or watching a game. Each of these activities have purposes other than simply intimate talk: transportation, relaxation, learning and enjoying sports. In each of these contexts, conversations about the “work” of coaching or education were very common. Additionally, *silences* often overwhelmed conversation. The intimate

silence of a ride together listening to music, of enjoying the atmosphere at a bar or of mindlessly watching television served as important backdrop for internal reflection. Intimate conversations thus became outflows of internal processes. This time of internal processing, and the silences necessary for its accomplishment, was often more important than the words spoken. Moreover, the silent backdrop for conversation often made the words spoken that much more loud, more significant, more *intimate*.

Coaches who were struggling with weighty emotional issues often made explicit time to “hang out” and talk about their problems. Invitations to watch a game or grab a beer were often understood as a desire for some level of emotional conversation. In that sense, spending time together watching a game was prescriptive of some level of intimacy, but the extended, halting conversation during commercials and timeouts over the course of three hours removed the burden of “staged” conversation. Just as Matt vehemently rejected the “staged,” “corny” expressions of proscribed romance captured in his friend’s infamous wedding picture, the Black males I worked with rejected staged conversation in favor of the naturalness of casual but *intentional* interaction. Just as Matt embraced the unabashed intimacy of my favorite picture of my love, my “boys” in venues that felt “natural,” openly expressed their hopes and dreams, struggles and shortcomings. Far from inexpressive men afraid to appear vulnerable, the coaches of Eastside high were a close-knit network of individuals who chose to be intimate with one another.

2.5 These Three Words

When Coach Smalls was feeling good about being a part of that group, he often expressed his affection as a joke. A joke that made fun of the lack of expression Black men

are “supposed” to exhibit, that pretended shame at his feelings, even as he loudly let them out in a packed locker room or a crowded bar: “Don’t tell nobody this, but I love y’all”

The mock-seriousness and mock privacy of that assertion, often accompanied by jokingly menacing gestures, actually underscored the intimacy of the comment. The joke, like most humor, was based upon a reality, a reality grounded in the vulnerability of such intimate talk. That declaration of love was “secret” in his joke, because its sharing does place the speaker in a position of risk, a position waiting for some sort of mutuality. Not to say that the response was always a quick “I love you too.” Sometimes it’d be an affectionate “shut the hell up.” Or, “I’m trying to watch the game,” or my personal favorite “you only say that when you’re drunk.” But each reply implied some sort of reciprocity, a bond of trust and affection that would be sorely tested with the ups and downs of the season.

But jokes were not the only direct expressions of love among the football team. “I love y’all” was a regular part of pre-game speeches and post-game congratulations or consolation. “Hey y’all, I just want to say, play hard and have fun. Oh, and I love y’all.” “We love you too, Nick.” “I love y’all” was an expression of love for the collective, for the bonds of friendship, for the feeling of belonging to a team. It captured the warmth and security of feeling like the people beside you had your back.

...

Coach Washington was an assistant coach at one of the area middle schools. He loved football, and loved being around the High School staff. He drove one of the buses to all of our away games, and showed up early to every game to hang out with the team and help out, organizing equipment and just generally pitching in. He often entertained players

and coaches alike with his “old school” football wisdom. Coach Washington, from the tidewater area in Virginia, had grown up watching, playing, and now coaching football, and always had something to say about what the game of football was all about. He loved to start a phrase with “all the great teams...” Like after a loss, “all the great teams lose a game or two early, it makes them strong.” Or after a couple players got into a scrap in practice “all the championship teams had that passion, that’s what you need to win.” Well, one of his many philosophies of greatness surrounded the bond that players and coaches had to have with one another. “All the great teams, they have to have that love, you have to believe that that guy in the trenches is going to fight his heart out next to you. That’s when you’ll go hard, and give it your all, when you have that love for each other.”

So, according to Washington, and seconded by nearly every coach on the staff at some point or another, bonds of love and affection were critical to winning football games. Love, in that sense, represented a part of the formula for success, as integral as practice or play-calling. In fact, a significant part of all coaches exhortations to players had to do with matters of the heart. “You’ve got to really really really want this.” “You’ve gotta believe. You’ve got to believe in yourself, in your coaches, in the man next to you.” “You can’t just play this game, you’ve got to love this game to play it.”

For the coaches at Eastside High, football was played with the heart as much as with legs, arms, helmets and shoulder pads. Feelings were not an after-thought or an unexplored abyss, they were at the core of the work of coaching.

2.6 The Work of Love

Nor were declarations of love confined to settings motivated by winning and losing ball games. Coach Sapp, like over a half dozen other coaches on the staff, often took on mentoring as a part-time job. Coaches would sign up with private, mostly for-profit agencies, to mentor kids who had been assigned by government or charitable organizations to receive mentorship. Most mentors made \$10-14 an hour, and the flexibility of scheduling made it an ideal part-time for a teacher. While mentoring programs have come under some public criticism as a “hustle” that did not actually benefit the young people served, coaches at Eastside seemed to take their role seriously, particularly with long-term clients. Often coaches would pick up their mentee, and take them to our practices, or grocery shopping, any sort of life-contact that provided stability and the chance for meaningful interaction. While mentoring was a “job” the nature of the work meant significant bonds with the individuals they were paid to interact with. Coach Sapp described it this way:

I don't know, it's a pretty good job. Sometimes it seems like a lot of paperwork. I mean, it really all depends on the kid you have. Some of those kids are like family to me, they come over my house, they know Kim, some of them will come to the house and they know where the spare key is, so they'll just let themselves in. I come home and they are just sitting there playing the game [video game system]. Some of them, man, I wouldn't let them nowhere near my house. Some of those kids you just can't trust. You try to work with them, but every kid is different. You're going to have a great time with a kid, or it's going to be just a job where you make some pocket money, it all depends.

Coach Sapp's first ever mentor, Mark, was a first year student in community college. He regularly hung out with us at the house or running errands. Mark worked at the local YMCA nearly full-time in addition to taking classes. “You see, Mark is one of those guys that

I will always have in my life,” Sapp said. “He’s a great kid. He’s not perfect, but he’s just a great guy. He can come over my house anytime.”

Mark was often the youngest guy in a room full of coaches. Though he complained behind our backs that many of us got on his nerves, he’d mostly sit and listen or watch the game with us. From time to time we’d ask him his opinion as someone younger, who had played high school football only a couple years ago. Mark was one of many younger men who we welcomed as a sort of junior member of the coaches’ social group. On one particular night, Mark was hanging at Coach Sapp’s house, eating a whole spread of food Kim had fixed for the coaches and their girlfriends/fiancées/wives. Mark was looking to roll out early and meet some of his boys. He circled the room, giving goodbye dap or handshakes to everyone. On his way out the door Matt Sapp stopped him. “Hey – I love you, be safe.”

I love you was not a phrase that was thrown around recklessly by the coaching staff. But at the same time, it wasn’t some forbidden language that was foreign or to be used only on special occasions. Love was understood as an integral part of playing the game of football, but it was also lifted up as the ideal end of mentoring and even teaching relationships. Coaches had no illusions that every kid would grow to love them, or even respect what they had to say. However, the students, players and mentees who did “get it,” who connected with them and what they had to say, made their work more than a paycheck. Love was not just an afterthought or byproduct of some lesson plan, game plan, or personal development checklist, it was the lifeblood that made all the sacrifice of coaching and teaching worthwhile.

3. Like a Prison for Your Mind: Black Males and the Promotion of Fear and Pity

The American creed and the biological equality of all races became the rallying cry of postwar liberal activists and policymakers, but they were not the foundation of either *Brown v. Board of Education*, which outlawed segregation, or President Lyndon Johnson's initiative to create preferential, compensatory programs for African Americans. Instead liberals used damage imagery to play upon the sympathies of the White middle class.

Given the history of the political use of social science, I believe experts who study social groups, particularly those who engage in policy debates, should place the inner lives of people off limits (Scott, 1997).

It's really tough to talk quietly to a friend when someone near you is having a loud conversation. It's *impossible* if they're talking about the same thing you are. - Anonymous

3.1 African Americans and Social Scientific Writing

A very wise woman once told me that you can't know the truth of a story without first knowing the storyteller. The coaches of Eastside High are telling this story with me. That's why I wanted to begin at the end, to open this dissertation with an exploration of the intense emotional bonds that come only after years of working, living and learning together. I will talk more about that particular story in the pages and chapters to follow, but it's also important to add to a discussion of this particular group of Black men the context of a legacy of social science literature that has at times intentionally misrepresented and at others grossly misunderstood Black men. As the above quote suggests, I understand the impossibility of having a conversation about Black men completely unaltered by the loud debates and dialogues that have Black men explicitly or implicitly within their grasp.

As a study of social groups that does not place the inner lives of its subjects "off limits," this project is unavoidably part of a banal American conversation surrounding Black

people and social policy. As Darryl Michael Scott chronicles over the course of two centuries, the debate around the “Negro problem” in this country has nearly always hovered near two extremes: either the “contempt” of “conservative” boot-strap rhetoric that views the poor as lazy, or a more “charitable” construct centered around pity and a need to address the “plight” of the tragic Negro. This is a trite and dangerous discourse that I have no real hope of escaping with this project. Conversations about “disconnected,” “marginalized,” or “troubled” Black males are divided right down the middle so to speak. Black men who don’t fall into the middle class are nearly always considered with fear; Black boys who live in poverty are nearly always portrayed with pity.

I only say I have no real hope of escaping this destructive conversation because the best and brightest minds in Black intellectual history have been unable to escape it. Considered to be one of the classic texts of early African American sociology, Du Bois’ 1899 in-depth study, *The Philadelphia Negro*, seeks to identify the myriad facets of “the Negro problem” in an urban city, while simultaneously humanizing a population often demonized by mainstream White society. With an almost prophetic voice Du Bois and Eaton illustrate the ways in which the challenges facing the Black community, and by extension Black males, are intricately interwoven and multiplied by one another. Du Bois’ study sets the stage for an entire century of African American life in several important ways. First, despite Du Bois’ insistence on the existence of “decent” Black people, his study seems forced to focus on the teeming masses of unemployed, underemployed, or illicitly employed Philadelphians. While he decries the fact that “to the average Philadelphian the whole Negro question reduces itself to a study of certain slum districts,” Du Bois himself focuses his efforts on those areas (5-6).

Likewise, while he asserts that “the best class of Philadelphia Negroes,” have their own social problems “differing from those of the other classes, and differing too from those of the Whites of corresponding grade,” he is unable to enumerate those problems. As a result, despite Du Bois’ great protestations to the contrary, *The Philadelphia Negro* reads on many levels as a study of “pathological” urban underclass, as the elucidation of a “Negro problem.” This focus on the Black underclass, and characterization of African American culture as fundamentally pathological, would prove a recurring theme in the coming century and beyond.

Du Bois penned his Philadelphia study during the time regarded as the “nadir” in race relations, as the boon of emancipation and gains under reconstruction were rolled back by mob violence and assertive state legislatures (Goldsby, 2006; Ifill, 2007). While Du Bois was effective in illustrating the damage done to the Black community by the ravages of slavery, his cry for help ultimately fell on deaf ears. Perhaps aware of the uphill battle he faced, Du Bois goes out of his way to downplay the amount of aid owed to Black communities, and to assert that only the most basic areas (schools, health care, etc.) should be improved for African Americans (Du Bois & Eaton, 1899). Thus Du Bois attempts to escape from the “pity” narrative by asserting the self-responsibility of the Black community, but ultimately succeeds only in mollifying what should be the study’s considerable demands upon the larger society.

Du Bois walked a fine line. He attempted to compel his mostly White readers to provide African Americans with access to better education and health care, and at the same

time avoid offending their sensibilities by acting as if Black Americans were “owed” something by their White oppressors. Thus Du Bois, perhaps facetiously, argued that

simply because the ancestors of the present White inhabitants of American went out of their way barbarously to mistreat and enslave the ancestors of the present Black inhabitants gives those Blacks no right to ask that the civilization and morality of the land be seriously menaced for their benefit (389).

Indeed, the early moments of the progressive era were more concerned with improving the condition of poor Whites, who must have been deemed more vital to the “civilization and morality” of American democracy (Baker, 1998; Du Bois & Eaton, 1899). This inattention toward African Americans on the national agenda began to change drastically in the Civil Rights era. Thurgood Marshall and the NAACP utilized damage imagery in the tradition of Du Bois to argue for the psychologically deleterious affects of segregation (Baker, 1998; Du Bois & Eaton, 1899). Subsequently, the “war on poverty” thrust to the national consciousness the plight of the urban poor (Rainwater, Yancey, & Moynihan, 1967). Yet, this new approach of state welfare and aid programs rankled the feathers of “charitable” communities who viewed the nuclear family as God’s plan for domestic life. In particular, one politico with a social science background, “strongly influenced by the Catholic welfare philosophy” soon penned a document that would define the terms of debate on African American poverty and pathology for decades (Rainwater et al., 1967). Daniel Patrick Moynihan was convinced that increased welfare supplanted the role of the family as teacher of morals and provider of material goods. As Moynihan put it to a UC Berkeley conference,

the logic of this relationship has taken us well beyond the original provisions of food and clothing and money to far more complex matters of providing

proper attitudes toward work, reasonable expectations of success and so forth. Obviously these are matters which for most persons are handled within the family system, and most of us would risk the speculation that the traditional family arrangement is probably the most efficient one” (quoted by Rainwater et al 1987, 20).

Spurred by the notion that government welfare undermined the family unit, Moynihan released “The Negro Family: a Case for National Action” in 1965. This report portrayed the Black community as an increasingly matriarchal society that, in the context of patriarchal American society, produced a dysfunctional connection to the overall economy. While Moynihan admits there is “no special reason why a society in which males are dominant in family relationships is to be preferred to a matriarchal arrangement,” he nonetheless asserts that matriarchy is a fundamental root of Black American poverty. Moynihan’s most outlandish claims center on his comparisons of Black Americans with the “ideal type” of their White counterparts. He asserts that “the White family has achieved a high degree of stability and is maintaining that stability,” a notion that would prove utterly false over the coming decades (5). In response to this characterization, a chorus of scholars, including Lee Rainwater, Joys Ladner, Herbert Gutman, and anthropologist Charles Valentine diverted from their various research agendas to attack the report (Scott, 1997).

3.2 Attempts in Economic Discourse to Get Beyond Pathology: The Case for Racism

Yet, despite the vehement reaction to the Moynihan report’s connection of Black family structure and economic (lack of) viability, economists have made similar arguments with regard to the increase in the Black-White wage disparity in the 1980s. Other scholars have argued against this explanation, effectively demonstrating that Black heads of household (without respect to partner earnings or lack thereof) lost relative wages during

that period (W. A. J. Darity, Myers, & Chung, 1998). The phenomenon is due in part to gender discrimination, as more Black female heads of household failed to receive equal pay for equal work relative to their male colleagues. However, even when controlling for the rise of female heads of households, this phenomenon can account for only a small portion of the increase in the wage gap (W. A. J. Darity et al., 1998).

Deirdre Royster argues that a stronger explanation for employment and wage disparity is racial bias. She effectively illustrates the multi-level nature of job discrimination. While Black men experience discrimination directly within the hiring process in the form of “Black name” discrimination and assumptions of criminality, they also experience exclusion from the social networks that provide access to employment opportunities (Royster, 2003). Yet, while Royster’s analysis of racial discrimination in the blue-collar workforce sheds considerable light on the challenges Black males face, her conceptualization of race as a fundamentally fixed category reflects a prevailing trend in economic literature. As Darity, Mason and Stewart note,

while anthropology and psychology (as well as sociology and cultural studies) subscribe to a model of racial identity emphasizing cognitive processing and learned associations, mainstream economics remains wedded to the treatment of race as a fixed parameter ascribed to an individual (W. A. Darity, Mason, & Stewart, 2006, p. 287).

The limitation of this “fixed” notion is that economists are unable to conceive of “the complex relationships between individuals and groups” that make up everyday struggles of identity (288). Likewise, Darity and his colleagues have attempted to get beyond simple “rational choice” models in explaining things like an individual’s decision whether or not to enter the workforce. Economists have generally ignored the importance of affect,

emphasizing instead the mechanics of an individual's choice to enter or refuse workforce participation (W. A. Darity & Goldsmith, 1996). While accepting the notion that “unemployment can be hazardous to your emotional health,” (122), these scholars have nonetheless asserted that experiences such as racial discrimination in job-seeking may have a psychological impact that deters a desire to work in the future. These scholars have argued that “a person who faces job search discrimination is thrust into an unbalanced psychological state... to renew psychological balance... they are likely to change their beliefs about the quality of the job that they can expect to attain, which provides incentive to reduce their labor supply” (Goldsmith, Sedo, Jr., & Hamilton, 2004, p. 15). What this means is that, while Black men are willing to work (Pettersen, 1997), and do not have unrealistically high reservation wages (the minimum acceptable salary to work), they may be disinclined to pursue work after experiencing discrimination.

3.3 Pity and Fear

While economists have advocated for the insertion of affect or emotion into understandings of the economic choices, studies more directly concerned with the emotional and communal life of Black males have largely presented Black males as caricatures either out of touch or unduly dominated by their emotions. With few notable exceptions (Ogbu, 2003), ethnography of Black communities has largely focused on “underclass” Blacks, or at least African Americans living in urban centers, ostensibly in close proximity to their underclass kin (Duneier, 1992). In general, this literature has focused upon the cultural lives of impoverished communities (Anderson, 1999; Bourgois, 1995; Lewis, 1966; Stack, 1974), the racial formations of individuals within these communities (J. L. Jackson, 2005), and the

efforts of individuals within communities to organize against systematic oppression (Checker, 2005). However, within this body of literature as a whole, African American males are sometimes characterized as violent or dangerous (Anderson, 1999), and are often at least portrayed as somehow exotic, markedly “other” than a presumed (mostly White) bourgeois audience. In this way, Black males in social scientific literature are misunderstood as “Black,” as “male,” and as “Black males.”

The mischaracterization of African Americans in ethnographic literature begins at the very impetus of American social science. As Lee Baker effectively demonstrates, anthropological interest in Black Americans began in earnest with the *Journal of American Folklore*'s commitment to gathering Negro folklore in the early 1900s (Baker, 1998). After abandoning the “unprofessional” collections by African American undergraduates and laypeople, Franz Boas turned to Black graduate students as cultural hunter-gatherers. Of this early period, Zora Neale Hurston's *Of Mules and Men* remains the most recognized work. Boas' introduction to a work which has been oft reviled for its lack of “professionalism” and consistency in authorial voice (see Rampersad's forward to the volume) reveals his effort to compensate for Hurston's access by playing what would become the trump card for many ethnographies of African Americans: Access. In extolling the virtues of Hurston's contribution, he asserts

It is the great merit of Miss Hurston's work that she entered into the homely life of the southern Negro as one of them and was fully accepted as such by the companions of her childhood. Thus she has been able to penetrate through that affected demeanor by which the Negro excludes the White observer effectively from participating in his true inner life” (Boas Preface to (Hurston, 1990), xiii).

Boas nakedly appeals to the voyeuristic desire to see “behind the veil” on the part of White audience members, and appeal which would have considerably less sway had the individuals depicted in the publication been even remotely considered as an important audience.

Hurston herself builds upon the notion of access in extolling the virtues of her work, asserting that “folklore is not as easy to collect as it sounds,” for “the best source is where there are the least outside influences and these people, being usually under-privileged, are the shyest” (Hurston, 1990, p. 2). This notion adds to the idea of peeking behind the veil a fetish for the “exotic,” or more accurately pristine far reaches of culture untouched by “civilization.” For ethnographers of North America, the fetishization of “otherness” geographically by their colleagues with international research sites necessitates a construction of Black communities as the “other” within.

While more recent ethnographies of Black communities do not paint their “exotic” subjects with as crude a brush as their predecessors, the trope of access to a world forbidden to a presumably White audience remains. As trends within anthropology began to unsettle the ethnographic authority of mostly White, mostly male researchers, Carol Stack in 1974 “anticipates curiosity about how a young White woman could conduct a study of Black family life” (Stack, 1974, p. xv). The legitimacy of Stack’s access to the “real” minds of Black people is buttressed by her innovative and wise decision not to enter the community through traditional channels of ethnographic power. While Stack’s use of a graduate student contact, rather than a political or religious (male) leader, serves to mitigate an appearance as an “authority” figure, her justification of her methodology serves as a method of validation,

rather than a simple attempt to problematize her own position. Likewise, in her more recent work, Stack emphasizes the ways in which her similarities in age-group and life experience compensate for the obvious differences between herself and her informants (Stack, 1996).

While the creation of ethnographic authority is a necessary part of scholarly writing, the portrayal of “the Black community” as exotic and other has unfortunate unintended consequences. In *All our Kin*, the result is a reading of “the Flats” as a community defined by poverty. Literally the first sentence of the first chapter of the book reads “The Flats is the poorest section of a Black community in the Midwestern city of Jackson Harbor” (1). Thus poverty is *the* defining characteristic of this group of people. And while Stack effectively complicates notions of poor Blacks as pathological or culturally deficient, the primacy of poverty remains as a definitional attribute. Likewise, Alford Young, in an excellent ethnographic study of the *Minds of Marginalized Black Men*, defines the communities his interlocutors call home by their poverty. After block quotes from each of his three key informants, he quickly places economic hardship at the fore: “These are the words of young Black men who were born in urban poverty” (Young, 2004, p. 3). Like Stack, literally in the first authorial sentence on the first numbered page, Young asserts poverty as definitional to underclass Black community.

An interesting foil for this portrayal of poor Black community is Kathleen Stewart’s portrayal of Appalachian communities in West Virginia. While many members of Stewarts mostly-White subject community live below the poverty line, Stewart focuses on the beauty of their mountain homes as much as the decay of a post-mining economy. Even as Stewart “others” these people, literally in the title of her book, she examines the “cultural poetics” of

her informants in a manner that seem to place much less weight on poverty as a definitional condition (Stewart 1996).

The salience of poverty in defining Black communities, even for “liberal” or “progressive” scholars, is particularly problematic given the characterization of these communities as typical of “cultures of poverty” (Lewis, 1966). In this context, a focus on economic deprivation may lead to what Darryl Michael Scott refers to as a sort of contempt/pity binary. “Damage imagery” like the “culture” created by poverty, argues Scott, is not necessarily conservative, but also appeals to the “pity” of liberal readers. Scott further argues that this “pity” literature, rather than an ideological shift sparked by “the defeat of scientific racism and... Gunnar Myrdal's evocation of the American creed” (Scott, 1997, p. xii), was responsible for advances like the victory in *Brown v. Board of Education*. But, argues Scott, as the inefficacy of pity scholarship such as the Moynihan report reveals, this approach ultimately leads to the gross mischaracterization of the communities it supposedly advocates for. For Scott, “given the history of the political use of social science... experts who study social groups, particularly those who engage in policy debates, should place the inner lives of people off limits” (xix). While the majority of his text is a historical re-telling of the contempt and pity literature on Black communities, in his conclusion he does name names of current pity practitioners.

Scott reserves particular scrutiny for Richard Majors, whose “image of a damaged male wearing a mask of ‘coolness’ is at heart a return to the failed Young-Moynihan strategy of early 1960s” (197). Indeed, argues Majors (and his under-identified co-author, Billson),

the “cool pose” is some sort of psychological scar-tissue, a salve or covering for the wounds of economic disengagement. The cool pose

eases the worry and pain of blocked opportunities. Being cool is an ego booster for Black males comparable to the kind White males more easily find through attending good schools, landing prestigious jobs and bringing home decent wages (Majors & Billson, 1992).

While the notion of coolness as a replacement for the self-esteem granted by “decent wages” seems ridiculous (given that fact that even working stiffs, yea, even professors want to be “cool” too), his work has gained considerable traction.

3.4 Escaping the Pity Trap

Despite the prevailing winds of banal discourse that nearly all thinkers who brave the high seas must sail on, several Anthropologists have made critically important contributions in escaping the contempt/pity trap. While Carol Stack does foreground poverty in very conspicuous ways in *All Our Kin*, she also presents a portrait of a community that confounds simple damage imagery. Stack points to the intricate fabric of social relationships, the ways in which people in difficult situations rely on one another and gain collective strength. Stack effectively unsettles simplistic misreadings of communities of color.

While Stack challenges common-sense understandings of impoverished Black communities through traditional ethnography and social theory, in *Dryslongo: a Self-Portrait of Black America*, Gwaltney disrupts the ethnographic tradition by greatly limiting his own voice as author. Instead, he records and transcribes long conversations with mostly “decent” Black people on a vast variety of topics (Gwaltney, 1980) . Likewise, Al Young asserts poignantly that in order to understand the challenges facing underclass Black men we must listen to what they have to say, and to take their words seriously (Young, 2004). For Young, Black

males, particularly those who have extensive life experience outside of their neighborhoods, have complex understandings of the nature of racism, class struggle, and economic disconnection. Despite the difficult terrain of conducting any work within a community that has been largely misrepresented and misunderstood by the social sciences, perhaps this turn toward the ideas of actual people negotiating the complex realities of life presents an opportunity to further ethnographic understanding of the “crisis” of the Black male. Perhaps, despite Darryl Michael Scott’s protestations to the contrary, “the inner lives” of Black men provide a rich site for inquiry.

3.5 Boys to Men: The (Re)Creation of the Black Male Monster

With respect to Black boys, educational scholars have asserted that the agenda of the hidden curriculum is to single these students out for discipline and to remove them from core curriculum into “remedial” or “special” education (Carter, 2005; Delpit, 1995; Duncan, 1999; Ferguson, 2000; Porter, 1997). Though the race and gender profiling practices of a complex of teachers, teachers’ aids, staff, and administrators are almost impossible to quantifiably prove, these scholars insist that Black males are systematically, disproportionately disciplined and punished by their superiors. Ferguson asserts that

though African American boys made up only one-quarter of the student body at Rosa Parks, they accounted for nearly half the number of students sent to the Punishing Room for major and minor misdeeds in 1991-92... In the course of my study it became clear that school labeling practices and the exercise of rules operated as part of a hidden curriculum to marginalize and isolate Black male youth in disciplinary spaces and brand them as criminally inclined (Ferguson, 2000, 2).

Likewise, Lisa Delpit sheds light upon the racist and dismissive attitudes of teachers toward these boys, and the ways in which they are excluded from praise and singled out for punishment (Delpit, 1995).

The emerging work on the “School to Prison Pipeline” has pointed to the connection between harsh school discipline policies and entry into the criminal justice system (NAACP/DF, 2005). This happens most proximately through the literal arrest of students for offenses such as schoolyard fights that would have earned less draconian responses in generations past. While these tough policies are ostensibly justified by the escalating levels of violence in many schools, their impact upon the long-term health of low-income communities can be devastating. The Mississippi Schoolhouse to Jailhouse Coalition and other partnerships of “educator, community, civil rights, legal, and public policy groups” are doing groundbreaking work in understanding and counteracting this phenomenon (Gilmer et al., 2009).

The transition of Black males from victim boys to criminal men reflects a larger transition toward the increasing criminalization of disconnected Black men in American society. While the persistent use of Black family “pathology” as an explanation of continued racial economic disparity points to a continuance of 1960s ideology despite this “watershed” moment, the treatment of Black males with respect to crime and incarceration seems to have reached new lows in the wake of the Reagan era war on drugs. With respect to violent crime, Black males in select urban centers are purported to experience more danger and death than in military combat (Davis & Muhlhausen, 2000). Yet, even as this Heritage Foundation report ostensibly focuses on Black males as “victims,” its policy recommendations reflect the

fact that Black males are viewed in fact as criminal perpetrators. In explaining the decrease in murders of Black males in Brooklyn, NY, the reports authors cite the increased arrests made under Mayor Giuliani's tough policing policies (Davis & Muhlhausen, 2000).

Notwithstanding the Attorney General's investigation that revealed that "roughly one out of every seven 'stops' conducted by the NYPD... fail to meet the legal threshold of 'reasonable' suspicion," the report's authors insist that "the available evidence does not support the claim that the NYPD reforms led to an increase in excessive force and civil rights abuses" (9).

This twisting of Black male as "victim" into Black male as criminal reflects a larger trend toward the demonization and criminalization of Black males in both academic and press publications (Asim, 2001; Hutchinson, 1996; J. G. Miller, 1996). As Jerome Miller notes, police departments routinely justify racial profiling and arrest practices through the criminalization of Black males. For example, in the violent response to the Rodney King verdict, the LAPD ran background checks "on the first 1,000 arrestees charged with misdemeanors (most having to do with curfew violations)" (J. G. Miller, 1996).

Approximately "6 out of 10 had criminal records and nearly one third were on probation or parole" (5). The deputy city attorney asserted on local and national television "this was not an instantaneous 'good guy rage' kind of thing... this was 'bad guy' taking advantage of a situation out of control" (5). In reality, a 1991 study revealed that "*nearly one-third of all the young Black men (ages 20-29) living in Los Angeles County had already been jailed at least once in the same year*" (5). The Black youths that took to the streets in rage were in fact, at least with

respect to “criminality,” a representative population. Likewise, the story of Black-on-Black crime reduction groups like the Heritage Foundation tell belies the fact that

the drug war was begun in earnest at precisely the time when violence among African-American males had either stabilized or was stabilizing... the homicide rates among young Black men continued to decline for two more years until 1983. But by 1991, homicide rates among young Black men were surpassing the record levels of 1934 and 1972” (J. G. Miller, 1996, p. 91).

More mainstream social science has also been complicit with this narrative. As Greg Dimitriadis notes, the relationships of Black males with one another are often criminalized in both scholarly literature and public discourse (Dimitriadis, 2003). As a brief example of this phenomenon, a 1995 study sought to prove empirically that gangs are inherently criminal, that “‘Gang’ thus signifies more than the nominal congregation of youth for protective and social purposes” (Sheley, 1995) (53). Unfortunately, this study was conducted with “responses to surveys completed by 373 male juveniles who identified themselves as gang members prior to incarceration in mostly maximum security correctional facilities” (53). The investigators took 373 males already convicted of crimes serious enough to warrant detention in a maximum security prison, interrogated their connections to gang activity, and formulated conclusions about the population of gang members *not* incarcerated for a crime. This sort of ridiculously biased subject selection is noted nowhere in the study. Had this study done anything other than confirm prevailing notions about the criminality of Black male social relationships and organization, it likely would have not warranted publication.

For ethnographic writing, the assumed criminality of Black males leads to a third and final way of misunderstanding them, the notion of Black males as exotically dangerous. Just as Boas appealed to the voyeurism of a curious, mostly White audience, present-day

descriptors of Black male subculture rely on these stereotypes to generate both audience interest and ethnographic authority. Elijah Anderson paints for the uninitiated reader a world utterly foreign and imminently dangerous. In discussing forms of disrespect or “dissing” that can lead to violent confrontation, he asserts that “many of the forms dissing can take may seem petty to middle class people (maintaining eye contact for too long, for example)” (Anderson, 1999, p. 34). While Anderson attributes this jungle mentality to “a cultural adaptation to a profound lack of faith in the police and the judicial system” (34), the effect of creating an exotic and hostile Black male remains. His animalization of his Black subject continues in chapter headings like “the Mating Game.”

3.4 No Fear: Counteracting the Discourse of Danger

As I argued above, the public debate surrounding Black males has been characterized largely by pity for Black boys (particularly those born into poverty) and fearful contempt of Black men. This legacy of this discourse and the social reality it reflects was painfully evident to Eastside’s coaches. The voices of Black male direct-service practitioners, as the literature reflects, have been loudly absent from discussion of Black male (Rasheed and Rasheed 1999, Reese 2004). Yet, even as those voices remain “invisible,” images of dangerous Black men are highly visible in the evening news, etc. The notion of society’s fear of Black men that is both reflected in and impacted by these images provides the context for Coach Sapp’s “Big Black Man Rules.” Even as the coaches were aware of the prevailing winds of fear in particular, they attempted to combat them in several related ways: First, fear of the developing Black men that made up parts of our program was utterly and conspicuously

absent from common conversation. Several of our players were or had been gang affiliated, and even larger percentages of students each of these men worked with every day participated in some sort of “criminal” activity. While this was an acknowledged fact among the staff, these affiliations were never brought up with a tone of fear, but rather in concern for the player in question, or even derision for the “childish thugs” these ties represented.

These vehement moments of ridicule reflected a second strategy for combating the prevailing winds of fear. When several players commented that the hand signal for one of our plays looked “too much” like a gang sign, which could be construed as disrespectful, a coach quickly responded “fuck them niggers.” When the players insisted on changing the sign, the coach changed it to an obscene gesture for cowardice, reflecting what he perceived as the weakness of his own players in wanting to change the signal. Such bravado was not only reserved for the relative safety of the football field. As one coach related,

A bunch of kids in my second period class are [gang] banging. So I mess with them. When I’m writing on the board, I will take a certain color marker and say ‘I’m not writing with this, I hate this color.

The bravado of disrespecting the chosen color of one of the largest gangs in the school reflected both the in-your-face teaching style of the particular teacher, and the relative security that the “gang” of the football team provided. Having fifty-plus larger-than-average young men with some loyalty to you certainly creates a sense of power within the school. Likewise, the checkered backgrounds of many coaches, along with the capacity for aggression trained by playing a violent game gave all coaches, even those small in stature, a strong belief in their own capacity to “handle” confrontations.

Lastly, coaches in fact regularly ridiculed (behind their backs) their colleagues who were “afraid of kids.” They repeatedly asserted that the fear of their colleagues undermined the educational process by curtailing their ability to control their classrooms. Similarly, they often discussed the ways in which the larger society’s fear of Black men undermined their own life chances and the futures of our players. This discussion and derision was a way of actively combating what they felt was the false information of fear their colleagues and even the evening news were feeding them. By ridiculing fear, these coaches sought to insulate themselves from its affects, and to bond together with their fellow coaches, to reaffirm their collective strength against very real violence. These methods were overwhelmingly effective in creating an environment where fear was nearly utterly absent as a way of thinking about young Black men.

Because coaching, teaching and mentoring (as I have explained above) is *heart* work, overcoming centuries of fear-mongering and the relatively recent hyper-criminalization of Black males is critical heart preparation in engaging with this work. The efforts of the Eastside High coaches reflect an awareness of a long history of the misunderstanding and misrepresentation of Black males, a tradition that has reduced their problems to poverty, characterized their culture as pathological and misrepresented them as hyper-violent. Darryl Michael Scott’s scathing critique of social science literature points to the ways even progressive social agendas have commandeered caricatures of Black men. *The Philadelphia Negro*, despite the best efforts of the brilliant Du Bois, can only succeed in describing the teeming, hopeless Black poor with any sort of clarity. From the Moynihan Report to the

work of cutting-edge scholars of economic opportunity, descriptions of the challenges facing Black males ultimately have only two villains: the systemic racism of American society and the pathology of Black male culture. Clearly, neither of these two extremes reflect the complex reality of the thoughtful and imperfect men this dissertation describes. But the debate reflects a larger argument on whether personal agency or system-level change is the best way out of social ill in general, and the problems facing Black males in particular.

For the coaches of Eastside High, the extremes of the rhetorical right and left were far removed from the day-to-day struggle of teaching and connecting with Black males. Yet, their passing familiarity with social science literature, their immersion in educational debates and their engagement with media representations of Black men and boys made them acutely aware of the affects of these misrepresentations. The coaches of Eastside High steeled themselves against the adverse affects of these images by actively and directly combating the discourse of fear, contempt and pity.

4. “Football Don’t Give a F* about Your Feelings”

4.1 *Coaching for Brian Moss*

Just as the prevailing winds of social science literature provide a sort of literary context for this project, an even more pivotal backdrop for this work is the specificity of the particular community this dissertation documents. This study in fact represents the first study of this length focused exclusively on a Black male community. Of the few book length studies focused entirely on Black males, several, like Al Young’s *The Minds of Marginalized Black Men*, deal with men not necessarily in close communal contact to one another (Young, 2004). Others, like Ann Ferguson’s *Bad Boys*, focus on Black male students, but within the context of co-ed and multi-ethnic faculties and institutions (Ferguson, 2000). This study focuses explicitly on the football team as a space of Black male subculture where both the student-athletes and the teacher-coaches were Black and male.

How that unique space came to be is a long story. Eastside high is one of the 300 Black-only high schools that dotted North Carolina under segregation. Only 5 of those high schools remain open. Following de-segregation in the late 60s and early 70s, the school remained largely African American prior to the early 1990s. That time period saw a temporarily greater White enrollment, attracted to competitive magnet academic programs. As the school continued to struggle in performance on standardized tests, these students left, leaving the school once again overwhelmingly African American. That time period also saw the rise of the schools Latino population in keeping with demographic trends in the state. However, Eastside remained majority African American, with over 90% of the student body self-identifying as Black.

During the course of my time at Eastside, we had only two non-Black Latino players, both of whom were on the JV squad. We had a single White coach who worked with the team for about two months in 2007 before leaving for another job offer. For the overwhelming majority of my time with the varsity team, we had both an all-Black staff and an all-Black team.

While the demographic make-up of the team created a unique context for the first study of this kind, the football team's distinctive leadership created a rich environment for deep and meaningful relationships. Head Coach Brian Moss is a native of North Carolina who grew up in "the country" about an hour and a half away from Eastside. He spent much of his childhood in difficult financial circumstances, living in a double-wide trailer. After high school, unaware of options for financial aid, he joined the military, serving in the Air Force, and eventually completing his college education under the GI bill. After living across the country, he returned to North Carolina to marry his long-time sweetheart and start a family. He started out teaching biology at a local middle-school, and began coaching football as well.

Eventually Moss left the middle school at the same time as a class of his players, taking over as a JV coach at Eastside while teaching biology. He coached that same group of guys the next year as the new varsity coach. They struggled, as he played a lot of underclassmen, working to improve a football culture in a program that was used to losing. In 2006, Moss's third year, he brought in several new staff members. I joined the team with that group, which included new Offensive and Special Teams Coordinators, and several

position coaches. We had a three-loss season in 2006, and were able to improve upon that success in 2007 and again in 2008.

Many of the coaches that joined the team in 2006 described a singular reason for joining the team: Coach Moss. His reputation in the community for genuinely caring for his players and going above and beyond to secure them scholarships had created a large number of supporters who sang his praises. The coaches that came on with me had all heard of Moss from different people, but each one had, like I, heard that he was doing something “special” at Eastside. I heard about him from two teachers at the school who I went to college with. I told them about the research project I was interested in, and my desire to get back into the game of football as a coach. “You have to come to Eastside,” they said. “Coach Moss is out there with those boys year-round, he’s with them traveling all over the state so college coaches can meet them. You’ve got to see what he’s doing.”

I emailed Coach Moss a resume, and left him a voicemail, with no response. Nervous that the staff was full, I decided to try to come down and meet him in person. I walked into the locker room in July, dressed in slacks and dress shirt. He wasn’t around, so I came back the next day, dressed for a job interview like before. He met me in the hallway. I explained my desire to coach, and he looked me up and down. “Yeah, I think you can help us, come back tomorrow at 3.”

Our attachment to Coach Moss was a pivotal part of what served as the backbone of our coaching community. The five of us, all under 30, walked into a team with several players who had already received Division I scholarship offers, including Manny Wallace, who had already been named an All-American. But, as Coach Wilbon put it two years later,

“when I came here, I didn’t know anything about Manny Wallace, all I knew about was Brian Moss.” All of us were attracted to a program that had experienced numerous consecutive losing seasons because of the man in charge. And, when things got difficult over the next three seasons, when personality conflicts caused friction, coaches often swallowed their prides, because of their commitment to Brian, and their respect for the “chain of command.”

4.2 About Football

American Football is probably the most “American” of all the major sports, in the sense that, with the exception of Canada, there is relatively little playing of the sport outside the U.S. It is also, along with wrestling, the last bastion of male-only sport in mainstream athletics. When I was in high school, I played JV football with a female kicker, a soccer player and probably pound for pound one of the toughest individuals on the team. The way media followed our JV team that year was proof that she was still the rarest of exceptions to the “male only” rule.

The game derives from rugby and soccer, with the significant change of the “forward pass” and non-continuous play. The purpose of the game is to score more points than an opponent. Points are scored by advancing the ball down the field, and scoring a “touchdown” by taking the ball into the endzone. Defenses attempt to stop the offense by “tackling” the ball carrier - forcing him or her to the ground. Points can also be scored by kicking a “field goal” through a U-shaped upright at the back of the endzone, or by tackling an opponent within their own endzone. 11 players on each team play at a time. For the most

part, on larger teams, players specialize in playing either offense or defense, with only a few players playing “both ways.”

Football is a game that, at least on the high school level, accommodates a wide range of body types. Players range from 110 pounds to around 400. The goal of the football program is to make these players more athletic: faster and stronger with more lean muscle mass. This is accomplished in the off-season (January-mid-August) by diligent weightlifting and agility training. Players work out in organized team sessions 3 to 4 days a week, basically year round. This requires considerable time commitment, both for players and for coaches. The off-season is LONG, and there aren't year-round opportunities for competition, as is the case with basketball, baseball, soccer and most other sports. Late spring and summer does bring the “passing league” season, with opportunities for non-contact football competition against area schools.

As a result of the long off-season in which the majority of the team is in daily contact through organized workouts, the rhythm of football looks like a protracted period of fighting boredom and working very hard, followed by a compressed period of high anxiety and intensity during the football season. Because the football seasons has fewer games than nearly every other sport, each game is imbued with extreme significance. Similarly, because of the impending period of pressure, offseasons are times of anxious expectation. High school football is about developing a new team every year, often with little continuity as players graduate, move, or become academically ineligible.

High school football is a constant building process. As soon as the last play of a season ends, a new one begins. Dedicated players, trying to cope with the frustrations and

disappointments that always accompany the end of the season, show up the next week to work out. Dedicated coaches, weary from time away from family and from the emotional drain of the season, show up to let them in the weightroom. That's where the 2008 season began, before 2007 was even over, in the slightly stinking fluorescent fog of the weightroom. Our weightroom was organized with the needs of football, by far its most consistent patrons, in mind. Power-lifting oriented machines line that walls: 2 squat racks, 2 squat/combo stations, leg press, 4 bench press stations, a pull-down machine, and a dip/pull-up station. A solitary leg extension machine is the only isolation exercise station in the room.

The large center of the floor remains open and covered with mats. Here players do hang-cleans and other exercises with the rubberized weights. Here, after the workout, the entire team gathers for the slow torture of a 15 minute intense core workout with weighted crunches and the like.

The weightroom is among the sacred spaces of the team. Certain rituals add to its "specialness." Players are allowed to enter through only one of the two entrances. Every workout ends with a team "break," a quick chant said together with hands raised, players together in a tight huddle in the middle of the floor: "We work harder on three. One...Two...Three We Work HARDER." The weightroom is the symbol of the football *program*, the system of physical training, academic accountability and football teaching that undergirds the development of players. But often the weightroom reflected the realities of the competing priorities facing players. Young ladies poked their heads in to deliver messages to players. Moms and dads came in to pick players up early or talk to coaches.

Players needing additional tutoring with their class teachers often missed weightroom entirely. Not all of them reflected the additional attention on their report cards, and perfect enforcement of who was where they said they were never really happened.

The weightroom, like football in general, was an imperfect space for the development of players, a space full of competing priorities, distractions, a space the required the vigilant maintenance of coaches and players to keep its energy and integrity. But the weightroom, unlike the practice field, where college and rival coaches, parents and boosters often attended, was private. Its thick walls allowed the playing of loud and profane hip-hop. Its closed doors and loud fans allowed free-flowing cursing from coaches and occasionally players. The weightroom was a space of collective pain, of collective dreams. There for eight months players and coaches dreamed of the next season, of what would be different, better. Players dreamed of scholarship offers, of increased playing time, of the roar of the crowd. I don't have words to describe the blessing and burden those dreams produced. They made every game *matter*, made every play, even every practice a major event. Coaches dreamed of wins, of getting noticed, of moving on to the "next level" as a college assistant.

For African American high school coaches, the odds against success in college football are long indeed. Of the 119 schools in the Bowl Subdivision of the NCAA (Formerly called D-1), only 6 had Black head coaches in 2008. Turner Gill played quarterback at Nebraska, Tyrone Willingham played Quarterback and flanker at Michigan State, Kevin Sumlin played linebacker at Purdue, Sylvester Croom played center under Bear Bryant at Alabama, and Randy Shannon played linebacker at Miami. Of those six coaches,

only Ron Prince, the now ex-coach of Kansas State, played at Appalachian state, then a 1-AA school. For a coaching staff with only one member with Division 1 (now called FBS) experience, coaching at the college level was a reach. For African American coaches faced with the brutal reality of racial discrimination in hiring practices, dreams of the college big time were in some ways a longer shot than the stereotypical NBA or NFL aspirations of younger players.

The particular challenge faced by Black college football coaches has to do with their relative use within the college system. College football programs are beholden, like all businesses, to their bottom line. In the NFL, revenue is generated through ticket sales, apparel licensing, and television broadcasting rights. In college football, revenue is generated by those streams, and also by participation in bowl games. However, college football is majorly supported by the donations of alumni. For institutions, many of whom only integrated a generation ago, these alumni bases are overwhelmingly White. Much of research around major college sports and football in particular has centered on the inequitable exploitation of the labor of “amateur” players. Estimates suggest premium football players generate as much as half a million dollars in annual revenues for their schools (Brown, 1993). Considerably less attention has been paid to the impact of alumni bases in influencing hiring (or lack thereof) of minority coaches. Whatever the myriad reasons, Black assistant coaches continue to be valued primarily for the “Blackness,” their ability to relate to the elite Black athletes the school is seeking to attract. In this capacity, coaches with playing experience are all the more valuable. There is little if any space made for the “football nerd” personas of (White) Bill Belichick or Charlie Weiss.

The hearts of players were full of perhaps slightly more realistic dreams. For the twenty or thirty most talented, that dream centered on a FBS (formerly Division 1) college scholarship, often on the opportunity to play college football on the biggest stage, under the brightest lights, to the largest roar of the crowd possible. Significantly, for football players, the first step for the overwhelming majority of NFL players is major college football. As a result, well informed players (and Eastside players were well-informed) were concerned with scoring well on SAT or ACT tests and keeping their core-subject GPAs up. College coaches as well as Eastside staff repeatedly explained to players the way the system works, as a sliding scale for college admissions with a “floor” of minimum requirements to be a “full qualifier.” Partial or non-qualifiers have much more limited options: Junior college, Division II and Division III schools.

Likewise, players with partial or barely qualifying grades face longer odds in earning scholarships. Admissions boards work with football programs to determine strategies for enrolling talented players with minimum impact on average GPA and test scores for the admitted pool. Usually this translates into a set of earmarks. A certain set of a given university’s 85 scholarships can only be used for students who meet admission requirements for the school. Another set of scholarships are reserved for students whose grades and scores are slightly below acceptable for non-athlete students. Lastly, a set of relatively few scholarships are reserved for student barely or partially qualifying who are extraordinary talents and “blue chip,” “Gold,” or “A1” recruiting priorities. Often coaches will tell players who are not All-American caliber that they are willing to offer them a scholarship if they raise their GPA and scores to be able to fit into a more competitive bracket of their

scholarship pool. Thus playing ability and academic qualifications act as a sliding scale, the greater a player's ability the less academic qualifications matter. Yet, nearly every player, even those with major talent, benefits in available options by being as academically viable as possible.

While the dreams of college scholarships were infinitely more immediately possible than of college coaching, both of these sets of dreams served an important role in underpinning the thankless hard work of football. In the offseason, coaches came out of their own pockets for trips to coaches clinics, and for visits to the spring and summer practices of major programs. Trips to places like the University of Florida, West Virginia and Virginia Tech served as inspiration and example for what a top-notch program and marketable coach should look like. Visits from college coaches and trips to combines provided more immediate positive reinforcement for the hard work of players.

These player evaluations or "combines" served as major measuring sticks for the athletic potential of players. Moss brought to the football program an understanding for how key these events were to the marketing of players. From his very start at head coach he donated his time and resources to take players to these events, investments that paid off in increased recognition for the Eastside football program and its players. Combines are athletic evaluations sponsored by independent third parties, from major outfitters like Nike and Under Armor to journalistic outlets like Rivals and Scout.com to smaller firms specializing in training and evaluation. These events featured tests of agility, strength and speed, including the highly regarded 40-yard dash test of speed. The strength and conditioning program at Eastside stressed core strength, agility and speed, and generally

produced players capable of “showing out” well at these events. These “objective” tests provided some sense of uniformity in a sport where coach recommendations cannot be fully trusted and competition in terms of football opponents could often be hard to measure. These hard numbers were for athletic evaluation the parallel to SAT and ACT scores with similar strengths and weaknesses. Just as test scores measure aptitude and potential, combines measure raw athletic ability and the “ceiling” of a player’s potential. But, like test scores, these raw numbers by their nature omit the intangible qualities of intuition, physical intelligence, and pressure performance that are at the core of excellent football players.

The cold hard quid pro quo of the business/academic profit/player development partnership of college athletics provided a context for all the work of the football program. Yet, despite the coldness of this reality, the dreams of both players and our relatively young coaches were a life-blood that warmed the months of work. College football coaching was on the one hand about the possibility of greater financial resources. “1.5 million to coach football? It doesn’t get any better than that,” coaches responded after a new major college head coach signing. But even smaller, less well-paying jobs seemed attractive, both as a stepping stone to more, and a way to live a particular lifestyle.

“Man, just give me fifty thousand just to coach football. What? I’m there man.”

“Forget 50 ‘G’s,’ I’m good with 35 [thousand]. You kidding me? Just give me something like I’m getting now, and tell me all I have to do is coach football. That’s me all day. So I only got to worry about ‘X’s’ and ‘O’s?’ I’ll take it.”

Coaching represented not only a means of financial gain but a way of escape: escape from the monotony, drudgery and perhaps most importantly the emotional drain of teaching

school in a failing school system. Significantly, the most vocal “dreamers” were two core subject area teachers and another teacher working substituting jobs while going back to school for certification. Both of those core subject area teachers exhibited all the hallmarks of extraordinary educators. Both stayed late with students, providing tutoring on their subjects, and in some cases helping students with other classes, both football players and other non-athletes. Both had strong relationships and were on first name basis with scores of parents. Both were beloved by their students, and were “local celebrities” at JV football and basketball games and the like. But both continued to dream of a life free from the stress and drama of the emotionally draining work of education.

For these coaches, football represented the best of all possible worlds. Football presented them with the opportunity to positively impact the lives of young people, fulfilling the commitment that had drawn each to education in the first place. But football, despite its dramatic ups and downs, seemed infinitely more possible than the messiness of teaching in “failing” schools. In football the coaching staff carved a space of functionality amidst the storm of a struggling school. Through football they saw their players go on to success in Division I, II, and III schools. In football they possessed the opportunity to impact students like “them,” students who despite their failings were on some level “about something,” in some way interested in using the educational apparatus to make a “better” life for themselves.

4.3 Win. Win? Win!

If the dreams of the players and coaches were different in both their substance and their possibility, they motivated concerted behavior. For the realization of each of these dreams, winning was simply the best possible path. Coach Sapp put it this way:

I told Brian, we got to win to get these kids in school. Sure, you can get one or two players to get scholarships off a losing team, but [college] coaches are going to say 'if they had talent over there, they would have won,' like the other kids on that team couldn't have been that good. When you win, everybody gets looks, coaches think there must be something about this kid that he is being successful on this team. And, if you win enough, when you get deep in the state playoffs, there's only a few games going on in the whole state. When you're the only game in town, college coaches are going to be there. There's all the more chance for them to fall in love with that player.

If the combines provided the “hard data” on players like an SAT score, a player’s “tape” or highlight film, provided the transcript, the report of performance on the field. But, as I noted above, the level of football competition, just like the difficulty of high school courses, was far from equal among players. While the combine numbers and highlight tape of a player provided a significant portion of a player’s resume, discriminating coaches place a high emphasis on seeing a player in person. Visiting football games for a coach is like an admissions interview, it provides them with a “live” look at a player in action, and also with the opportunity to interact person-to-person with a potential player.

Similarly for coaches, winning was a critical component of career advancement. The very few coaches who successfully made the jump from high school to college coaching had done so through consistent success at the high school head coach level. Winning as a value was a positive outcome that had benefit to everyone involved with or associated with the program. Winning boosted ticket sales, providing increased revenue to the athletic

department, and bankrolling the uniforms and expenses of other sports. Winning allowed for playoff runs, producing additional home games that generated further ticket revenue. Winning attracted local press, who did features on the football program, providing Eastside with much needed positive press. Winning also was a source of pride for the school, even for those not directly involved in the program.

A couple of my favorite teachers at Eastside were friends of mine from undergrad. Both North Carolina natives, they had married shortly after graduation (like me) and taken jobs at Eastside. As I have stated above, they were ultimately a big part of the reason I came to Eastside, great supporters of what Coach Moss was trying to do with the program. As another young African American couple interested in social justice, they formed part of the larger community that sustained my wife and I. Sharing a meal with Jamaica and I after visiting their church, Sonja put it this way: “Things are difficult at Eastside. We have a lot of challenges, and a lot of things that need to change. Honestly, football was one of the bright spots for us last year. We were just really hopeful and excited about what was going on.” Football was by no means the only “bright spot” at Eastside. Magnet programs, strong support for music and the dramatic arts, and several other locally recognized athletic programs also at times provided positive press. Yet, as Sonja’s comment illustrates, the positive feelings of the football program’s success engendered were shared by the larger Eastside community.

Foley’s study on the social significance of football in the life of a high school effectively illustrates the ways football in a Texas high school was mobilized as a source of school pride, discipline and collective identity (Foley, 1990). Eastside was not a “football

school” in the sense of many Texas powerhouses, or even in the way my high school in central Florida operated. Nevertheless, winning had an impact on the high school, and even formed fodder for trash-talking in the community at large. The school district’s “school of choice” policy (though its implementation appeared at times bewilderingly arbitrary) meant that many community residents “chose” schools for themselves, as well as for their children and relatives. Community members, regardless of neighborhood, were often supporters of a particular school, with or without the ties of family alumni and the like. Likewise, younger kids were often “fans” of a particular high school, and would wear their chosen school colors on game days, talk trash, and generally have fun with their fellow students and teachers. Coach Thomas, who taught at a local middle school, would often reference his kids after a win. “Now I can shut those dang kids up from talking trash. Kids gonna come up to me and say ‘y’all need to get it together, y’all soft.’”

Winning football games impacted the educational trajectory of our players, the career advancement of the coaches, the financial viability of the athletic department, the positive visibility of the school, the outlook of teachers, the support of the community, and the trash talking of kids all over the county. It’s hard to over-emphasize the level of pressure that complex of issues placed both on players and coaches to win football games. This had a very particular impact upon the offseason. Just as dreams of wild success motivated the hard work of players, fears of failure haunted the conversations I had with them. Just as coaches hoped for a better life and an easier vocation, they feared that the loss of key players or new rules or poor player attitudes or injuries in other sports would doom the next season. Offseasons, even for our very successful program, were times of anxiety, times in which

coaches often wondered aloud if they had the players (and likely wondered internally if they had the know-how) to be successful “again.” At times, certain coaches in particular would actually voice their heartfelt conviction that we would not be able to reproduce the success of the previous season (we always did).

4.4 Winners and Losers

While winning presented significant positive outcomes for players and coaches alike, winning was not simply motivated by material concerns. Winning *feels* good. And, like anything that feels good, it is pregnant with potential for addiction. Like their counterparts in other fields, coaches can suffer from workaholism, using work both as a means of primary personal validation and escape. But these challenges are made stronger by the concreteness of winning and losing in football. A common coaching axiom is that “football is a game of inches.” Coaches often dissect a season, pointing to just how thin the margin of victory of defeat was: “We were three plays away from winning that game, three plays away from being in the state final. Shoot, we were six plays away from being undefeated. If he makes that tackle/breaks up that pass/catches that ball, everything’s different.”

Coaches constantly fought the urge to dissect the mistakes, to obsess over the infinite details that derailed hopes for victory. The phantom of manic obsession clawed at the back of collective brains. No one knows which plays are “those” plays, which will determine the outcomes of a game, of a season, of a career. Conversely, for every play that went hopelessly wrong, there were others, often overlooked, where something special or unexpected gave our team the opportunity to be successful. Coaches fought to remember

those moments, to learn from mistakes without being preoccupied with them. With greatly varying success. With a level of balance that varied from coach to coach, from day to day, from moment to moment.

In its proper perspective, winning was a means and not an end. Winning was a means to player scholarships, to career advancement. Educational opportunity and professional gain were in turn viewed as means to the larger goal of living full and fulfilled lives. Yet, while each coach had “moments of clarity” in which they articulated a philosophy that postulated winning as a means and not an end in and of itself, lived reality was significantly more complex. Each and every coach also had moments when selfish desires for winning or the frustration of failure overwhelmed the more noble reasons for their involvement in the lives of young men. One offseason event in particular pointed to the war both within the hearts of coaches and between members of the coaching staff to put the pleasure of winning into proper perspective.

2006 and 2007 saw the Eastside high offense put together impressive numbers. Over 4000 yards of total offense, multiple 1000 yard rushers and receivers, and back to back all-conference quarterbacks highlighted an offense among the most explosive in the state. Going into the 2008 season, we returned a senior quarterback with over 4,000 passing yards and a running back ranked by many among the top 50 players in the nation. But, our team was particularly inexperienced at the wide receiver position. Really inexperienced. We had only one returning wide receiver with a catch in a varsity football game. He wound up missing the entire season with a torn ACL, a severe knee injury.

Our team was invited to participate in the Carolina Panthers 7-on-7 touch football tournament. Unlike where I played my high school football in Florida, North Carolina does not allow any contact football in the offseason. “Spring football” for Eastside and every other school in the state consisted only of touch football. During the summer, teams participated in various tournaments sponsored by colleges, companies, and the like. The Carolina Panthers tournament was sponsored by the NFL, and featured a free trip to New Orleans for the tournament winner. 8 of the best teams from across the state were competing.

Our performance that day was less than impressive. Our defense played decently, but our receivers dropped several key passes, and our quarterback made a number of bad decisions resulting in turnovers and points for the opposing team. While none of the coaching staff enjoyed losing 2 of our first 3 games, one coach took it particularly hard. He made his frustration with one particular player visible, and vocally attributed the player’s failures to a lack of focus. The player in question was among the most consistent on the team in terms of dedication. He never missed a single practice during my 3 years with the team. In fact, despite being battered like a rag doll nearly every Friday night, he only was unable to participate in one practice all year due to injury, and had to be forced to sit down at that point by his Offensive Coordinator.

The coaches’ critique stemmed in part from his quarterback’s choice to attend a workout following the 7-on-7 tournament with an SEC team that was interested in recruiting him as a wide receiver. That particular school not the coaches’ first choice for the player. The coach commented that the player was focusing on the upcoming trip rather than the 7-

on-7 tournament. The player decided to cancel his workout with the other team following our losses. As a result, another coach who had planned to drive the player and a friend to the workout was forced to cancel the trip.

After the emotionally packed day, other coaches launched several critiques on the overemphasis on winning for the day that led to a situation of frustration and conflict. The critique centered along three distinct lines:

- 1) Have realistic expectations – the passing league format favors offense, so the play of that particular unit is key to winning. Several coaches asserted that because of the youth of our receiving core, emerging as the best touch football team in the state that day was a bit of a long shot. The coach in question’s assertion that his frustration stemmed in part from “wanting to go to New Orleans,” reflected a disconnect between his expectations and that of the rest of the staff.
- 2) Place player development first – another coach emphasized the importance of seeing touch football or “passing league” games in the offseason as opportunities to develop the ability of players to perform in pressure situations. This coach argued that “you can’t win anything” in the offseason, that “nobody remembers what passing league you won” when the “real” season starts in the fall. Several coaches asserted that an undue emphasis on winning in what would prove to be relatively meaningless practice games undermined the ability of players to develop confidence in their ability to make plays.

- 3) Remember the program's priorities – by forgoing an opportunity to work out with the SEC team interested in bringing him on as a student athlete, our quarterback closed a door on a potential scholarship opportunity. While the player was able to obtain a scholarship offer to a school with a comparable academic and football tradition, many coaches took issue with their fellow coach encouraging a player to do something that was ultimately not in the best interest of having multiple educational opportunities. These coaches also felt that there was absolutely no benefit to the development of the team in the player forgoing the workout.

The three lines of critique launched against the particular coach's response to a competitive situation outlined strategies coaches regularly employed both internally and with one another to combat an overemphasis on or addiction to winning. At other moments, other coaches evidenced an overemphasis on winning and were similarly critiqued by their colleagues. Football coaching is ultimately about putting players in a position to be successful. As coaches, we would often become frustrated when a player did not perform up to our level of expectation, did not respond to what we felt like were our best efforts as coaches. Often it took a fellow coach pulling one of us aside and reminding us of the necessity of being flexible. If a player was unable to perform up to our level of expectation, nothing could be gained from continually putting him in a position to fail and add to our frustration. Rather, coaches again and again reminded one another to change the situation, to try another player at that position, to scale back a player's responsibilities, to have realistic expectations for a player's performance based on their ability and aptitude.

Similarly, coaches continually reminded themselves and each other to see “the big picture” and not lose the forest for the trees. As I have said repeatedly, the football offseason was a long process always full of ups and downs. Likewise, the football season was a protracted struggle with good days and bad days, good plays and bad plays. Coaches continually reminded one another that the success of our program was judged on how we performed at the end of the season playoffs, not in offseason contests. Coaches also admonished one another that our focus needed to remain on developing players, building depth, and striving for perfection, rather than immediate results and instant gratification.

Lastly, coaches encouraged one another to remember what the top priority of our football program was: the development of young men and the creation of opportunity for ourselves and for our players. Coaches did not need to be reminded of how important winning was to each of us. We were all fierce competitors. Rather, each coach often needed to be reminded that the development of young men was our top priority. In a context in which so much rides on winning, remembering the “higher” purpose nearly all of us articulated regularly was a constant struggle. This challenge was made all the more difficult by the emotional impact of wins and losses. I have stated above that winning is addictive because it *feels* good. The flip side of that equation is at least equally powerful: losing *feels* bad. And, particularly for men who, like all of the human beings I have come in contact with, have deep-seated personal insecurities and other emotional issues, the fear of failure often proved a powerful motivator. But as hard as coaches and players alike worked to give themselves the best possible chance of success, the staunchest defense against the emptiness of losing, no amount of hard work can guarantee victory. One coach put it this way:

You can work as hard as you want to in the offseason, you can lift those weights, you can watch that film. But at the end of the day, players got to make plays. And then, the ball's gonna bounce the way it's going to bounce. As a coach, you can't do nothing about that.

If football (like much of life) didn't care how hard you worked, how much you had "earned" the right to be a champion, it cared even less about how much losing hurt you, how sad it was to see your players who had worked and fought so hard crying after a loss. Matt Sapp, in classic fashion, put it this way:

"Football don't give a fuck about your feelings."

So if football is uncertain and cold, coaches coped with this reality by focusing on the things that were within their control. The beautiful thing about coaching is that if you work hard to develop players, your effort will often be rewarded. Coach Thomas described his approach this way:

I can't make plays, I make zero plays. So what do you do? You just help players get better. I know that if I'm out there every day, being professional, running my drills, they are going to get better. It's as simple as that, making players better, making men.

If football doesn't give a fuck about your feelings then the only answer is to focus on the people that do. Even as you are "working your ass off" to help your team win football games, to remember that you are working for the players that play for you and the coaches that coach with you. That you are not playing for the roar of the crowd or the respect of your peers, but for the moments when you see a young man go from tentative to brave, from scared to confident, from barely making it to college qualified. Football, in its fickleness, its unpredictability, was an assault on the heart. Combating this offensive could only be done through the support and value of community.

For the majority of coaches, this same technique was utilized in their full-time work environment, as educators. The educational system, perhaps even more than football, mounted what they perceived to be an ongoing attack on their humanity. They survived the difficulty of teaching by cultivating networks of support, enjoying the process, rather than just the “outcome” of education, and focusing on the lives of the kids they were able to impact.

“You know what my favorite part about football is?” Coach Sapp asked me. “It’s not the games, because if you lose, you feel empty. It’s practice. I love practice. Just being out there with the guys, working my ass off, just getting better. Yeah, I love that.”

5. A Football Family: Wrestling with Community

5.1 *Intentional Community*

In “Don’t Tell Nobody This But I Love Y’all,” I raise the notion of Black male inexpressiveness articulated by the important and insightful work of Anderson Franklin as a sort of paper tiger to make a rhetorical point about the willingness of the Black men I coached with to express intimate emotions with trusted friends. While I think that an assertion of Black males as expressive is critical to transforming a banal conversation about Black men (as if they were always not in the room) that centers on their presumed emotional deficiency, the unique situation of my fieldwork site in fact illustrates Franklin’s larger point: that Black men need specific, thoughtfully constructed *contexts* in which to discuss their most intimate emotions. My ethnographic evidence, while in some ways contradictory of Franklin’s assumptions, in another sense reinforces his larger point: that Black men, like all human beings, need communities of trust in which to process the violences performed upon them by their social environment. The Eastside High football coaching staff was a uniquely well-suited community for frank discussion because of the duration of relationships, volatility of coaching and the necessity of emotional engagement to coaching football.

It’s August. It’s football time. All the months of the dank sweaty stickiness of the weightroom, all the countless days of stressing out over ultimately meaningless touch football games, all the hand-wringing and worrying and pre-season jitters are about to come to a close. We are all excited. We’re sitting in the coaches conference room, talking through

player issues, still sweaty from a hard afternoon's practice. The athletic director pokes his head in the door: "Gentlemen, great work out there... Coach Moss, I'm about to order coaches shirts. I know we need about 20 of them. You all have got to have the biggest coaching staff in all of North Carolina."

We all laugh.

"We need 15 coach... oh, and one more for Coach Green. So 16 all together. What do we do about sizes?"

"I know I need a 3X," Coach Smalls chimed in. He counted up sizes in his head. "Get 6 3 X's [XXXL], 5 2 X's, and 5 X Large."

The coaches shirts were the only "perk" provided to those counted as members of the coaching staff. Coaches came out of their pockets for trips to coaching clinics, for their membership in the state coaches association, for their practice gear, gloves and coats. But the school paid for two coaches shirts (White and dark for home and away). For coaches, the shirt was the only tangible symbol of membership in the "football family" of the Eastside coaching staff. The abnormally large number of that staff reflected the commitment of Coach Moss to being flexible and inclusive in conceptualizing his assistants.

The list of men who received coaches shirts reflected a broad range of involvement levels. 13 of those coaches were paid something in the neighborhood of \$600 for their time. With all the time coaches put in throughout the course of the year, that supplement, even for slightly higher-paid head coaches, worked out to much less than one dollar an hour. One assistant coach who kept track of the hours he spent as a coach estimated it at over 6200 hours of work per year. That works out to 10 cents an hour. With the cost of gas to and

from practice, and the money assistants spend on needed and “extra” practice and professional Eastside gear, all coaches lost not only time but money on football. Football coaches coach because that’s what they love to do. And, given the availability of part-time jobs as mentors, tutors and even bouncers that coaches worked in their free time, the time spent working with players literally cost them money.

For one coach this was particularly true. Coach Green was among the 3 coaches (including myself) who worked on a strictly volunteer basis. More importantly, every hour he gave to the football team was an hour away from generating bonuses in his very high-paying sales job. Green was a graduate of Eastside, and played football at an ACC school. While in school he discovered a love of mathematics and the then-nascent field of computer programming. After working for several startups and a couple major, nationally-known firms, he landed back in the triangle as a senior-level sales manager for a computer software company. With a large house in the pricey housing neighborhood, grown-up kids already finished with college, and a beautiful luxury sedan, Coach Green was by far the most senior and the most “successful” of the Eastside coaches. He was also among the coaches who found it most difficult to make time for practices. But he found ways to contribute to the program, both as a financial supporter, and as a mentor to several members of the coaching staff. Often, when I was overwhelmed by the pressures of school, coaching and providing for my family, I called coach Green. I wasn’t the only one.

Our success as a football program didn’t necessarily translate into having the newest and the best as a program. Our school, located in high poverty area, was never able to garner consistent, high-dollar support from local businesses. As a result, the athletic department

struggled to keep the schools numerous teams outfitted. Coach Moss, inheriting a losing program with outdated uniforms, sold candy and performed various other fundraisers to purchase the team new uniforms in 2005. By the 2008 season, these uniforms were considerably the worse for wear. With an expensive renovation of the basketball gym and new uniforms for various teams in need, there just wasn't a whole lot of money in the budget for the expensive proposition of new uniforms. In the stressful process of getting new uniforms, one coach described calling Green distraught. "I called him crying," he joked, "Like I was calling my daddy."

While Green's contribution as a mentor and supporter of the program made the reasons for his inclusion in the "football family" clear, Green himself articulated the network of support the program provided for him. He was able to be a regular part of the program during the 2006 season, and was able to be at practices and games considerably less in 2007 and 2008. Whenever he was able to be there, he was greeted with open affection. Whenever I talked to him, he expressed how much he missed being involved with the program day-to-day, and his desire to make more time to be involved. After seeing him for the first time in a while I asked him how he was doing. He responded:

Coach, I'm doing good man. I'm really kicking butt man. My [sales] numbers are good, and things are really going well on that front. I'm just so busy, you know how it is G [my nickname on the staff]. I just miss being around the guys, around the kids, just the camaraderie. You don't notice just how important the feeling of being a part of it all is until you miss it, like I'm missing it right now.

Coach Green's used "coach" in the first sentence of the above quote as a term of endearment members of the "football family" used for each other. My wife, after being around the whole team, often ridiculed the "lovefest" which the term formed a part of.

“Coach, coach, look at this, coach, coach, isn’t that funny,” she’d say. “Coach,” as a general term that could be used for any member of the staff, reinforced our sense of belonging to a special “fraternity,” as it is often called. His use of the term with me in a one-on-one conversation reinforced the bond that we had shared over the last three years. As much as his actual words, his choice of both “coach” and “G” in reference to me emphasized the importance of the community we were both a part of.

5.2 Through the Fire: Creating Community

We played one of our archrival high schools in the second week of conference play. While our game every year with the other majority-black high school is considered our “rival” game, the game is a hard-fought contest between sister schools. Both programs boast staffs with strong ties to the local HBCU (Historically Black College or University). Players know each other, and many have best friends or hang-out buddies on the opposing team. The game against Park High is different. Park is a majority White school, whose district borders ours. Though we are close with some coaches from Park, our staffs generally do not get along particularly well. And then there’s the infamous monkey incident, when a stuffed or blow-up “monkey” (it looked more like a gorilla to me) mysteriously followed our star player up and down the field in 2006. We shared the conference title with the team that year. The 2008 Park team featured a strong running back and a ball-control offense.

At halftime, we trailed 6-0. After a dismal performance by the offense in a loss the week before, some of the defensive players and coaches were growing in frustration. I met with the rest of the offensive staff at halftime, assessing the problems we were having on offense and discussing possible adjustments. Our halftimes were generally segregated. First,

the offensive and defensive staffs met together separately, while players hung together (on the road) or went to separate spaces (at home). Then, after about five minutes of staff meetings, the staffs would call together their respective groups of players. Rarely, if ever, was the whole team called together for some sort of “rah rah” halftime speech. While talks did at times focus on effort (or the disgust of coaches at the lack thereof) they more often focused on particular changes to plays or assignments that would be made for the next half.

When we had finished talking with our staff and with our players I took the walk back to the sideline. I was focused immediately on getting to my headset, but my mind was racing, searching for solutions to the challenges we were facing. I was accosted by Coach Sapp on my way back to the bench. He tugged my shoulder, and I turned to face him. “Y’all got to score some points, or these boys are going to quit on me, he said.” His manner, his tone, every ounce of his being was directly confrontational. I looked him right back in his eyes. “We got this,” I said. “I promise you, we got you.”

“You’re not hearing me,” he replied. “Y’all got to put some points on that board.”

I glared back at him. “I hear you, we got you.”

We went on to score two touchdowns in the second half to win the game. After the game we laughed about the incident. Three months later, at the end of the season, Sapp described our relationship this way:

G, that’s the thing about you and me. We can get in each other’s face, and we understand it’s business. You can’t do that with just everybody. But we have always been real with each other. That’s why we’re boys. We can get heated at each other in the heat of battle, and we can go have a drink after the game. That’s what it’s all about.

Let me be clear: this was an incredibly heated confrontation, a “liminal moment,” so to speak (Turner, 1967). There was no predetermined way that the “business” conflict between Sapp and I should end. There was no guarantee that my “promise” would be fulfilled (although you couldn’t have told me that in the moment). Let me also be clear: Sapp, as I have noted before, was (and is) a big dude. He was considerably bigger than me (and I was 6’1” 245 lbs or so at the time). And his manner in that moment was intended to be intimidating, was in some sense violent. My response was the same, aggressive both in my body language, my choice of absolutes in my phrasing, and my insistent eye contact. Sapp did not mince words with me, and I did not back down from him. And that, he would later say, was a fundamental strength of our friendship, a context that set the stage for conversations that were equally emotional in opposite ways.

These sort of direct confrontations happened most often between coaches who had close personal relationships. In that sense, the directness of these moments was a symbol of trust. Trust that the confrontation would stay “business,” would not devolve into personal attacks or physical violence. Here, as in Lawrence DeGarris’ concept of *somatic intimacy*, interpersonal aggression or violence, rather than being destructive of community, reinforces its fabric (DeGarris, 2000). While the direct confrontations between coaches, both in public and in private, represent one form of the development of intimacy through conflict or friction, other “confrontational” forms of interaction between coaches also were ways of developing community.

Playing the dozens, “signifying,” “clowning” or “scolding” has long been an object of Black cultural surveillance (Dollard, 1990; Henry Louis Gates, 1988). The basic notion has

been that games of insult are predicated upon a public exchange in which participants are alternately verbal victors and vanquished. Most scholars have referred to this verbal back-and-forth as harmless fun, but others have pointed to the potential of verbal sparring to erupt in physical violence (H. L. Foster, 1974). Rather than undermining verbal sparring as a community building activity, the potential for offense and even violence is at the core of what makes this interaction so valuable.

Some interactions centered on fairly light stuff, like allegiances to college teams. As a student who went to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill for undergrad and to Duke for graduate school, I was often a subject of ridicule. In particular, the guys often called me “Dukie,” which, as a die-hard Tar Heel fan, was anathema. Similarly, every game involving UNC’s basketball or football team was fair game. Like when coach Wilbon sent me a text message declaring “UNC is going to lose to Wake Forest tonight” (they did). After the game, he sent me a home-made ringtone of an off-key “Wake Forest” chant.

While teasing of that nature was never a directly personal attack, some verbal sparring was considerably more pointed. One of my favorite people to tease was the aforementioned Coach Sapp. Sapp, in the midst of the life transition that his engagement was a part of, decided to become a vegetarian for six months. Both the coaching staff and players found that decision universally hilarious. In private, I heard several coaches commend the decision. His stance was part of a general push on the part of our staff to lead healthier lifestyles, a push that included diet changes for several staff. Publicly, both players and coaches referred to Sapp as “the world’s biggest vegetarian,” claiming that formerly obese vegetarian rapper KRS-One wanted his title back. Sapp’s choice of diet was one of the

many things that we went after him on, and he found plenty to get at us about. For me, all the coaches generally clowned my lifestyle as a student and consultant, and my lack of a clear, 9-to-5 job. “What is it you do again?” they would often ask, to the loud laughter of everyone around. They would often compare me to “Tommy,” the character on comedian Martin Lawrence’s 90s sitcom *Martin*. The joke with Tommy is that no one knew what he did, and when asked he would provide no further information other than that he worked in “that building downtown.” It didn’t help that the office of Frontline Solutions, the consultant company I was helping build, was located in fact located “downtown.”

One of the other sources of ridicule for me was my choice to ride a bike to practice most days. I made the 10 mile roundtrip each day in an effort to be more healthy, and was generally successful. The other coaches privately commended me on losing the weight, and publicly joked that my “legs looked sexy” with the new regular exercise. But the running joke was that a grown man shouldn’t be using a child’s transportation. And, after a near-accident, when I broke down and started wearing a proper helmet, the joking only increased.

Just as the joke of my dubious employment and juvenile transportation never seemed to get old (to them), Sapp and I never got tired of going back and forth. And, because text messaging was the primary form of communication for the coaching staff, joking often took the form of “text battles.” One afternoon, working on my dissertation and a coffee shop, I sent a text to Sapp to let him know I wouldn’t be able to accompany him to see our JV team play that evening:

Me: Aye man, I don’t think I’m going to make it out to the JV game tonight.
Too much stuff to do

Sapp: Like what?

ME: Like none of your beeswax beezitch

SAPP: U aint got no job asswipe

ME: I do have a job. It sucked to wake up early this morning for my meeting... at 10 ... I've had a hard day

SAPP: U a ugly rapper that. Anit shit

ME: It just took me five minutes to figure out what you were trying to type. U need to get a bigger phone or lose some weight in ur fingers... Like the Hines Ward sausage fingers diet plan – Vegetarian version

ME: I'm killing you right now

SAPP: Naw I am winning smart head rock go read a book

SAPP: U need to get un smart because your head is big as hell and that's a lot of pressure for the rest of your body to hold up

ME: Either that or just borrow ur big ass neck

SAPP: u 2 smart 4 ur own good bitch ass smart guy

ME: I'll let you get the last one in so you feel good

SAPP: U r the smartest pro student in the world that rides a bike with a helmet peace fool

ME: lol. Ur dumb. Peace

SAPP: U 2 pro student and I hope u make the pro student pro bowl

Our exchange over text has particular potential for volatility given the medium. Text messaging, without the important facial cues of face-to-face communication or the tonal indicators of voice, has great potential for having comment taken out of context. Our comfort using this medium to “scold” reflects the general comfort with which we engaged teasing. Additionally, our attacks were intentionally personal. My reference to his “sausage fingers” and “big ass neck” hardly constitutes polite conversation. Likewise, his assertion of my unemployment and childlike means of transportation in an American system where

manhood is tied to financial viability had potential for offense. These comments were not “OK” because these were not issues that were truly offensive or personal. In fact, as a graduate student struggling to get on solid financial footing, the comments definitely “hit home.” Moreover, my financial struggles were well-known to Sapp, as we were the sort of friends who would loan a couple dollars or pick up the tab for one another during times of duress. Likewise, Sapp’s desire to lose weight and create a more healthy lifestyle for himself was indeed a serious, even life-threatening issue. The insults traded for comic effect were real and visceral. In that sense, as we received the jabs for one another, we were both in some sense “emasculated.” And, in receiving those blows with good humor, and in responding in kind, our “masculinity” was remade anew as stronger and bigger than the simple symbols of employment, or notions of physical viability.

This is the process that happens when “playing rough” goes right, when it does not devolve into mean-spirited verbal or physical violence. There are winners and losers in any moment, the winners prove their metal through their sharpness and quickness, the losers prove their strength in “taking it” with dignity. The same was true when we wrestled and roughhoused, either with players or coaches. The impetus was on both the winners and losers to be “good sports,” to not take things “too far.” One of our favorite games was “dunking.” Note: This is not some widespread African American cultural practice, it is not something you can bring up with younger people and expect them to know what you are talking about or think you are “cool.”

Dunking was wonderful. I think Coach Sapp did it do Coach Johnson first. We were walking off the practice field on an August day. We passed beneath the goal post, the “Y”-

shaped set of bars used for kicking field goals. Sapp ran up behind Johnson, jumped up, and “dunked” an imaginary basketball in an imaginary goal, apparently affixed to the goal post. Players and coaches alike went crazy, like a high school gym after a big dunk. “Oh!!!!!!” “He got you” “You got his nuts all on your neck” “[in a parody of a SportsCenter commentator] POSTERIZED!” It was really a lot of fun. From that day for the next year or so “dunking” was all the rage with the coaching staff. I got “got” a couple of times, and had my fair share of dunks. Coaches dunked on one another on imaginary goals hung on doorways, on awnings, on the roofs of SUVs. A reign of terror ensued. Coaches refused to walk beneath goal posts, looked over their shoulders when they crossed a threshold. The feeling of getting dunked on was overwhelming and embarrassing..

Interestingly, as widespread as “dunking” became with coaches, players didn’t “dunk,” either with each other, or with coaches. Coaches did regularly roughhouse with players however, generally in an “us vs. them” between the adults and students. Coach Smalls was “jumped” and had his shirt ripped after a game. Coach Sisco was slapped (with a loud “clap”) on his bald head. I was dog-piled during a drill. And, on more than one occasion, coaches took on all players in an all-out “war” after practice, chasing and being chased across the practice field and through the parking lot. In all of these exchanges, there were moments when each individual was the “bully,” a person in a position of physical power being rough or cruel. At other times, each person played the role of “punk,” having something rough or cruel done to them. Not one of the coaches was too good to be the “punk” when called for, down from 5’6” up to 6’6” 300 lbs.

While the Eastside-specific game of “dunking” and the spontaneous horseplay were locally generated, constantly evolving cultural practices, they parallel a widespread tradition in football: the “Gatorade bath.” Any football fan has seen it: as a big game winds down, cameras begin to follow a couple mischievous looking players on the winning team. They find a big cooler filled with ice water or Gatorade and unscrew the top. They sneak up behind the coach. An accomplice gives the head coach a congratulatory hug, holding him in place for the money shot. The players dump the bucket’s contents over the head of the coach, who attempts in vain to jump aside. The coach takes a moment to get over the shock of the cold, then hugs the offending players warmly.

For a sport often played in very cold weather, dumping cold liquid on someone is a violent act in every sense of the word. At least one coach in college football has died due to complications from exposure to the cold and wind following an ice-water dunking (APWire, 1991). Moreover, a coach who detects the subterfuge may try to run away, prompting players to physically overpower him. In American culture, throwing a beverage onto someone is an extreme sign of disrespect, a direct affront often leading to a physical confrontation. The Gatorade bath in this way reverses power relations. The head coach, the ultimate authority, is reduced to the victim of a prank. The coach receives this indignity and accepts it as an honor. Often, this symbolic exchange is followed by the restoration of the original order of power, as players lift their coach on their shoulders.

The Gatorade bath, like all the horseplay, conflict and verbal sparring mentioned above, reaffirms community by its breach of person and its reversal of power. Each of these instances illustrate the ways in which violence and aggression can create, rather than

undermine, community. Each of these acts, on their own, are violent enough to warrant direct and even physical confrontation. They make sense only in the context of loving communal relationships. Coach Sapp can call me an out-of-work bicycle-riding fool, because he is my boy. I can “dunk” on Coach Wilbon in a hotel lobby in front of the whole team, because I was there when he got married and had his first kid. In the context of a football family, consensual violence is constructive of intimacy.

5.3 Conclusion

Understanding consensual violence is critical to telling the story of how Black men build community. Simplistic conceptions that see “polite conversation” as the only forms of intimate talk denigrate a significant portion of the meaningful relationships these and other Black men have with one another. Likewise, the understanding of horseplay, teasing and other culturally specific contexts is critical to effective educational practice. While I would not go as far as some others have in articulating the primacy of this “dilemma” (H. L. Foster, 1974), I recognize the ways the perspectives of a significant population of teachers may not map well onto the rough and tumble approach to relationship their students exhibit. Consensual violence, in that sense, may capture an important pedagogical technique. But what are the costs? All-male subcultures like the Eastside football team have been singled out for fostering violence that is not simply confined to the field, or to mutually consensual, intimate relationships. Do cultures of structured violence create or foster patterns that spill out into social and sexual violence? What are the costs of the at times rocky marriage of athletics and education?

6. A Cute Little Violent Edutainment Machine: High School Athletics

6.1 *What Do We Think About Football?*

When I told one of my most supportive intellectual mentors about my new project on Black male high school football coaches, he was decidedly less than enthusiastic. After my rather disjointed explanation of the connections I was exploring between football and youth development, he smiled, and stated with characteristic bluntness “you know that’s already been written.” The ethnography he was referring to was the work of Douglas Foley, a book chapter and an article by the name of “The Great American Football Ritual: Reproducing Race, Class, and Gender Inequality” (Foley, 1990). This brief, “non-starter” conversation with my mentor, and the work it references, express the peculiar way with which progressive-minded scholars approach revenue-generating high school sports. On the one hand, these spectacles are simply “uninteresting” in an anthropological sense. They are, after all, so mundane, so *ordinary*. On the other hand, what engagement there has been with sports like football, as the title of Douglas’ article reflects, has been concerned primarily with identifying the ways sport reproduces and exacerbates inequality and violence.

In the opening to the article version of this piece, and unidentified editorial voice provides this context:

Many Americans, obsessed with football, routinely watch professional games on television and go to high school and college games in their communities. Football is more than a game, and it’s more than a revenue generator—it’s a powerful agent of socialization.

Douglas Foley studied a small town in Texas during football season. His findings reveal how rituals associated with high school football help to sustain inequalities among gender, racial, and social classes. As you read this

article, think about how sports in your high school or university helped to maintain inequalities (Foley, 1990, p. 1).

Here, the reader is told explicitly how to “read” football as social spectacle. The people who attend games are “obsessed.” There are no casual spectators, no aunts or uncles who merely came out to support “little Jimmy.” Likewise, the reader is told to think about how sports in our own high schools helped maintain equalities. So the case against high schools sports centers first on the unequal way in which it structures social relationships in the school. High school sports have a negative social impact as a way of stratifying students based upon athletic prowess that, for the majority of students, is not in the long-run “meaningful” in a material sense.

The comment of the mentor I mentioned earlier also reflects a notion that because a study of football has been “done already” we collectively understand the meaning of sports. The literature (or lack thereof) says otherwise. As I have previously stated, high school athletics is an institution that, in a post-Title IX context, impacts over half of all Americans who go through public education. Given the surplus of research on public education, theoretically there should also be a significant body of research on the best practices, educational impacts and economic outcomes of athletics. The opposite is the case. A 2006 study on the labor market outcomes of high school athletic participation, for example, was able to reference only four articles focused on high school, dating all the way back to 1984 (Barron, Ewing, & Waddell, 2006).

The U.S. Department of Education, despite its unwavering support of High School athletics, has produced little evidence for its continuance. High school athletics are assumed to be an important part of the educational process, but this importance is an untested axiom

rather than an empirical certainty. At the height of the era of “accountability” and “research-based” approaches, a government report on high school student-athlete’s 10 years after high school relied on a relatively small sample, and likewise referenced articles up to two decades old that would have been deemed out of date to provide empirical (rather than theoretical) support in a robust field (Carlson & Scott, 2005). Both of these articles point to the ways in which, counter-intuitively, an American institution serving over half of its citizenry has been woefully understudied.

If the case *for* athletics has less than stellar empirical grounding, the same can be said for the case *against* it, at least from the standpoint of academic and economic outcomes. The most salient critic of the “hyperathleticization” of the Black male, John Hoberman, provides a rhetorical, rather than an empirical critique. For Hoberman, centuries of denial of legitimate paths of success have compelled Black Americans to place all their symbolic eggs in the basket of athletic performance and the veneration of athletic “race heroes.” “This pride,” says Hoberman “is damaging black America in ways that African Americans in particular find hard to acknowledge” (Hoberman, 1997, p. 3). His critics have attempted to deconstruct his argument by suggesting that athletes throughout American history have had poor academic performance, but the issue only became a concern when African Americans became athletic success stories. Naysayers have not singled out Ted Williams, Mickey Mantle, or a host of young professional tennis players for forgoing college in the same way they have attacked recent young (Black) NBA players, for example (Curtis, 1998). More to the point, others have noted that

Hoberman’s critical comments on the sad decline of intellectualism among black American males are not supported by rigorous scientific research and

his passages on this subject contain no empirical evidence or supporting statistical data (Sandiford, 1999, p. 113).

So, even as a deficit of information points to the educational benefits of high school athletics, its sharpest critics have even less of an empirical leg to stand on. Despite my protestations to the understudied nature of the academic and economic outcomes of sports participation, my reading of the available literature leads me to echo the U.S. Department of Education's accurate (if overly optimistic and under-informed) opinion, that "there is ever-increasing evidence that school athletic participation is positively associated with many educational, labor market, and health outcomes" (Carlson & Scott, 2005). My caveat, as stated before, is that this evidence is in fact *slowly* increasing. But, taken together with studies that focus on collegiate athletes, it seems pretty clear that students who participate in athletics are more hopeful about their life-chances (Curry, Snyder, Cook, Ruby, & Rehm, 1997), are more healthy, have better grades and attendance, and are more likely to attain a higher education and retain a job than their non-athlete counterparts (Carlson & Scott, 2005).

But the critiques of the primacy of athletics continue to capture and cauterize the sentiment of many scholars and concerned citizens. Despite the presumed positive impact of athletics on the *athlete*, social critics continue to assert that there is something sinister and destructive about the social organization that supports athletics. But despite the lofty language of Hoberman, the lack of empirical support points to the nature of these critiques. They are based upon affect, upon a gut reaction to something that isn't quite right, and may be terribly wrong. These sort of visceral reactions should not be dismissed offhand in a vulgar allegiance to an ideal of Reason over emotion. Rather, understanding the impossibility

of intelligibly or empirically articulating these critiques makes their endurance all the more noteworthy from an anthropological perspective. Despite their seeming illogic, the mere survival of these sorts of academic vs. athletic binaries must mean there is a “there” there, right?

Take for instance a recent publicity stunt and/or policy intervention staged right here in North Carolina by State Senator Charlie Albertson. Albertson is a democrat representing the educationally under-performing county of Duplin. In March of 2009, he filed Bill 377, which proposed that schools that have a majority of students performing below the 50th percentile on end-of-course tests for more than two consecutive years be barred from athletic participation. The bill was co-sponsored by 10 other senators of the 50 in the state assembly. In an interview with local high school sports reporter Nick Stevens, a clear opponent of the bill, Albertson’s explanations for the proposed legislation reflected the illogical or unintelligible nature of the persistent critique of athletics. Stevens opened the interview by asking Albertson what the impetus for the bill was. Interestingly, Albertson’s rationale had nothing to do with athletics, asserting instead that he proposed the legislation because “we have too many kids who are falling through the cracks” of the educational system. Stevens, politely, asked his first subtly hostile question next.

Stevens: What kind of research is required for a bill like this?

Albertson: I’m sorry, I didn’t understand you.

Stevens: What kind of research is required for a bill like this?

Albertson: What kind of research?

Stevens: Yes, when you’re drafting a bill, what kind of research do you have to do. Like, do you look at studies—

Albertson: I look at studies, yes, and I look primarily at my county, I live in Duplin [county]. We had an assessment done on my county last year by Dr. Johnson over at [UNC] Chapel Hill. While we've got some great schools and great kids, we found that only 41% of our children were passing the end of year reading and math test. And I'm just trying to find a way to call attention to that.

Stevens: Do you know how many of those [failing students] were student athletes or involved in extra-curricular activities?

Albertson: No, no, they pass, they have to pass, you know this. They have to pass before they can play. And of course we give the athletes more attention than we do the other students, so why do we treat them different?

Stevens: Is it punishing athletes then to take away—

Albertson: We're not punishing athletes. We don't want to punish athletes. Look, I played sports when I was in school. I know how important they are. But we rally around those who play sports, and we give them help through the coaches and the [coaching] staffs – which is important, and it's the right thing to do – but we've got to find a way to find more community support and more support for those other kids who are failing.

Stevens: I've talked to some school board members here in Wake County... and they believe that athletics are a way to keep students in the classroom, make those students perform better in the classroom. Do you agree with that?

Albertson: Yes, I do.

Stevens: So would it be risking students dropping out—

Albertson: No. All the community has to do is make sure the 50%, just 50% of the student body passes the end of year reading and math test... Is that asking too much, that at least half the students in a school would pass?

Stevens: But is that 50% or more who are not passing being caused by athletics?

Albertson: No. It's because, I think, the community is not involved enough in the schools.

Stevens: But doesn't athletics involve the community some?

Albertson: Sure it does, you know that (Stevens, 2009).

At this point in the interview, Stevens, trying hard to be the consummate professional, hesitates just for a second. He stutters, as if not able to comprehend the way this conversation is proceeding. At moments it appears like a debate, at others, as if the critiques Steven's questions are suggesting are already self-evident, already assumed to be true. Students are struggling, and cutting athletics is the answer, says Albertson, but athletic involvement is not the reason students are struggling. In fact, sports, through coaches, provide students with important support, Albertson goes on to reiterate.

Albertson's assertion that having above 50% of students score in the 50th percentile is not too much to ask is not readily supported by mathematical data. The very nature of the 50th percentile, as a near-median point for test scores, suggests that a school even slightly below "average" in educational quality would be excluded from competition. Toward the end of the interview, Stevens, in exasperation, asks "What can the community do?" "They can give the same support to the other students that they give to athletes," Albertson replies. He uses an example of a basketball team. "You've got 3 people helping 10-15 people, giving them instructions, encouraging them to do better, helping them be the very best they can do. And that's wonderful, don't misunderstand what I'm saying. But why can't we give some help to the other guys?"

Oddly, Albertson's critique echoes both Hoberman and Douglas. On the surface, by threatening the elimination of sports for struggling or even slightly below average schools, the Bill seems to articulate a critique of the negative impact the over-emphasis on athletics has on academic achievement. Here, his critique appears to echo Hoberman. But, in the course of the interview, Albertson reveals that athletics, in his opinion, actually supports in

an overwhelmingly positive way, the academic performance of athletes. It is unclear to me whether this was his opinion prior to his conversation with Stevens or when his analysis, like Hoberman's, is exposed as empirically unsupported, he retreats to a larger societal critique. At any rate, he winds up articulating a version of Douglas' point: sports are problematic, not because they directly, negatively impact athletic performance, but because they promote inequality: both the social stratification Douglas highlights, and the unequal access to mentoring and support Albertson points to.

For me, the appropriate response to this inequality, rather than the abolition of high school sports, is the strategic investment in culturally appropriate extra-curricular programs to reach the approximately 45% of the student body that do not participate in athletics (and, of course, many students who would want to do both). The idea to me is, rather than railing against the over-emphasis of sport and the anti-intellectualism of the Black community, to be involved in the constructive work of developing low-cost, volunteer-based models like athletics that can prove exciting, engaging and productive to young people. But, as the Albertson interview most clearly illustrates, the critiques of athletics vs. education are not fundamentally about athletics. They are yet another angle to get at the problem that haunts American society with ritualistic frequency: the specter of educational reform. The dichotomy is a false one, a paper tiger invoked by those disheartened by the failures of the educational system as a stand in or a cipher for educational failure. Thus, these sorts of critiques, that ostensibly have the well-being in the athlete in mind, are in fact deliberate attempts to use the athlete, and his or her sometimes Black, sometimes male bodies as a pawn in a larger rhetorical debate.

6.2 In the Shadow

While High School football is inevitably and at times discordantly tied to the institution of public education, it also exists, as a revenue sport, in a shadow beneath the Leviathan of the NCAA “cartel.” The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), as a money-making enterprise masquerading as “amateur,” has to say the least been extraordinarily problematic from the perspective of a large number of economic scholars (Humphreys & Ruseski, 2009). In economic terms, a monopoly refers to a situation in which a single entity controls an entire chain of production. A cartel, is the “team” version of a monopoly, in which various semi-independent entities work together to maximize economic power. According to economic theorist E. Woodrow Eckard, “many economists view the NCAA as a cartel through which members ‘collude’ to exercise joint monopoly power over football’s main input” (Eckard, 1998, p. 347). What that means for athletes is that, because the NCAA controls the rules of “employment” as a student-athlete, they can fix compensation at a very low rate to maximize profit (and maintain the “myth” of the “amateur athlete”). College athletes receive scholarships and living expenses, and are severely limited even in their ability to earn money through summer jobs or other employment. This means is that an athlete at a major football powerhouse may receive as \$5,000-\$10,000 in compensation, and earn as much as \$500,000 for their school. (Brown, 1993)

Allen Sack’s *Counterfeit Amateurs* provides some historical context to the development of the current professional college athletic machine. In 1909, the NCAA’s original constitution forbade the granting of athletic scholarships. Though the institution’s lack of enforcement power meant schools openly and secretly flaunted the rules, as late as 1941, the

NCAA “clung to its founding principle that athletic scholarships were a form of pay for play and that such financial subsidies blurred the distinction between college athletes and paid entertainers” (Sack, 2008, p. 69). In fact, the line between professional and amateur was initially so (rightfully) blurred that a California court awarded the family of a football player killed in a plane crash for team travel workers’ compensation death benefits (Sack, 2008). The following decades saw the increased undermining of amateurism, and the increased professionalization of college sports. In 1967, the NCAA allowed schools to take away scholarships from athletes who voluntarily withdrew from sports, thereby reinforcing pay-to-play. This was taken a step further in 1973, when four-year scholarships were replaced by one-year grants. The utter control of coaches over the performance of athletes, and the bedrock of the employer-employee relationship of college athletics was complete (Sack, 2008).

Despite what many (including me) view as the clearly problematic nature of collegiate athletics, various camps continue to argue that athletics, even at its most extravagant and exploitative, furthers the educational mission by generating revenues for scholarship and research, and by diversifying the student population. Furthermore, while many continue to rail against the NCAA cartel, these critics are by no means all of similar tone and perspective. In particular, some declarations of outrage have been athlete-focused, arguing that the generators of sports revenue deserve fair compensation and such benefits as healthcare and employment security. Others have been openly anti-athlete, concerned instead with the other students that must suffer their comingling. As a Rutgers professor advocating for withdrawal from the Big East athletic conference put it: “Screw the [big-

time] college athletes. What I care about are the thousands of regular students whose educations are degraded by the presence of athletes on campus who are merely masquerading as students” (Sack, 2008, p. 152).

While I am less than sympathetic to the intellectual outrages suffered by students forced to learn alongside students with lower GPAs, SAT scores, family incomes (and often darker skins), the critique of the connection between athletic privilege and interpersonal violence is of critical concern. A preponderance of evidence exists that athletic participation (at least on the University level) is tied to various forms of violence, including sexual assault (Messner, 1990). But still others have pointed out that assessments of both the benefits and the burdens of athletic involvement have generally been grossly blunt (K. E. Miller, Melnick, Farrell, Sabo, & Barnes, 2006). Just as athletics are assumed, without a preponderance of evidence, to be academically beneficial on the one hand and academically harmful on the other, the correlation between athletics and non-sport violence has often been characterized without nuance.

I categorize the arguments about violence and sport as either *essentialist* or *cultural*. The essentialist arguments around violence in sports argue that violence is an indelible and unavoidable part of sport, and that this violence will inevitably lead to social and interpersonal violence. Michael Messner, for example, conceives of sport as inherently masculinist. Despite the explosion of female athletics happening all around him, Messner persists that “within the world of organized sport, men are almost exclusively the perpetrators as well as the victims of violence” (Messner, 1990, p. 206). Likewise, Messner constructs an origins narrative about sports that he argues competition is unable to escape.

Following Elliot Gorn, Messner argues that sports were created as a result of the perceived declining prestige of middle class men, as a way of reinforcing patriarchy (Gorn, 1986). Thus, for Messner, sports are *essentially* violent. Messner makes no clever distinction between aggression and violence, but argues instead that when bodies are used as weapons to accomplish athletic goals, this must be characterized as violence. In sum, Messner asserts that “the media’s framing of violent sports as public spectacle serves both to unite men in the domination of women and to support the ascendance [sic] of hegemonic masculinity and the continued marginalization of other masculinities” (Messner, 1990, p. 215). Thus, for Messner, sports like football are always already violent, and the “spectacle” of these endeavors can only lead to the persistence of social violence and patriarchal oppression.

By contrast, *culturalist* understandings of violence in sport actually articulate with one of Messner’s key theories: that different forms of masculinity exist at the same time. Rather than Messner’s view that sports marginalize in a totalitarian fashion non-violent forms of masculinity, a study titled “Jocks, Gender, Binge Drinking, and Adolescent Violence” asserts that multiple identities are available to athletes (K. E. Miller et al., 2006). “Jock Identity” was simply defined by a self-reported “very well” or “somewhat” response to how well the “jock” type fit a respondent. The study found that boys (47%) were more likely than girls (20%) to identify this label. They also found that African Americans (22%) were less likely to identify with this label than Whites (37%). Most importantly, they found, in keeping with earlier research that athletic participation *alone* did not correlate with an increase of violence. Other studies have found similarly tenuous or non-existent connections between athletics alone and violence. Nixon, for example, asserts that “among both males and females, there was no

difference between college athletes and nonathletes in their likelihood of being aggressive outside sport” (Nixon, 1997, p. 384). However, his study also found individuals who valued toughness in sport highly were more violent than their peers. Here again cultural values, rather than mere participation, are the culprit.

Given the uncertain connection of mere athletic participation to violence, a more useful project would be “devoted to untangling the disparate consequences of sport behavior (what one does) and sport identity (who one is perceived to be)” (K. E. Miller et al., 2006, p. 114). In other words, to determine what sorts of cultures and identities (plural, not singular/hegemonic) are circulating in athletic communities. Similarly, the resolution of the problems facing athletic culture rightly centers on culturally appropriate interventions designed to help transform sports ideology into less homophobic/sexist/socially violent forms. Fortunately, several models exist for these interventions, including “The Mentors in Violence Prevention Project (MVP)” (Katz, 1995), and “Men Can Stop Rape” (www.mencanstoprape.org). The MVP program, which pairs Katz with ex-football player and filmmaker Byron Hurt, provides training to athletic teams at Northeastern University. Men Can Stop Rape provides culturally appropriate training by transforming traditional masculinist concepts like “strength” toward anti-violent ends.

6.3 Violence and Athletics at Eastside High

Eastside High was neither an idyllic space of feminist and anti-homophobic rhetoric. Nor was it a cesspool of virulent violent discourse. Rather, multiple, competing notions of manhood, of women and of sexuality existed side by side and at the same time. A particularly outrageous event and its aftermath illustrates these dualities:

On a random afternoon, after practice, something remarkably funny and slightly disturbing happened. We were just breaking up from practice, and many of the defensive players, having just finished running out some sort of punishment, were still exiting the field. I was already inside, changing clothes and getting ready to go home. I followed the commotion of several players back outside, expecting to find a fight, or maybe just a couple of the guys wrestling or horsing around. I was awestruck by what I saw. An otherwise lovely young lady was walking across the practice field in flip-flops, stalking Lonnie, one of our middle linebackers. Lonnie was unsuccessfully trying to balance his desire to avoid a physical confrontation and to look cool doing it. Lisa had no such conflicting concerns. She finally closed the distance to Lonnie, and began punch/slapping the hell out of him. I don't know that there is a correct or appropriate response to such a situation. If there is, I am certain Lonnie didn't know it either. He alternated between bobbing and weaving Muhammad Ali rope-a-dope style, and trying to block the blows with his free hand (he had his helmet in the other). We were just in shorts and T-shirts for a light practice that day, so he had no other armor available to him. After vain attempts to block the blows, he seemed resigned to take a couple square slaps on the chin. At last his attacker stormed off the field, into her waiting vehicle, and squealed out of the parking lot.

I spent the next 30 minutes with the players and coaches, trying to make sense of what had just transpired. We were able to piece together a hypothesis. During practice Lonnie gave his phone to Tammy, his good friend and on-and-off again girlfriend. Apparently (although who can say for sure) Tammy was using said phone to send text

messages to Lonnie's *current* girlfriend Lisa (the flip-flopped assailant). I don't know exactly what the alleged text messages happened to say, but I have a feeling they involved Tammy, Lonnie, and some sort of activity Lisa felt was reserved for herself. Hence the flip-flopped, violent rage.

So, beyond the random absurdity of the moment, I was struck by the way everyone responded. No one seemed to know what to do. Lonnie's friend Mike tried to restrain Lisa for a moment, but quickly abandoned that effort. The team was awestruck. Lonnie seemed like he just wanted to crawl in a hole with embarrassment. When she drove off, the entire football team was laughing hysterically. Lonnie, as many of us do when life becomes a bit too much for us, took a knee.

In retrospect, it was interesting that responding in kind never seemed to occur to Lonnie. He clearly wanted out of the situation, was clearly embarrassed about the "drama." But it didn't look like fighting back crossed his mind. Over the next few days, he received his fair share (and more) of teasing. I was present for much of it. I heard many offer unrequested advice. Many suggested the appropriate response to being assaulted by your girlfriend in front of fifty of your closest friends. No one that I heard suggested he should have hit back, even in jest. "You shoulda ducked, I'm quicker than that" "Why didn't you put your helmet on? You had it right in your hand?" (I guess it's hard to argue with that logic). "You should have stopped trying to be cool. I woulda ran dude."

Violence, in this case was an acceptable response for the girlfriend. However, reciprocal violence was not even entertained as an option. Interestingly Lonnie, to borrow a term from Nixon, had a "high value of toughness" (Nixon, 1997). He was incredibly

undersized for a middle linebacker, but threw himself fearlessly into tackles. He dealt out some of the fiercest hits on the team, had an ability to violently strike opponents with his body. He played his entire senior season on a knee with partially torn ligaments. On the surface, Lonnie's case represents some sort of alternative masculinity that embraces toughness, yet actively rejects violence as an appropriate social response. But, responses to the event did reinforce other aspects of stereotypical, hegemonic masculinity. "Lonnie's a pimp. I don't know how he does it. Two girls fighting over you like that, that's crazy." Lonnie's run in, on the one hand, was incredibly embarrassing and even emasculating. On the other hand, his ability to attract and "engage" different women reinforced his sexual prowess. Rather than transforming masculinity into an idyllic model devoid of the old macho standbys, Lonnie's approach (or at least the model attributed to him), combined some aspects of traditional masculinity with an anti-violent response.

Similarly, anti-violent messages, in the rough-and-tumble intimacy of the team, often were a little rough around the edges, to say the least. "No means no" was a common anti-violent refrain, but not as preferred one coach's interpretation thereof: "Don't take no puddy that don't belong to you." The phrase is playful in its delivery, using "puddy" as in the Looney Tunes quote "I thought I saw a puddy cat" as a slightly gentler term for "pussy." But the message, despite its unorthodox packaging is clear. Likewise, another coach exclaimed in "you've got to be a bitch to hit a woman." Rather than jettisoning wholesale traditional masculinity, this phrase transforms it, raising the specter of "bitchness," the antithesis of masculinity to accomplish a pro-feminine message. The violence with which the phrase was uttered reflected anger and disgust. Thus, efforts against inappropriate violence are not

couched in pacifist or traditional feminist rhetoric, but rather within a larger framework that embraces appropriate forms of violence, with clearly defined boundaries of what sorts of aggression are unacceptable.

While an essentialist understanding of violence and sport asserts that the historical origin and violent activity of sports dooms participants to lives of violence, a more nuanced culturalist approach recognizes the myriad, often conflicting contours of Black athletic masculinity. This new, shifting manhood is of course overshadowed, and in some sense over-determined by a racist, sexist, homophobic past of “frontier masculinity” (Johnson, 2002), but it is also struggling and wrestling with decades of potent feminist critique. But it is at varying degrees and at varying moments violent and feminist, and myriad points in between. Similarly, while critics of athletics point to the negative impact of athletes and sport on educational outcomes, the lack of empirical evidence for this negative affect points instead to the ways in which the Black male athlete has become a pawn in larger conversations about the angst-filled exchange on educational reform.

7. Imagining School: School Reform and the Burden of Education

Adults who are unable to solve the nation's most serious, recurrent dilemmas – poverty, racial and social injustice, and civic apathy – predictably conclude that the solution resides not in their own behavior but in the flawed practices of the school and the imperfect nature of the young... Citizens who should know better routinely expect them to accomplish what is humanly impossible, complain bitterly when the schools falter, and yet turn to them again and again to cure social ills not of their making (Reese, 2005).

Of all the competing approaches to educational reform, the value of “accountability” through standardized teaching has emerged as the dominant paradigm (Payne, 2008). This new regime has created new categories, transformed “struggling,” “marginalized,” or even just plain “Black” schools into “failing” schools, for instance. In the furor surrounding the design, passing and implementation of No Child Left Behind, its context within a larger history of educational “crisis” and “reform” has been largely lost. In reality, the angst of the NCLB moment, in that it embodies a recent articulation of centuries of critique, will not end with the new guise of the Obama administration. In this chapter, I place the current era in historical context by examining some key moments, movements and texts in the battle for educational reform. The constant crisis narrative surrounding education, I argue, has created an impossible set of burdens for the educational apple-cart to hold. Simultaneously, the fetish for new ideas has often ignored the real heart and soul of the educational system: the school boards, “downtown” education offices, administrators and teachers that make education happen.

Current U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan came to Chicago with a rhetoric that emphasized “human resources” and the assets already within schools. Long-time

Chicago educational reformer Charles Payne adds to that picture the ways these “human resources” are often rendered ineffectual by the insanity of a broken system (Payne, 2008). But, even as he details the ways in which interpersonal relationships often derail the best laid plans, affect or feeling is often conspicuously absent from the scope of his important study. This chapter and the ones that follow attempt to put the “human” back in “human resources” by examining the way policies, implementation and the “failing” environments they construct make teachers feel. I assert that only by considering the impacts of educational reform(s) in all their new and sexy guises can we achieve transformation not doomed to a meaninglessly short life cycle.

7.1 No Child Left Behind

A White man is sitting next to another White man, sitting across from another White man. He looks young and confident (the first White man), not eloquent, but strangely engaging. The White man across from him asks him a question, something about the supremacy of the United States, how he'll handle the steering wheel of “the single-most powerful nation in the world, economically, financially, militarily, diplomatically, you name it.” He answers, rambling on a ways, but eventually coming home to his primary talking points:

One of the things I've done in Texas is I've been able to put together a good team of people. I've been able to set clear goals. The goals ought to be an education system that leaves no child behind, Medicare for our seniors, a Social Security system that's safe and secure, foreign policy that's in our nation's interest, and a strong military, and then bring people together to achieve those goals.

Seven years later, only one single member of the “good team” George W. Bush put together for his cabinet remained. Despite success in re-structuring Medicare to increase privatization, Bush’s “fix” for social security fell flat. Likewise, pre-emptive, nation-building foreign policy resulted in a military stretched woefully thin. Of all Bush’s campaign promises of 2000 on that stage and hundreds others, No Child Left Behind stands as perhaps the most complete fulfillment of the neo-conservative dream. While Bush listed education third among his priorities in his announcement speech, as the campaign progressed it developed into a central issue. Bush’s campaign devoted more carefully crafted rhetoric to it than any other topic 2000, making up 38% of his campaign press releases and beating out taxes, health care, and social security (Marschall & McKee, 2002).

As the specifics of his platform took shape, “he spent considerable time discussing plans to increase local control of schools, expand parental choice, transform Head Start into a reading program, and make schools more accountable by imposing mandatory testing” (Marschall & McKee, 2002). Once in office, Bush became the very first president in history to devote the first week of his term to education reform. In response to pressure from democrats, he backed off controversial vouchers provisions, which were voted down by congress. The No Child Left Behind Act passed 384-45 in the house, and resounding 91-8 in the Senate. On January 8, 2002, George Herbert Walker Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act into law.

Research for this dissertation took place in the waning days of the No Child Left Behind era, as Barack Obama rose to power, and George W. Bush exited (surprisingly gracefully) stage left. It took place in a “failing” school, a new, absolute, technical label

created by NCLB, a visceral confirmation of what many feared and believed all along. This chapter provides context to this era, examining the ways in which NCLB was a culmination of the long history of educational reform, was a bearer of its impossible burdens. The teachers of Eastside high who I had close contact with were wrestling with those various burdens, trying to make sense of humanistic, instrumentalist and even nationalistic viewpoints of education that assaulted their work, that twisted their responsibilities, and that put heart-breaking pressure on the emotionally draining work of teaching.

NCLB has become the framing narrative for nearly every discussion of school and schooling. Among the educators I work with, nearly every gripe or analysis of the educational system was housed within a critique of its particular incarnation in the guise of NCLB. But while the current policy served as a framing narrative for political rhetoric, local agitation and teacher animosity, it really served as a stand in for a centuries-old debate in education. On the one hand, the rhetoric of “accountability” only described gaps in educational experience experienced by Black Americans and other underprivileged groups throughout their fraught history with the system. NCLB created for these enduring inequalities new language, codified long-struggling schools like Eastside with a stamp of “FAILING.”

The easiest impulse is simply to take shots at No Child Left Behind, to implicate a flawed public policy as the “enemy.” In reality, NCLB, as the most recent incarnation of educational reform, represented the impossible dream of American education. Throughout the history of public education, visions of the humanistic, social, nationalistic and pragmatic potentiality of education have placed on an institution an impossible burden. Just as the

school has become a site for the construction of “childhood” as a phase of innocence to be vigilantly protected,

7.2 So Much Reform...

A fundamental tension within education from its very inception has been an humanistic notion of the way learning impacts and individual’s identity, and a utilitarian notion of how skill acquisition impacts a worker’s productivity. Almost no educator or research falls neatly into one of these categories. But nearly all differences in philosophy stem from this humanistic/utilitarian binary. U.S. education, as William J. Reese has effectively argued, has from its outset has been characterized by constant complaining, agitation and reform (Reese, 2005). Along the way, each wave of passion that washed through the classroom left its baggage: a mounting burden of responsibilities given first to the student and then, following the development of new conceptions of childhood, to the educator.

The concept of formalized school represents a philosophical break with socially-centered, communal forms of learning. The development of the first U.S. public schools in the New England area was enabled by long-standing settlement, increasing urbanization and the decline of apprenticeship and other forms of social learning in the early 1800s. Free public schools presented an opportunity to fill the vacuum left by the movement away from social learning, as well as to instill “American” values in a rapidly shifting urban poor. The urgency for this movement was escalated by the “Specter of Social Breakdown,” the heightened stress on the American social fabric created by the tension between ideals of equality, immigration, industrialization and chattel slavery in the years leading up to the Civil

War (Mintz, 1995). Against the backdrop of mob violence in the North, lynching in the South and proto-anarchy in the West, schools represented opportunities to transform the lumpen masses into responsible citizens respectful of the rule of law. Reformers imagined public schools as a site of class mingling, where “the children of the rich and the poor sit down side by side on equal terms, as members of one family – a great brotherhood” (1830s Governor of Maine, quoted by Reese 27).

While the lofty goals of social mixing, moral instruction and lessons in “reading, writing and ‘rithmetic” persisted as public schools expanded after the Civil War, a movement toward “progressive” or “new” education railed against rote memorization and other sins against what childhood should be all about. This movement throughout the 19th century coincided with similar reforms, such as child labor laws that redefined childhood and the acceptable levels of unpleasantness children should be expected to endure (Ariès, 1962; Cunningham, 1995). Interestingly, even as greater demands were placed upon the school to provide a more pleasant, more socially stimulating education, no significant expectations in terms of academic performance were removed. While the demands of new pedagogy put increasing stress on teachers to provide qualitative values, school superintendents largely defended the use of tests and other quantitative evaluations.

7.3 Pressed Down, Shaken Together and Overflowing: The Educational Burdens

One of the most salient features of the new testing regime is the way in which it has transformed the articulation of Black educational critique. Black damage imagery in the context of the educational system had its most brazen application in the historic *Brown v. Board of Education* case. In it, Thurgood Marshall and others argued against segregation by

citing the infamous doll study of Kenneth and Mamie Clark (Clark, 1950). The study argued that the separate and unequal education accorded Black children and the corresponding segregation from mainstream society resulted in inferior self-images, as seen in the preference for White dolls over black dolls. Further questions demonstrated that a majority of children thought the White dolls were morally as well as aesthetically superior to their black counterparts. Sadly, a non-academic study performed by Kiri Johnson in 2005 produced remarkably similar results. While the jury is still out on the effects of integration on Black self-image, *Brown v. Board* set a tone for one-half of the “crisis” narrative surrounding public school. Interestingly, the NAACP and its partner litigators did not turn to a cost-based analysis of separate institutions in arguing its case. Instead, it pointed to the impact of education on personal identity, the crux of the “humanistic” approach to education. While the doll study provided empirical support to the NAACP’s argument, it ultimately proved a qualitative, not a quantitative, argument.

Nor was such sweeping damage imagery confined only to “Negroes.” In *The Culturally Deprived Child*, Frank Riessman opens up with what turns out to be a nearly meaningless, if ominous, statistic:

in 1950, approximately one child out of every ten in the fourteen largest cities of the United States was “culturally deprived.” *By 1960, this figure had risen to one in three...* By 1970, it is estimated there may be one deprived child for every two enrolled in schools in these large cities (Riessman, 1962, p. 1).

Riessman explains in a footnote that “the terms ‘culturally deprived,’ ‘educationally deprived,’ ‘deprived,’ ‘underprivileged,’ ‘disadvantaged,’ ‘lower class,’ ‘lower socio-economic group’ are used interchangeably throughout this book,” as if they were indeed the same thing. Here, Riessman conflates clearly economic terms with cultural terms, identifying the

children of poor parents as automatically deficient, a deficiency that the schools must, he asserts, remedy. Riessman in many ways anticipates the ethos of the era of “accountability,” rejecting

the emphasis on the non-school environment, the parents, and the child himself, as the central determinants of the failure to learn. What has happened to the old idea that held if the children aren’t learning, look to the teacher (5)?

Here is the bedrock for the idea of “failing schools” and “failing teachers” that haunts the testing regime. If the teacher is to blame for the disparity between one student and the next, clearly the teachers in “bad” schools must be “bad” teachers.

If education in the 19th century bore the burden of democratizing and sanitizing an immigrant nation, and education in the middle of the 20th century became a locus for Civil Rights struggle and class uplift, the Cold War era introduced education to its current articulation as a source of nationalistic global struggle. 1983’s *A Nation at Risk* introduced the nation to the cocktail of fear mongering and the specter of international competition on a grand scale. The document’s very opening words seem ripped from the script of a horror movie whose subject is zombies or Nazis rather than children.

Our Nation is at risk. Our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world. This report is concerned with only one of the many causes and dimensions of the problem, but it is the one that undergirds American prosperity, security, and civility. (*A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, 1983)

Two clear salient points are apparent from the quote. First, the notion of “our once unchallenged preeminence” disregards the emergence of the U.S. as a world power as a

result of the two World Wars is replaced by some sort of eternal destiny of the U.S. to be “first.” Here, following a trend still evident in all of levels of society, American is assumed to belong on top, rather than to have arrived there as a result of particular circumstances of history.

Equally unfortunate for the educational context is the undue primacy this system is given as a “cause” of the “problem” of competition with the U.S. While the report recognizes that education is “only one of the many causes” of the problem, it is *“the one that undergirds American prosperity, security, and civility”* (my emphasis). While the connection of education to the issues of prosperity and civility has a long history, the addition of security to the growing apple cart educators must balance represents an important shift. The Cold War era of fear, complete with useless school “atomic bomb” drills designed either to “reassure” or terrorize the public (your view likely depends largely upon your political orientation), ushered in an even greater urgency for schools. School reform was no longer a moral imperative or a necessary social progress. It was now a matter of life and death.

I could go on about the debate between pragmatic and romantic notions of education for the entirety of this dissertation, without any substantial resolution on either side. This is the single most important thing about this debate: *neither side won*. No single great moment turned the tide to a concerted focus at either end of this continuum, no single dominant rhetoric, either pragmatic or romantic, has given definitive shape to the country’s vision of education. Rather, just like at various junctures throughout the short history of American public education, salient points of both points of view were absorbed into the ideal of education. What this resulted in was a system asked *both* to prepare its students to

compete in economic Armageddon *and* create citizens that are well-rounded and somehow enlightened as to the American ideal of a productive individual. As such, American schools must be able to compete with the specter of the mythic Asian “knowledge factories” and provide an environment that ensures the well-being necessary for proper childhood and adolescent development.

7.4 Innocent Children and “Grown Up” Accountability

These two goals are, according to prevailing beliefs about childhood, mutually exclusive. American notions of proper childhood development are rooted in beliefs about what childhood should be that explicitly preclude the idea that a child should, for example, go to school six days a week. Likewise, the child labor reform movement beginning in earnest at the turn of the 20th century re-conceptualized childhood as a sacred space that should be beyond the pressures and drudgery of adult life (Ariès, 1962). So, according to international law, children cannot fight wars or even labor full-time, but, according to the U.S. government, they are allowed to be pawns in America’s continued knowledge conquest. And while American political rhetoric has no problem invoking the stereotypical Asian student competitor working harder and longer than the U.S. child, it is uncertain that the public would be able to stomach the increased suicide rates that are correlates to that model. In fact, even model minorities within the United States evidence this hidden cost of achievement. Caribbean-American students achieve at levels far better than their American-born counterparts. Yet, emerging research suggests that these success levels are also accompanied by higher risk of suicide (Joe, Baser, Breeden, Neighbors, & Jackson, 2006).

Suicide rates are in some sense an outlier as even the highest of these rates reflect less than even one percent of these populations. Yet, in some sense this ultimate cost reflects the larger reality of “increased accountability:” attrition. Preliminary evidence suggests that high-pressure teaching is, not surprisingly, associated with increased teacher dissatisfaction. This pressure is compounded when the challenges teachers face are not effectively considered. While NCLB gave some federal assistance to high-poverty schools, its rhetoric is laced with an illusion of equality, that all teachers and schools should be held to the same “standards” regardless of real impediments like an impoverished tax base. The dismissive rhetoric of accountability views dissent as childlike “whining,” as evidenced by this jewel from then-secretary of education Rod Paige:

With the No Child Left Behind Act, education reform has grown up. No longer is reform about access or money. No longer is it about compliance or excuses. Instead, it is about improving student achievement by improving the quality of education we offer our students. It is once again focused on the student, not the system (Paige, 2002).

Paige’s perspective as articulated here represents an utterly wrong-headed approach to education reform. Reform at the federal level must necessarily be about the “system.” Effective system reform must be focused on “access” and “money.” In taking a turn away from the structural forces that are the right jurisdiction of the federal education system’s relatively limited powers, Paige’s model of “grown up” accountability, like Riessman’s earlier intentionally de-contextualized critique, necessarily places the blame for failure and the burden for “reform” on the backs of teachers themselves.

7.5 Framing Change: Heartwork and Heartworkers

Charles Payne's important recent contribution *So Much Reform, So Little Change* draws on personal experience, quantitative crunches and rich qualitative contributions to demonstrate the ways the everydayness of struggling schools undermines potential for change. Deftly making use of Weberian theories of bureaucracy and his own understandings of interpersonal breakdown, he demonstrates the way change is undermined by incomprehensible organizational infrastructure and the "sheer inability of adults to cooperate with one another" (Payne, 2008, p. 6). Likewise, he effectively demonstrates the futility of the way educational reform is generally approached, by those across the political spectrum:

Failing to appreciate the salience of social infrastructure and the irrationality of the organizational environment, both liberals and conservatives have spent a lot of time pursuing questions of limited utility. The questions that were arguably the defining questions of the 1980s and '90s had to do with the content of interventions. What's the right program for these schools? What's the right way to teach? What's the information we need to get to teachers? ... These are not such important questions when there isn't much likelihood of being able to implement any of them well (Payne, 2008, p. 6).

For Payne, three decades of experience in education reform have led him to distrust his own brilliance, to be skeptical of the magic bullet programs education departments crank out like party flyers. He recounts just a few of those efforts:

The... standards-based reform movement and the restructuring movement that preceded it; the popularity of policies calling for the end of social promotion; the transfer of authority from traditional school boards to mayors; the complete or partial reconstitutions of failing schools; state takeovers of failing districts; the \$500 million investment of the Annenberg Foundation in improving schools; the National Science Foundation's attempt to reshape science and math education in the cities; the small schools movement, freshman academies, and other forms of personalization of the educational experience; calls for much more intensive forms of professional development and instructional support, including instructional coaching... dozens of comprehensive school reform projects (Payne, 2008, p. 3).

While many of these efforts have been at least partially successful, they have failed to fundamentally transform the educational system because of the institutional and even interpersonal barriers he describes in detail. The impact of the aggregate of these factors are systems that are severely, well depressed (and depressing to read about). The kind of systems whose Eeyoric tendencies “makes it likely they will fail to recognize good fortune even when it is beating them about the ears” (Payne, 2008, p. 61). Yet, while Payne goes as far as to literally compare these *systems* to “depressed individuals,” an in-depth analysis of the emotional impact of teaching appears to be beyond the scope of his project. While he talks about the messy, at times mean-spirited actions of teachers and administrators, he doesn’t spend very much time talking about the complex of emotions that lead to such destructive behavior, other than to describe them as the product of dysfunction.

One poignant story in particular highlights both Payne’s profound respect for what I call the heartwork of teaching, and his propensity to turn from raw emotion to thoughts and beliefs. He recounts a post-Katrina story in which civil rights hero Jerome Smith commented on whether the plan to make New Orleans a charter-school bonanza would work. ‘Depends on the hearts of people running it,’ Smith said. While Payne rightly notes that this comment “cut through to a more profound way of thinking,” his paraphrasing of the moment in a small way re-intellectualizes the heartwork Smith described. “The Big Magic isn’t in the charters themselves,” Payne asserts, “so much is in the thinking and understanding of the people who implement them, in the approach they take, in the values they hold dear” (Payne, 2008, p. 189).

While I agree with Payne that the thinking, understanding, approach and values of educators and educational reformers are important, I want to return in the pages to follow to the actual emphasis of Mr. Smith's quote. Education, I argue, is heartwork. And, if educational policy is to be effective, it indeed "depends on the hearts" of teachers in particular. Those magical hearts. Those hearts that are being plugged in to the lives of students, that are being beaten by "accountability," that are being turned to stone and back again every day.

8. Real Problems. Real Solutions? Educators Talk About No Child Left Behind

Change has to come from the top down. I think a lot of teachers have good ideas, but we don't have the support of those above us. As a leader, you have to listen to the people who are on the ground floor, on the lower level, putting in that work (Brian Moss).

8.1 I Got My F*ing ABC Check Today

One of my favorite parts of the football season is the end of August, when the weather's beginning to change but it hasn't gotten that cold yet. The sun starts heading home early, which means that the last hour of practice happens in the growing dusk. The sun sets slowly behind the gymnasium, like a giant painting hung above the school. Football practices are funny things. Some days it's a huge lift for everybody. Players are hustling, working to try and get better. Coaches feed off the energy, on top of their game teaching, pushing. On good days of practice there's not a whole lot of yelling, not a whole lot of cussing. The football team is just surging forward together, like a team of horses pulling a stagecoach, everyone playing their part.

We were wrapping up a practice like that. The sun was down and the dark was coming quick. Everybody had a smile on their face. As the players ran their wind sprints to wrap up practice, the coaches gathered in the middle of the field, joking, wrestling and talking trash. Everybody was in a good mood. We were heading to the Ale House after practice. I think that's how the subject of money came up, it was payday for all the teachers (and time for my Duke check, too). Thomas, as he did from time to time, went from zero to hopping mad in about two seconds.

“I just got my fucking ABC check today. It was three hundred one dollars and forty-two cents. You have got to be kidding me. I said, ‘I’m going to fold this check and put it right here [in jeans].’ Because that’s all that is, pocket money” Thomas said.

Brian jumped in, “yeah man, that’s bullshit, all those hours tutoring, staying after class. They’re going to have to pay me by the hour on that.”

Liking to play the naysayer, Smalls, the In-School-Suspension (ISS) teacher, came back. “Y’all can do all that if you want to. Me, I’m a union teacher. We don’t have a union, but I’m a union teacher. I leave every day at 2:35. The teachers I learned from didn’t stay after for no tutoring. I got mine on my own, they’re going to have to get theirs on their own.”

In the North Carolina incarnation of NCLB, the ABC check served as a way of providing incentive for excellence in teaching. Teachers received the bonuses based upon their school meeting “High/Expected Growth.” Based upon the “performance of the school and positions of employees” within the school, bonuses ranged from \$375-1500 (before steep taxes), and were paid based on the previous school year’s scores (Ambler, 2008). The ABC check was designed to be a reward, and it in reality was so little it ruined an otherwise beautiful day for two dedicated teachers. Both of these teachers worked in core subject areas, subjects that required intense lesson plan preparation, grading and tutoring of struggling students. Of all the teachers in the staff, these two teachers voiced most consistently a commitment to the ideals of education. And of all the teachers on the staff, these two teachers often appeared the most overworked and discouraged. Their critique in many ways echoes similar arguments articulated by teachers unions and other forums (see for instance

“Voices from the Classroom” on the National Education Association website). These educators articulate the ways the regime of testing has undermined their value as educators, undercut their authority, and created an emotional drain, leading to a “crisis” of teacher burnout.

8.2 I’m 72% Thomas

Oh I love teaching. Science, Math, it doesn’t matter. I’d even teach history. I love it. I love setting up labs, the kids getting to look through a microscope for the first time. I love all that (Leroy Thomas).

[Addressing players] Don’t y’all hate school? I *hate* school. Football is all I got. Y’all get out here and act like you’re not happy to be *here*. I’m happy to be here. I wait all day for this (Leroy Thomas).

Leroy Thomas is from Oxon Hill, MD. He majored in biology and minored in anthropology at Temple. He decided to pass up the opportunity for better money working in a lab, or going to graduate school to become a teacher, to work with kids who, like him, came from difficult circumstances. Despite growing up in a relatively rough neighborhood at the height of the crack epidemic, Thomas is proud to have come from a home in which both his father and mother were a regular part of his life. His dad would come down to an Eastside football game once a year. He’d come out with the rest of the coaches after the game, drinking us under the table and cracking jokes. Thomas doesn’t drink.

Leroy started coaching at his middle school, where he also served as athletic director. His emphasis was always on players being plugged in to school and getting good grades. Thomas (even more than me) was known as a speaker of “proper” English, and a knower of both useless and useful factoids. If someone had a random academic question, they would generally ask Thomas first, and me next (or sometimes the other way around). Leroy’ DC-

area style emanated from head to toe, from the socks and slides (sandals) he rocked on weekends to his fast-paced, nearly incomprehensible speech when he was excited. Thomas and I worked together on Friday nights. He would be up in the booth, talking to me on the radio, helping our staff on the ground make adjustments. I had to say “slow down Thomas” at least three times a game. Thomas was and is a great guy. Like most of the coaches, Thomas generally had a player or two in his car. They would wait patiently while we cracked jokes after practice, and enjoy their ride home (and lecture) with Coach T. 2008-2009 was Thomas’s fifth year in the classroom.

Brian Moss was head coach of the football team, and one of the most well-respected biology teachers in the county. He actually was hired as the football coach because of his success in the classroom. Eastside high experienced a long period of almost no football success from the late 1990s until 2006. After the departure of another head coach, the head coaching vacancy at the struggling school received few applicants in 2004. When the test scores for the fall semester came back in January, Eastside’s then-principal realized that her biology teacher Brian Moss had the best scores “in the entire system.” The two decided to offer the job to Moss. Moss struggled on the football field his first two years, but continued to “perform” in the classroom. However, in his fifth year at Eastside, Moss faced a challenge as an educator he was not able to overcome:

I went from, the first three years I was here, being the top teacher in the district as far as scores. Because I always had an honors class, and I would take my general class and kind of split them up [to target those who needed extra help passing]. I guess scoring those scores hurt me because they took all the honors classes away from me and just gave me all general classes expecting the same result. And it couldn’t happen. At the end of the day, I

was burnt out, because I had three periods of kids you just have to bang their heads on the desk just to get something in them.

In an attempt to have Moss be able to impact more students who were in danger of failing, Moss was saddled with more difficult students in what turned out to be his final semester at the school. Moss worked hard to think of new and innovative ways to reach his students. He missed more football practices than in the two previous years, and generally struggled to be a more effective teacher. So with four years of experience he didn't have when he scored the highest in the district, with extra work, with extra sacrifice, somehow, according to the test, Brian became a "worse" teacher. This phenomenon was what Moss called the "false positive" effect of the test.

We don't need a test to tell us who is the bad teacher, because that can give you a false positive on who is the bad teacher. My scores this year are horrible. Does that mean I'm a bad teacher? No, because according to the test for the last four years I have been great! I'm not going to agree with that, because I'm a better teacher now than I was four years ago, but the tests say different.

Thomas experienced a similar situation,

Right now, my scores are low. 35% of my students passed the highest benchmark, the highest score [in the district] is 55%. But, we've done projects so they can understand the information, research reports, but 'they don't know the information.' I can't agree with that.

There's no way in the world you can look at the stuff I did before to have number 1 in the district in math, number 2 in science, now I dropped to 4th in science, 5th in science. So, 'my teaching just went down.' I've got more experience, I've got more training. So, I'm a number now, I'm a number.

Despite their insistence on believing their own evaluation of performance rather than the test, both Moss and Thomas recognized their ultimate inability to escape being defined by the way their kids tested. Thomas put the weight of that definition even more clearly:

Teachers got changed to a number. I'm 72% Thomas, instead of Leroy Thomas: science teacher, coach, mentor, mediator. I'm down to a number, of how my kids tested on that day. If you pass my class, 'fine and dandy,' if you past the test, wonderful. So that one day you took that test is more important than the other 182 days you were in class.

Teachers, argue Thomas, Brian and even Sapp, have been reduced to a number. A number that is personally demeaning, that does not honor the sacrifice and dedication these men exhibit as educators. Ironically, even as I make this case, I realized that my argument that the denigration of Thomas and Brian into test score numbers is only made egregious by their status as "good" teachers according to the rubric of testing. If Moss had not been given substantial honors students, had not been successful in his strategy of dividing students in his early years, no amount of my own ethnographic perspective could prove "scientifically" his chops as a "good" teacher. The same goes for Thomas.

8.3 "Like Going to War with 2 Bullets"

While the personally degrading effects of the testing regime created emotional impacts on the identity of Moss and Thomas as teachers, it also necessarily transformed the focus of their pedagogical practice. In short, teachers are unable to avoid "teaching to the test" because their livelihood is dependent upon "the test." Thomas put it this way,

I'm real. I'm a teacher, I got to keep my job, it's a hard economy right now; this is a stable job to have. But if you don't cut the mustard, you are just cut off, you're expendable. Every teacher on the block is expendable. Yeah, 'we need more Black male teachers, we need more science, we need more special ed.,' [but] if these kids aren't meeting these standards you're expendable. We'll find some other old retired person to come back in, we'll find some young person who's fresh out the blocks to move in, we're all expendable.

In such a forcefully punitive environment for educators, teachers are forced to make difficult decisions to protect their livelihoods. A teacher's logic sounds something like this, says Thomas:

I have 30 kids in class. I got to get the ones I can get. I can't get all of these jokers [to pass]. I got a kid back there in the back of the room who did good in 7th grade, but is struggling this year, so I have to work with him. I have 4 special ed. kids in my class; I have other kids in the class who have a different set of issues going on. So you have to pick and choose who you want to work with. NCLB creates a mentality that says: 'I'm going to help these 3 out, another group of y'all are alright, the rest of y'all fend for yourselves.'

These 3 categorizations of students made up the backbone of the sort of "divide and conquer" strategy Moss and Thomas both pointed to as a way to maximize scores. Kids, under this rubric, fall into 3 categories: The "good" students who can pass with little extra help, the hopeless cases who aren't present in body or mind enough to have a chance, and the all important middle group, the group teachers "have to work with." Thus, the first group is "alright," another group the teachers take extra time to work with, and the rest "fend for [them]selves."

The impact of these sorts of harsh educational realities on the students are clear. No testing rubric measures how much better a failing student did than the year before, for example, or gives extra points if a student almost passed. Likewise, teachers do not receive "extra credit" for exceptionally talented students they helped to maximize their potential. There are only three categories of test scores: failing, passing or proficient. A pass is a pass, and a proficient score is a proficient score. Sapp, a teacher who, as a teacher of Educationally Challenged students, often didn't have to make such draconian decisions, nonetheless sympathized with the predicament of his colleagues:

Co-teaching and working with another teacher, teachers that have testing as a main part of what they do, some teachers will tell me, ‘you just work with your [Educationally Challenged (EC)] kids, I got the rest of them.’ Is that fair? No. But in actuality, you can’t save all these kids. And their thing is ‘why waste your time working with 5 or 6 kids that are EC that are not going to pass the test, when you can work with 15 kids who have a chance to pass the test.’ Then you’ve got your other 5 regular ed. kids that just aren’t going to make it: the kid that misses 38 days, the kid that goes to sleep every day. So the teachers are going to work with those 13, 14, 15 students that have a good chance to pass. I don’t think it’s necessarily right, but it is what it is.

Sapp summed up the teacher’s dilemma with characteristically poetic bluntness: “It’s like going into a war with 2 bullets. You gotta to make those 2 bullets count.”

8.4 Testing the Teachers

Are you testing the teachers or the students? I think you’re testing the teachers. How well did Leroy deliver that information to Micah, Matt, Tony and Brian. Micah got it, but Matt, Tony and Brian didn’t. That’s 25%, he’s a bad teacher. But Matt came up 15 points from last year! Tony dropped just by a point. Brian came to school late on test day, but we have to test everybody, so we gave him the test anyway—have a kid take 2 tests in one day—you’re not supposed to do that. But we’ve got to get the kids tested, so we can have that number that says 100% of kids take it. (Thomas)

In addition to creating a clear priority list of students who will receive the teacher’s best attention, the testing regime has also created an educational system in which teachers felt their work was devalued and their authority was undermined. Brian Moss put it this way:

Some people are going to take it to another level – I know that the human body is not going to be on the test, so why teach the human body in biology? It’s hard to rationalize, but at the end of the day the principal’s not going to come in here and ask did you teach the human body, he’s going to come in here and ask “what’s that test score.” Like Thomas said, my name is Brian Moss, 10% pass or 0% pass, not Brian Moss the biology teacher.

I think we have taken all the value out of what it is that teachers do in that classroom. Because teachers are going to teach to the test. And we have all the experts who say ‘but if you’re doing great teaching you are teaching to the test.’ No. There comes a point when I have to eat, my job depends on a test score.

They have taken some measure of the power from the teacher, and put in the test.

As the test gains all-power over the livelihood and even the identity of teachers, it removes some power from that teacher. This is directly in line with the explicit logic of the architects of the regime. If “bad” teachers and school districts are the enemy, the answer is to remove power from their hands. If, as one of NCLB’s architects suggests, accountability has “grown up,” accountability has passed from the student to the teacher. This “grown up” accountability was clear to Moss

So who are we assessing, are we assessing students or teachers? If we’re assessing students, it should be a personal score that the student and their parents should only know, not blasted on the internet.

If the teacher is accountable to the success of the student, they are ultimately beholden to them. Kids, in their power to receive or refuse knowledge, to come to class or skip, to do their best on the test or go through the motions, hold sway over the livelihood of teachers. Moss, Thomas and Sapp all saw this new power dynamic reflected in a shifting power relationship between teachers and students.

When I was in school, I don’t remember taking too many standardized tests. But the teacher was law... When you went in that classroom, that teacher had all power over you. And I hate to say that, but that’s the way it should be, because it’s up to that teacher and how that teacher can attest to your work ethic, your character. That test cannot tell me a kid’s work ethic, and can’t tell me about a kid’s character (Moss).

The whole thing of NCLB is, we all remember going through school, if we didn’t pass Mr. Thomas’s test in his class, we didn’t get moved on, you had to go to summer school or whatever. Now [as a student] I can go downstairs and talk to someone to get promoted (Thomas).

While testing has undermined the grade-giving authority of teachers, it has also, through policies designed to stem social promotion, created barriers to promotion for

students who don't test well. While these situations aren't the norm, they point to the failure of testing, in the eyes of the teachers I spoke with, to support "good" educational practices.

Thomas: 2 young men last year: 1, he missed basically the whole quarter, came in, passed the EOC [End of Course exam]. I have another young man, he didn't pass 6th grade, he didn't pass 7th grade, he probably didn't pass 8th grade, but he's one of the best kids you ever want to meet, works hard, so do you punish him who just can't pass the test? He busts his ass every day in class –

Moss: And they'll say 'well kids like that – we can develop a portfolio for them' – so what's the point of the damn test then?

Sapp: Then you're going to frustrate the kid because to even get to the portfolio stage you have to take the test 2-3 times.

Moss: Then you go before a board – so once again you take the power from the teacher

Just as the testing regime creates problems for hard-working students who do not test well, it also creates problems for teachers seeking to punish students with problems showing up or completing course work.

They'll do this now: a kid can flunk your class, pass the EOC, and you're getting pressure to move that kid on. It devalues everything you did as a teacher (Moss).

The pressure to move kids on has several potential sources. Parents can apply pressure, which in turn impacts county and school leadership looking to avoid a headache. But it also comes from administrators and others who want to move a "bad" kid on and get them out of the system. This pressure always existed to get students with difficult behavior problems from monopolizing the time of administrators. But testing has heightened this pressure, as "bad" kids also potentially represent a continuing negative impact on test scores.

Sapp: You're going to do your job, you're going to be professional, let's say you are doing all the right things. The parents will not accept the fact that the kid is not learning, the administration wants the kid gone. If you don't pass

the kid, the administration is going to pass the kid, and that Assistant Principal or that downtown office person is going to get upset with you because you just didn't change that grade in your gradebook and they had to do an administrative change. So they put the pressure back on you. It's not like they're going to support you, because it's like Johnson says CYA – cover your own ass, nobody wants to get sued.

Thomas: NCLB created a lot of apathy in education: 'He never passed in 6th grad, not in 7th grade, or 8th grade,' there's no way he's going to pass Algebra I, it's like 'oh well, we'll pass him on anyways.'

While the administration may make the decision to pass a seemingly undeserving student for reasons of their own, these administrative changes require work and reflect a negative reality of discord between the bureaucracy and the teacher's assessment of a student's performances. Teachers thus receive pressure to erase the evidence of this discord by simply changing the grades in their books. In this situation, teachers are pitted as adversaries against their superiors. In such an everyone-for-themselves scenario, teachers necessarily lose due to their relative lack of power.

Parents, argue my three thought partners, create additional pressure. While each of these three teachers worked to build partnerships with parents, they often found these relationships difficult to manage.

Sapp: Some parents don't want to hear the truth. They don't want to hear that their child needs extra help, they don't want to hear that their child is just bad as hell. They don't want to hear that.

A lot of parents are tired. Working in this economy, you need to work two jobs. They're tired. They don't want to hear about 'little Ray-Ray messed up.' Because they are working from 7-3, then coming home and getting something to eat, and working from 4-11. That takes away from them helping teach their child, it takes a toll. That affects the teacher, because I have a problem because my parents don't even want to come meet with me. "Can we do it over the phone" "Can I do it after I get off work at 5 o'clock." You expect me to stay at school until 5 o'clock, and you probably won't get here till 5:30. I'll do it, but who's going to want to do that all the time. I'm

not saying that makes me a bad person, or that makes them a bad person, that's just the simple facts of the situation.

While Sapp and others expressed their frustrations in working with parents, they also articulated an analysis of the challenges the parents of their students face. These teachers, all of whom came from at times trying economic circumstances, appreciated the pressures of work and making ends meet parents face. They also understood the impact these circumstances had on the ability of students to perform academically. While each of these educators hesitated, when asked by Coach Wilbon, to say that tests are culturally biased, they recognized the ways the mostly Black and Latino kids they taught disproportionately experienced pressures on their educational opportunity.

We are always talking about how the test is “culturally biased.’ In the day of Obama I try not to use race and socioeconomic background, because that’s a crutch, but in some ways that test doesn’t account for emotional problems. “My parents are going through a divorce” or “we just thrown out of our apartment, we ain’t got nowhere to live, but I got to take this test.” That test doesn’t account for that, and that goes for every race, every economic background.

And then when we do talk about race, we talk about economic background, some of this stuff for a Black kid or a poor kid, they are not going to get it, because them and their family are just trying to make it, day to day living. They’re not going to take their books home, they’re going to leave them at school, because they might not know where they’re going to be that night, they might have to pick up and run. And, I try not to use race and economic situation as a crutch in the day of Obama, but it does have a lot to play (Sapp).

Thomas, who’s middle school also included a significant Latino/a population, put it another way.

Take a kid like Alex, who misses every other day, who is a first generation American, who has to work every night, who has to do all this stuff. “We got to get everyone tested,” so I have to say to him “Alex – go take another test,”

“Aight Mr. Thomas.” He just took another test 30 minutes ago. If he doesn’t pass that test, whose fault is it? “The math teacher, the language arts teacher.”

Thomas, like Sapp, expressed sympathy for the predicament the student is placed in by his difficult socio-economic circumstances. Likewise, Thomas expressed the way the unreasonable burdens he felt forced to place on Alex impacted him as an educator emotionally. Alex, out of loyalty to his teacher, attempted to do the impossible task of taking 2 tests back-to-back, facing head-on his own lack of proficiency, fighting through his fatigue. But, Thomas also expressed his sympathy for the teachers on whom Alex’s presumably poor score will reflect. The math teacher, the language arts teacher (and presumably Thomas himself, the biology teacher) who will ultimately be the scapegoats for Alex’s “failure.”

8.5 Getting Rid of Bad Teachers

Alex’s teachers, according to the logic of the testing regime, are “bad” teachers who must be held to task under “grown up” accountability. But, argues Moss, “bad” teachers are not best judged by test scores. The qualitative judgments of administrators and peer teachers are better able to point out “bad” teachers who need to be removed. Moss notes how NCLB has undermined the authority of administrators to do just that.

Not only did they take power from teachers, but in writing that legislation they took power away from assistant principals and principals to evaluate teachers, to evaluate a teacher’s work ethic. They come in and do evaluations. What’s the purpose of doing evaluations? You got to see the work ethic in the teacher. We’re getting judged on that test number, but we could be excellent in classroom management, excellent in lesson planning, the kids are just not getting it. Oh, ‘it’s my teaching strategy,’ I’m doing ‘kinesthetic teaching’ instead of doing this type teaching ‘Every kid has a different learning style, we have to have something for every kid’ and all that.

I understand that, I’ve been to all the education classes, but in writing that legislation, you took the power away from principals to find those bad

teachers and get rid of them. Principals want to keep their jobs, they want to get rid of the bad teachers. We don't need a test to tell us who is the bad teacher.

No one hates bad teachers more than good teachers. As Moss notes, teachers and administrators alike work hard to “get the bad teachers out of here.” In my time as permanent substitute in a D.C. area elementary school, I worked with an amazing cohort of teachers, educators who mentored me in the finer points of classroom management and pedagogy. But I also saw those teachers turn on their colleagues, to make life difficult for their peers who they felt weren't on par with the other excellent teachers in the school. That particular elementary school was a “Blue Ribbon” school under NCLB, an outstanding performer. But that success did not translate to the entirety of the D.C. school system. As great as that particular school was, it depended largely upon recruiting good teachers and ousting bad teachers. This strategy, employed by effective principals and leadership everywhere, cannot ultimately create system-level change. System-level change can only take place with the recruitment, and more importantly the *retention* of good teachers across the country. Unfortunately, according to the educators I worked with, the testing regime has only heightened the extreme problems of retention faced by our educational system, particularly for low-income schools.

8.6 Double-binds

...a situation called the “double bind” – a situation in which no matter what a person does, he “can't win.” (Bateson, Jackson, Haley, & Weakland, 1956)

Anthropologist Gregory Bateson and his colleagues in psychology and therapy postulated double-bind theory as a way to explain the causes of schizophrenia. While Bateson's work, as had the work of all Freud-influenced anthropologists, has endured

considerable critique, I find this particular notion, ripped from the fabric of his work, to be an apt description of the underlying causes of teacher attrition my fellow coaches point to. While Bateson et al go into particulars in the home life of an individual that may lead to the onset of mental illness, the fundamental point is this: a damned-if-you/damned-if-you-don't situation can make you crazy. In my time at Eastside, the teachers I spoke with often articulated the conflicting messages they received about what their teaching "should" be, and the impossible tasks they faced daily.

The zero-sum game of testing itself presented teachers with double-binds. Particularly, the need to make sure "every student is tested" for the school's compliance, and the desire to keep their personal scores as high as possible by not having students with poor attendance test:

There are 3 numbers [that matter under NCLB], the number that are proficient 3's and 4's, the number of kids that are testing, and the number of kids that meet exit standards. They want to get 95% of all kids to test. It doesn't matter [the student's situation]. I had a kid in my class today who missed 64 days of school [in a semester]. They want me to call him and get him to come take the test. I had another kid who missed 32 days. In order to get this number on those that tested, I'm cutting myself off on the other number [of test scores] (Brian Moss).

Moss, in order to comply with his boss' wishes, called the kid up to come to school and test, knowing that the student's presence would reflect negatively on him, even though the child's truancy was not technically his responsibility.

While the raw mathematics of Moss's difficult choice, if unfortunate, are relatively straightforward, these teachers felt considerably more angst about the conflicting pedagogical, and even moral messages they received from the educational structure. One particular tension reflected a nostalgia for the "humanistic" critiques of education I talked

about above. Teachers, on the one hand, are told to be creative and engaging, to make school fun for students. On the other hand, for many subjects, their entire pedagogical practice is centered on a series of multiple choice tests.

You contradicted a lot from the people at the top. They say ‘we want you to be creative’ ‘we want you to think outside the box,’ but at the end of the day, all they care about is the test. They don’t give a flying “F” that you’re creative, it’s about that test.

If we’re being creative, why are there no music programs, why are there no art programs? Because we are cutting the money out. I don’t know where we are cutting it to, I’m not that ‘smart,’ I don’t make those ‘big decisions.’ But it seems to me if you want a kid to be creative, then you give them more art programs, more music programs so that they could be creative. But when it comes to reading, writing, arithmetic – those main core subjects – it’s time, as Leroy said, to build those building blocks (Sapp).

Sapp points to the hypocrisy of a system that bases its performance evaluations on multiple choice and standardized tests, that morally impels creative teaching, and simultaneously cuts the very programs designed to foster creativity. These sorts of conflicting messages place educators in a double-bind: I can do what is in my own best interest, become a “bad” teacher in terms of teacher creativity or I can buy into the creativity rhetoric and (according to their analysis) become a “bad” teacher by my test scores. For educators committed to helping students, maintaining their livelihood and enjoying their profession, the situation is impossible.

While these sort of moralizing messages create emotional double-binds for teachers, other conflicting messages more directly impact the time and time management of educators. Sapp talked often about his challenges as a special education teacher. Sapp really enjoyed teaching, and was encouraged by the school leadership to be a physical presence in class. Sapp, as a large Black male body, was often called upon to help with classroom management,

discipline and other issues outside his particular job description as a special education inclusion teacher. But compliance with the testing regime meant that the district-level authorities required of him considerable paperwork, such as Individualized Education Programs for each of his students.

I'm kind of different from Brian and Leroy, I know they work with some special kids, but that's what I mainly deal with. Working with EC kids, special needs kids, however you want to say it, they are just way behind, the system is not caught up.

I know my bosses (my department chair, the [assistant] principal that is over my department) just want us to be in the classroom [helping other teachers with EC students]. But the people from downtown, they just want us to do the IEP stuff [Individualized Education Program]. It's like I'm doing two different jobs.

If they want the IEP stuff taken care of, they need to hire case managers to work with these students, with these families within the school system. And they need to allow people like me who are teachers, who want to teach, to be in the classroom. That would cut down on doing a lot of the unnecessary paperwork. You have a person like me that's doing an honest job of this, but after two or three years of this you get burned out. Or they go back to school and become a PE teacher, or leave the profession, because they get burned out, because they are doing too many jobs.

Sapp points to the dilemma teachers face, the balancing act between their own quality of life and their desire to teach. This battle, my education experts argue, is at the heart of the challenges facing the educational system. While teachers are often attracted to the vocation as a way to be involved in the lives of young people, the physical and emotional drain of teaching in a “failing” system often is too much to take. “The problem,” says Thomas, “is teacher burnout.”

8.7 I'm Done – Expendable Teachers and Thrown Away Jerseys

Thursday's are laid back days for the varsity staff. We do a lightweight workout with the guys, focusing on getting the stiffness of the week out, and finish with some light core work. Then we head out to the game field for walkthroughs. It's nice being in the stadium. The grass is (mostly) green, no large dirt patches like the practice field, patches that grow over the course of the season, that are alternately choking dust in a drought, or stinking mud during a rain. The game field has real grass over all 100 yards. We try to stay loose, to prepare without thinking too hard about the pressure of the coming night. Guys wear only helmets, some coaches wear street clothes. We go through our special teams, then break so the offense can go over their script of plays while the defense goes over last-minute reviews of key plays and players for this week. It's early, and coaches usually have planned a meal together before heading to the JV football game at 7.

We had a big game that week. We were playing another one-loss team. The winner would be in first place in the conference. If we lost we'd basically be out of contention. Big game. We finished walkthroughs and came together for our after practice huddle. Coaches said a few words, and everyone broke off to get a couple things done before the JV game. Coach Smalls, as usual, went to go hand out the jerseys. I went to go get a haircut. I rejoined the rest of the staff at the JV game. The entrance to the football stadium is on a hill. An asphalt road runs from the gate straight behind the home bleachers, which slope (as gently as steel benches can) down to the edge of the black rubberized track. We used to always stand on the first part of that hill, before the bleachers, on the asphalt overlooking the too-steep,

lumpy grass. That way we were right by the concession stand, that way we could see and greet everyone coming in and out.

We were standing there, together, picking with kids, sharing popcorn, like we always did. Coach Smalls said suddenly, “I couldn’t find the jerseys.” We all looked at him in disbelief.

“Did you look in the little closet things in the equipment room?”

“Yeah”

“Did you look in the laundry room?”

“Yeah”

“Did you look in the coaches’ office?”

“Yeah”

“Did you look in the other equipment room, the one in the back?”

“No... I’m afraid to look there, because if they aren’t there, then they’re really lost.”

“I’ll come with you.”

We all went together to look in the other equipment room. They weren’t there. We looked in the athletic trainer’s office. In the laundry room (again). In the basketball lockerroom. In the JV lockerroom. In coach Moss’s classroom. They had vanished out of thin air.

“Welcome to Eastside,” we laughed.

Slowly, we tried to piece the story together. Our last away game was two weeks ago. As usual, players after the game had stacked their uniforms in two piles to be washed: one for pants and one for jerseys. The next day all the coaches, on schedule, came in to “get

tape,” DVDs of our next opponent. Coach Thomas went to go wash the jerseys. The washing machine (which seems oddly older than the actual school building) was broken. Thomas left the jerseys in the laundry room, to be washed when the machine was fixed. Where these jerseys disappeared to remained a mystery.

I took Coach Moss’s keys to go look in the janitor’s closets. The closet had an enormous leak in the roof or something. A gigantic trash can on wheels sat at the room’s center, almost full of putrid water. Several mops and brooms sat suspended in the mire. The room stank of decay. The room, inaccessible to all but a few, seemed an apt metaphor for the deceptively functional appearance of Eastside High. The school building was designed by one of the Triangle area’s leading architects, and was a beautiful and well-designed as buildings of concrete cinderblock come. Likewise, although the athletic wing was not on the inspection list and thus received relatively scant attention, the school in general was not noticeably dirty. But behind that veneer, the dripping cesspool in the janitor’s closet reflected the ways in which the school fundamentally struggled to function.

We couldn’t find the jerseys anywhere, so we tried to track down a member of the janitorial staff, on the off chance they had seen them somewhere unexpected. We found a gentleman who often came to eat at our pregame meals before games.

He looked aghast. My heart sunk. “White jerseys?” We nodded. “Yeah, I saw them,” he said. “They were out on the loading dock with the trash. I saw them out there Coach, I meant to tell you. I thought they were practice gear, but they seemed good enough for at least the JV guys to practice in. I even went through and picked out a number 22 jersey to take home. Seemed a shame to waste them.”

We walked around the back of the school to the loading dock. The jerseys were gone. They had been picked up by Waste Management and taken out with the rest of the trash. The jerseys that were taken were our away game jerseys. They were several years old, and were the cheapest jerseys available at the time, bought in part with money Coach Moss raised selling candy out of his classroom. They were, apparently, so subpar that several members of the janitorial staff thought they were garbage. A member of the staff who was new threw them out. Several other members of the staff walked by them in a pile on the loading dock. Eastside had no jerseys to wear the next night.

To make matters worse, we didn't have proper JV jerseys to wear at the game. Most schools use old varsity jerseys for their JV teams. When Moss finally raised enough money to buy new uniforms, the old jerseys were just too worn for anyone to wear. They were literally disintegrating. As a result, JV played in practice jerseys, cheap mesh uniforms with numbers spray-painted on them. These jerseys were much looser fitting than proper game jerseys, and created a considerable disadvantage for our team as we wore them going forward. They were easier to grab a hold of, and opposing players made several tackles by simply grabbing on to some loose jersey fabric. We played two games in those rag-tag jerseys, and eventually were able to purchase proper game jerseys for the playoffs.

A series of unfortunate events led to that moment: the broken washer-machine, the new janitorial staff member, the lack of communication between their staff and the coaches, the "trashiness" of our game jerseys. These multi-layered things that didn't "work" the way they were supposed to point to the frustrations of working in a school lacking many of the intangible resources of wealthier schools. Just as I was puzzled and disheartened by the

embarrassment of coaching a team that looked like it belonged on a practice field rather than under the bright lights of Friday night, my fellow coaches daily negotiated the sort of stigma that came with being 30-and-40-and even 72% Thomas, Moss and Sapp. The inadvertently discarded jerseys for me are an apt metaphor for the way Thomas, Moss and Sapp talked about their value as educators. Worn out by an educational system that consistently asked more of them than they felt they can give, they felt chewed up by an educational system that would eventually treat them as disposable. The result was an emotionally untenable situation.

The shortage is created due to teacher burnout. This is my 5th year in the game. 5th year in the classroom, 7th over all. I'm done. (Thomas)

Given the undesirability of teaching at a place like Eastside, dedicated, if at times over-matched teachers are not so easily replaced.

And who you going to find? Who you going to find to come teach algebra at an inner-city high school that don't nobody want to be at? The only person you're going to find is a kid straight out of college: they are trying to make that quick dough, and then they're trying to get something on their resume, to move to another school district, or move to med school, law school, or be an accountant, go get a CPA, because they did business administration in school so they passed the praxis, but they don't really want to do it. Boom, they go to the CPA thing

You get a teacher here for 1, 2 years of experience. After that 3rd year, they leave, they either go to another school, they quit, and you get 2 or 3 new people in the job that don't know how the school is run. You don't have teachers that have been teaching 5 to 12 years in your school, you're always working with young teachers that may be inexperienced. The older teachers go the private route, or they go to a better high school where there is more support, or they go to another district where there is more support, and that's what you run into in the EC department, because there is so much turnover, you rarely find an EC teacher who has been at a school 12 years. You see them being there 1 or 2 years, maybe 3 years, maybe at the most 5 years. And they go to the next because they get so fed up, they get so burnt out, that they have to make those hard decisions. (Sapp)

Teachers every day have to make “hard decisions” about whether to continue the important work they are doing (“failing” to do?) at their schools and finding another way to “eat.” While the accountability era has, on the one hand, exposed the ways in which high poverty schools fail to meet the standards of our imaginings about what education “should” be, its inability to provide sufficient resources to create change has left teachers in trying predicaments. While the problems facing educational reform are known, few have placed teacher burnout at the center of the conversation. This, these experts believe, is a critical oversight.

9. Barack Obama's Skinny Jeans: Youth Culture, the Prime Directive, and the Need for Social Change

Two sorts of answers are usually returned to the bewildered American who asks seriously: What is it the Negro problem? The one is straightforward and clear: it is simply this, or simply that, and one simple remedy long enough applied will in time cause it to disappear. The other answer is apt to be hopelessly involved and complex- to indicate no simple panacea ant to end in a somewhat hopeless-There it is; what can we do? Both of these sorts of answers have something of truth in them: the Negro problem looked at in one way is but the old world questions of ignorance, poverty, crime, and the dislike of the stranger. On the other hand it is a mistake to think that attacking each of these questions single-handed without reference to the others will settle the matter: a combination of social problems is far more than a matter of mere addition-the combination itself is a problem” (Du Bois & Eaton, 1899, p. 385).

9.1 Cultural Relativism and the Final Frontier

This study is birthed by two in some ways warring traditions. On the one hand, African American engagement with research has from its outset had as an ultimate goal the betterment of the life chances of Black people, and all people by extension. The quote from *the* pioneer of African American social science illustrates both the promise and the limits of that approach. While scholars have been effective in enumerating the underlying causes of economic and “life-chance” disparity, they have been significantly less effective in postulating whole-cloth, coordinated solutions. Scholars that have focuses on structural factors (education, employment discrimination, generation wealth, etc.) have often overlooked the cultural factors focused on by Ogbu and others. While some decidedly progressive scholars have provided important correctives to the grossest misreadings of these cultural explanations (Tyson, Darity, & Castellino, 2005), hard social science has often struggled to engage with cultural “pathology” in nuanced ways.

On the other hand, as an anthropologist, I am also incredibly troubled by the very notion of blanket denunciations of Black underclass culture as “pathological.” Within this discipline, through the tradition of cultural relativism popularized by Franz Boas, anthropologists have often been vocal in articulating their belief of the value of all cultures, regardless of their fitness for global capitalism. Likewise, structural-functionalists have theorized the ways in which apparently nonsensical or pathological cultural practices serve practical purposes. More recent scholars like Carol Stack have provided similar insights with respect to Black poor people in particular, arguing that underclass culture is both functional for specific circumstances, and characterized by a warmth and communal cooperation (Stack, 1974). Stack’s analysis reflects a complexity not found in the earliest cultural relativist texts. Classic Boasian anthropology was haunted by a taxidermical impulse, a desire to study and preserve pristine “wild” cultures free from the corrupting influence of civilization. Orin Starn’s *Ishi’s Brain* engages such a relationship between Boas disciple Kroeber and the last “wild” American Indian (Starn, 2004). At its worst, this style of anthropology is informed by what I call the cultural prime directive.

My dad was a huge *Star Trek: The Next Generation* fan. We never had cable growing up, and watched very little TV. Other than our Sunday afternoon viewing/napping courtesy of the NFL or NBA, our family rarely had “appointment television.” *Star Trek TNG* was a grand exception. We’d all gather around the TV on some weeknight, watching with my Dad his favorite show. I always loved the opening. The black screen, the subtle White noise that hinted at the vast emptiness of space (I still think that’s what space sounds like). The soft

horns would intone softly as Jean Luke Picard, played by the implacable Patrick Stewart quoted the lines I can still recite by heart:

Space, the final frontier. These are the voyages of the starship *Enterprise*. Its continuing mission: to explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilization. To boldly go where no one has gone before.

Star Trek's enduring popularity is largely due to its ability to capture the spirit of the "final frontier," to re-inject into the American (and global) imaginary a pioneering dream lost with the utter saturation of Western civilization throughout the world. And, like good Teddy Rooseveltian conservationists, the crew of the *Enterprise* worked hard not to "mar" the cultures they came into contact with. This ethic was informed by the #1 guiding principle of the United Federation of Planets: the Prime Directive. The Prime Directive meant that cultures not advanced enough to be capable of inter-stellar travel should not be impacted, but should be allowed to develop along their "natural" cultural evolution toward technology. Thus, Picard and the crew took great pains not to impact or alter the civilizations they came into contact with, a real impossibility that often caused severe ethical dilemmas for the crew. This caused particular problems, as it has for anthropologists, when the societies were particularly oppressive. Picard and crew, like anthropologists talking about clitireductomy, often struggled awkwardly to find a balance between their own ethical positions and their pledge of non-interference.

This taxidermical impulse, the romantic search for the pristine, primitive culture has its counterpart on the sort of exoticization of the "dangerous" Black male I discuss at length in Chapter 2. With respect to youth culture, this impulse is reflected in a sort of armchair fascination with "what the kids are saying/doing/wearing/dancing/singing." For a Black

youth culture that has from Scott Joplin to Souljah Boy been mined for the pleasure of adoring (White) masses, this relationship is even more problematic. However, just as the work of cultural anthropologists inherently resistant to the Whitewashing of native peoples provided an (ultimately impotent) dissenting voice to the dominant narrative of imperialism, the apologists for Black youth culture push back against the strict assimilationist narrative in ways I find compelling and useful.

So on the one hand, I am compelled as a scholar who believes in the possibility and necessity of social change to articulate forward-thinking visions of how teaching and mentoring can empower youth to success in American society. On the other hand as a 27-year-old unabashed member of hip-hop generation, I am utterly resistant to the finger-wagging, “pull up your pants” rhetoric that demonizes everything young and Black that does not look like a miniature replication of Black respectability. I love Black youth culture, even the next half-generation of young people who have a different aesthetic than I do, who think about the world differently, and perhaps have a greater feeling of personal entitlement than my own situation would allow me. Young people today think that they deserve the best in a way that Black people of my parents’ generation did not, and with that comes a potential both for the assertiveness and brattiness of privilege.

But as poetic as we anthropologists and others can wax about the potent (political?) potentiality of youth culture (Chin, 2001; Gilmer, 2007; Hebdige, 1979), those that work everyday with young people have always had to wrestle with the ways in which youth culture is indeed a negative impact on their students, mentees and players. The following chapter speaks at length about how the teachers I worked with wrestled with warring loves of the

creativity and expressivity of youth culture and the need to impose dominant society values upon their players and students. In this introductory essay, I examine some of the pop-cultural and scholarly debates around this topic, debates that are reflected and nuanced in profound ways by the lived experience of Black male educators. I introduce Barack Obama as a public figure open to public critique, as a sort of “iron tiger” (as opposed to the paper kind) that can stand up to a scathing analysis of the problematic engagement of respectable Black people with youth culture. The nuances of his ambivalent relationship to young people point to a larger phenomenon that all “respectable” Black people, even 30ish football coaches closely connected to youth, wrestle with.

9.2 Barack Obama Y’all: A Presidential Hopeful and the Hip-Hop Litmus Test(s)

I hate to talk about Barack Obama. As I write this, he was just inaugurated two weeks ago, and I’m already tired of talking about him. I know that writing about him here has the possibility to doom me to further conversation with colleagues and strangers. But I feel compelled, literally against my will, to talk about him because he is such a perfect example of the complex and complicated ways Black people in particular must navigate respect and transformation for youth culture. Barack Obama’s appeal to youth has been widely documented. The standard narrative is that he transformed politics by stepping into the digital age, embracing youth culture through the employ of text messaging strategies and web 2.0 (Facebook, etc.). Moreover, Obama directly embraced Black youth culture in his endorsement of hip-hop, in an interview, transcribed below, with BET’s Jeff Johnson, a former vice-president of the Hip-Hop Summit Action Network (HSAN).

Johnson: Do you like hip-hop?

Obama: Of course

Johnson: Who do you like?

Obama: You know, I gotta admit, lately I've been listening to a lot of Jay-Z, this new *American Gangster* album is tight.

Johnson: What do you like about it?

Obama: It tells a story, and as Jay would say, "you've got flow." Kanye I like. But I have to admit that I still am an old-school guy. I'm still [a fan of] Stevie [Wonder], Marvin [Gaye]. If you look at my iPod, it's Earth Wind and Fire, Isley Brothers, Temptations, I got a lot of that old-school stuff.

I enjoy some of the newer stuff, and honestly I love the art of hip-hop. I don't always love the message of hip-hop. There are times, even with the artists I love, there's a message that is not only sometimes degrading to women, not only uses the "n" word a little too frequently, but also, something I'm really concerned about, is always talking about material things, always talking about how I can get something, how I've got more money, more cars.

Johnson: ...would there be space in your White House... to explore how hip-hop can be effectively used-

Obama: Oh, absolutely. I don't think that there's any doubt that it can be. I've met with Jay-Z. I've met with Kanye, and talked to other artists about how potentially to bridge that gap. I think the potential for them to deliver a message of extraordinary power that gets people thinking – the thing about hip-hop today is – it's smart. It's insightful. The way that they can communicate a complex message in a very short space is remarkable. A lot of these kids, they're not going to be reading the New York Times, that's not how they're getting their information, so the question then is: what's the content? What's the message?

I understand that folks want to be rooted in the community, they want to be down, but what I always say is that hip-hop is not just a mirror of what is, it should also be a reflection of what can be. A lot of times people say 'I want to keep it real' and 'I want to be down,' but then we are just trapped in what is. The question is [how to] imagine something different, imagine communities that aren't torn up by violence, imagine communities where we are respecting our women, imagine communities where knowledge and reading and academic excellence are valued. Imagine communities where fathers are doing right by their kids. That's also something that has to be

reflected. Art just can't be a rearview mirror, it has to have a headlight out there pointing to where we need to go.

I wanted to include most of the transcript from that three-minute interview here, because it hasn't been widely published, and I think it really runs the gamut of responses to youth culture by members of an older generation. Obama, though self-composed as usual, seems taken aback and even offended by Johnson's first question. "Of course" he likes hip-hop, he contends. He forcefully resists being lumped into the category of hip-hop's castigators. His answer to Johnson's follow-up seemed to reflect that defensiveness, an invocation of a "new" Jay-Z album which he was probably not intimately familiar with. Obama returns to a level of comfort by confessing to his own generational disconnect from hip-hop, asserting that he's an "old-school guy" who, although familiar with what's happening in hip-hop, remains more firmly rooted in the Civil Rights Era soul music of his youth. He really hits his stride as he asserts a message of "tough love" for hip-hop, in which he admits that even his favorite artists have messages he does not support. Here he makes a subtle important rhetorical move. While he enumerates the traditional "respectable" critiques of hip-hop: misogyny, foul language, the "n" word, he deemphasizes these points, harping instead on a denunciation of hip-hop's hyper-capitalism. By asserting this is "what I'm really concerned about," Obama's critique of hip-hop mirrors his castigation of Wall Street and others, a contention rooted in his own communal, rather than self-centered, rhetoric.

Obama, at Johnson's prodding, also affirms the transformational power of hip-hop, the ability "to communicate a complex message in a very short space." But, while taking on this cultural form as an important communication tool, he nonetheless asserts that hip-hop

itself must be transformed to accomplish its purpose, to be a “headlight” rather than a “rearview mirror.” So youth culture must be appreciated as “art” in the manner of a museum curator. But, according to Obama, it must also be transformed and bent toward particular social aims. Rather than a cultural artifact the Prime Directive prohibits touching, hip-hop is a tool that must be handled, manipulated, employed for explicit progressive agendas. Thus Obama’s deft management of this interview (in a marketing sense) is utilitarian on two levels, both immediately in arguing for a productive employment of hip-hop, and in a meta-sense as the creation of political capital through a carefully crafted “tough” dance with popular culture.

If Obama’s treatment of hip-hop in this interview is utilitarian in particular ways, his employment of hip-hop thematics at other points in his campaign served similarly practical political purposes. Among the most memorable of these moments was the event at an April 2008 political rally where Obama “dusted his shoulders” free of the mudslinging tactics of his then-nemesis, Hillary Clinton. Obama denounced Clinton’s attack as the “textbook Washington game” the Republicans did to her “back in the 1990s.” In a crowd-rousing moment, Obama said that “when you’re running for the presidency, you’ve got to expect it, and you’ve just kinda got to, you know-” As Obama dusted imaginary dirt off his shoulders, his sound crew cued Jay-Z’s “Dirt of Your Shoulder.” Behind him, a choreographically multicultural stage audience rose to their feet. The looks on their faces were decidedly different. An older White man rose in polite, smiling applause. Others likewise arose and gave their approval. But behind Obama and to his left, a bald, 30ish black man rose immediately to his feet upon hearing the first few bars of the song, hooping at what he

clearly understood as an important cultural reference. This reference to hip-hop culture works in two ways, first as an apt dismissal of what he claimed was the frivolity of Clinton's attacks, and as an important political wink at Black youth culture, and all youth more generally. Far more than his intonations of love for hip-hop in his interview with Johnson, this moment crystallized an understanding of the larger themes of hip-hop, in this case the need for "swagger" or simply "swag" to dismiss adversaries.

Here Obama takes "respectable" engagement with hip-hop a step further. Rather than simply trying to transform and re-mobilize hip-hop to invoke the progressive idyll, Obama takes from hip-hop in all its fraught imperfection to accomplish a message of personal power. While Obama in the Johnson interview indicates his awareness of the "respectable" critiques of hip-hop as misogynistic and full of the "n" word, he pulls the Jay-Z "dirt off your shoulders" line literally from the midst of that rhetorical tide. The full line in the uncensored version of the song is "If you're feeling like a pimp nigga go on, brush your shoulders off, ladies is pimps too, go on, dust your shoulders off." The line captures everything that is "wrong" with hip-hop from a "respectable" perspective: the invocation/reinterpretation of the pimp, paragon of sexual abuse and degradation; the use of nigga, condemned by respectable negroes across the political spectrum (from Cornel West to Alan Keyes). But it also captures the complexity with which rappers, Jay-Z in this case, are re-thinking traditional forms of masculinity, incorporating a feminist, or at least ironically egalitarian critique. "Pimp," in being divorced from its original meaning, has become a gender neutral term that refers simply to proud/cool/brazen Blackness.

Obama leans on this line (of course sanitized of its unsavory past a la Little Richard) both as a political punchline and, ostensibly, as a personal support. It's probably assuming too much to think that the line actually had personal impact for Obama, was relied upon as a source of proud strength amidst the slings and arrows of an outrageous American political system. I like to think that I'm not the only "respectable" person who listens to ridiculously problematic music as a source of strength, that transforms verbal violence into dissertation pages, for example. I know my fellow coaches did just that, utilizing messages of deplorable communal violence toward the positive end of self-improvement, academic excellence and athletic achievement. I know academic-types who do too, though they shall here remain nameless.

...

But despite his at times emotive embrasure of hip-hop culture, Obama in many ways, as an essentially assimilationist model of success, directly controverts Black popular culture. In particular, Barack Obama speaks the king's English, and has at times been directly in opposition to clothing choices generally associated with hip-hop style. In an interview with MTV's "Sway" Calloway, he responded to a question about a Florida law penalizing people who exposed their underwear by sagging their pants:

Obama: I think passing a law about people wearing sagging pants is a waste of time. We should be focused on creating jobs, improving our schools, health care, dealing with the war in Iraq. Any public official that is worrying about sagging pants probably needs to spend some time focusing on real problems out there.

Having said that, brothers should pull up their pants. You are walking by your mother, your grandmother, your underwear is showing. What's wrong with that? Come on. You don't have to pass a law, but that doesn't mean

folks can't have some sense and respect for other people. A lot of people may not want to see your underwear - I'm one of them.

Obama's comments clearly reflect an emphasis on "respect" for older, "respectable" norms of behavior and dress. While Obama rejects the policing of personhood in this particular way, he denounces saggies as lacking "sense," and even intones his own version of the infamous "pull up your pants." Obama's comments sparked a firestorm of embrasure, particularly from the political right, where publications like the New York Post, who's celebratory first line of an article titled "Kick in Pants from Obama" read "Barack Obama has a message for America's youth: Pull up your pants" (Earle, 2008)! The first comment in response to the article, in screaming all-caps, reflected the way in which right-of-center audiences received Obama's quote: "I GUESS OBAMA AND I CAN AGREE ON SOMETHING!!!!!"

Fascination with this quote did not end with conservative piling-on America's youth. Even a North Carolina NPR affiliate picked up on the story, thankfully in a much more nuanced way. The show on WUNC's the State of Things was titled "Bye-bye Baggy Pants?" Host Frank Stasio first spoke with Kent Williams, Jr., student body president at historically Black North Carolina Central University. Williams talked about policies he supported in conjunction with the University administration to enforce dress code requirements on campus. His rationale centered on employment options:

There are a lot of recruiters on college campuses... if all they're seeing is people walking around in pajamas, hats and do rags, and sagging pants, they are not going to want to employ nobody off that college campus. So I think our students look at Barack Obama... as someone of change... I think he's inspired people across the country just to change their appearance... and make sure we are not fitting into stereotypes that people have placed on us ("Bye-bye Baggy Pants?," 2008).

Williams theorizes that the correct response to stereotypes, rather than resistance to these mischaracterizations, is to make sure not to fit into them through attire choice. He postulates the “change” Barack Obama inspires as literal personal “appearance” change, a shift compelled by the opportunity and the peril of a moment where racial discrimination (“the stereotypes that people have placed on us”) co-exists with the possibilities Obama “inspired.” But while recognizing the uniqueness of this particular political moment, Stasio’s second guest, Duke Professor Mark Anthony Neal, placed Obama’s new inspiration to respectability in both pop cultural and historic context:

If you think about the tastemakers in hip-hop... figures like Sean [Diddy] Combs... Sean “Jay-Z” Carter and a range of other folks, for the last five or six years they have moved away from this idea of hip-hop style in terms of the traditional wear - the baggy pants and t-shirts. If you see any of these men now, even 50 cent, they are more likely to be seen in six thousand dollar suits... so I think hip-hop has been having this conversation for a long time. I also think that it’s not a new conversation. There has always been concerns and anxieties for what I would call the public spectacle of blackness... so if you go back to the nineteen twenties you have Black folks who have been born and raised in the North who are trying to regulate the look of black southern migrants coming into the city... it’s always been generational, the discussion about Afros, for instance, within the Black community in the late sixties and nineteen seventies, so it’s not surprising that this conversation is occurring at this particular place and time (“Bye-bye Baggy Pants?,” 2008).

Neal places the “inspiration” of Obama, and by extension the “suited up” of hip-hop squarely within the larger discourse of respectability within the Black community. Neal points to the Afros discussion, a discussion that photographic evidence indicates Obama was on the other side of at the time. But the question of “respectability” and acquisition of “mainstream” (a nice word for “White”) cultural norms has a much longer history, through Du Bois *and* Booker T. Washington, all the way back, I imagine, to house-niggerishness vs. field-niggerishness, and at infinite points in between. On the continuum of various points

within the spectrum of views on personal attire, Obama in fact comes out on the most conservative, most assimilationist end of the spectrum (very “pro-business,” to use the Clintonian term). How far he is willing to take “changing appearance” is reflected later in Obama’s interview, as Calloway brings up directly employer appearance discrimination:

Calloway: In regards to piercings, tattoos, I had a friend who worked for UPS and he had 'locks. He almost lost his job, but he fought for it. In regards to those things, how do you feel?

Obama: It's one thing if an employer discriminates on the basis of gender or sexual orientation or, obviously, race or ethnicity. I think employers can set standards. Now you got 'locks, but it looks clean, man, it's tight, and my little girl has twists, Malia, and to me, it looks great. Obviously I would be upset if she were discriminated against on that basis. On the other hand, if you are working at a fancy store and you show up to work in jeans and a shirt and you have a tattoo across your neck like Mike Tyson, for them to say, you know, “That is not the kind of image we are trying to project,” obviously, that is in their rights as well. I think any business has the right to say, “This is the kind of tone we want to set,” as long as they aren't discriminating on the basis of things people can't control.

Obama makes a nod toward his own personal connection to the issue of appearance discrimination, preference which, in both the case of his own daughter and of Calloway’s friend, is clearly racialized. However, still in many ways the constitutional lawyer, he ultimately gives the employer almost limitless leeway to discriminate, as long as it is something that “people can’t control.” This definition fits into the strictest of Black assimilationist categories. Simple discrimination based upon gender or skin color is wrong but everything else is fair game. Thus, by Obama’s definition, unless a person is completely assimilated, they are incapable of being discriminated against.

Barack Obama's complicated relationship with hip-hop points to the potential and the limits "establishment" authority figures (my fellow coaches included) run up against in embracing youth culture. The best of positive intervention in the lives of youth, like Obama's rhetorical posturing, is in some sense celebratory of youth culture, reflects an "appreciation" of the art of youth music and style that resonates with the cultural relativist leanings of the anthropological Prime Directive. But leaders, mentors and teachers (from the leaders of Oakland's the Mentoring Center to the coaches of Eastside high) concerned with positively transforming the lives of young people also must make strategic denunciations of the facets of youth culture they find particularly deleterious to the life chances of their students and mentees. While I will discuss in detail the ways in which my fellow coaches navigate this sticky terrain in the following chapter, I first want to look at the way education scholarship has wrestled with its own class-based assumptions, and the limits of its embrace of youth or vernacular culture.

9.3 Boas vs. BooBoo: The Limits of Progressive Education Scholarship

Ethnographic engagement with education came to the fore in the 70s and 80s, as educational researchers and policymakers began to realize the limits of purely qualitative data collection for assessing the effectiveness of educational programs, and proposing alternative approaches to teaching (Rist, 1980). Prior to and during this shift toward anthropological and qualitative sociological inquiry, a cohort of scholars influenced by Marxist or socialist theorists began to examine the educational system as an apparatus of state control. An exemplar of this tradition, Henry Giroux utilized the intellectual tools of the Frankfurt school, Pierre Bourdieu, and Antonio Gramsci to assert that schools needed re-making into

sites that can provide “an ‘opening’ for revealing capitalist (and other oppressive) ideologies, and for reconstructing more emancipatory relations” (Giroux, 1983, p. 237). As the rather lofty language of this quote illustrates Giroux, though effectively outlining some of the ways leftist theory could be brought to bear upon education, falls considerably short in providing real world, step-by-step suggestion for effecting positive change in the educational apparatus.

Nevertheless, the work of Giroux and other more literary theorists (Apple, 1982) provided a conceptual groundwork that has been taken up by ethnographers interested in the day-to-day operations of school. In particular, the notion of the “hidden curriculum,” which Giroux and others focused on, became an apt descriptor for the many ways in which schools “teach” social norms such as racial and class hierarchy. Giroux adopts Elizabeth Vallance’s definition of the term as a category used

to refer to those non-academic but educationally significant consequences of schooling that occur systematically but are not made explicit at any level in the public rationales for education... it refers broadly to the social control function of schooling! (Vallance *Hiding the Hidden Curriculum* 1973)” quoted by (Giroux, 1983).

The fundamental premise of this important tradition in anthropological and all qualitative inquiry is that schools, following the totalizing theories of Foucault among others, are part of the apparatus by which those in power maintain their social position. Thus, for those interested in disrupting the present social order, school represents a critical site for critique.

But “hidden” in this agenda ostensibly designed with the underclass in mind is a latent class prejudice toward middle class ways of being. This fundamentally “bourgeois” awareness of education and class warfare is reflected in Paul Willis’ classic text *Learning to*

Labor. He opens the book with the blatantly assumptive assertion that “the difficult thing to explain about how middle class kids get middle class jobs is why others let them. The difficult thing to explain about how working class kids get working class jobs is why they let themselves” (Willis, 1981). While he goes on to critique the notion that working class kids are so weak as to say “I accept that I’m so stupid that it’s fair and proper that I should spend the rest of my life screwing nuts onto wheels in a car factory,” his fundamental assumption is that no one in their right mind would want anything but a White-collar job (1). Thus anything other than a desire not to “let” someone take their rightful place in the middle class must be some sort of false consciousness, the result of victimization at the hands of the hidden curriculum.

Such an assumption of bourgeoisie identity as the norm which all youths would or should want has as its parallel in a set of literature not directly tied to the anthropology of education. Scholars of the African American experience have long examined “success” as a way of categorizing and crystallizing the philosophies and “strategies” of “successful” Black men, with the goal of replicating lessons learned. Unfortunately, though a host of scholars have examined success in a variety of contexts, I have not yet encountered a single attempt at defining the term. In a scholarly tradition in which definition is often the first step of prescription, this silence is particularly striking. For example, Sandra Taylor Griffin’s book, literally titled *Successful African American Men*, nowhere defines what “success” constitutes. In fact, in her chapter on “methods,” the term falls out all together, and is replaced by “high-achieving.” This term, Griffin suggests, is definable for the purposes of study, and in fact deliberately exclusionary. For her study

30 men were interviewed. Later, two men were dropped from the study when they failed to meet the high achievement criteria defined in the methodology. These criteria included being in possession of some or all of the factors of (a) an advanced degree, (b) income of \$50,000 or more annually, and (c) employment in a position of influence (Taylor Griffin, 2000).

Griffin constructs “high-achieving” as stand-in for “successful,” as an exclusionary category, with identifiable boundaries. If success, as Taylor Griffin implies, is truly equivalent to “high” achievement, than a project designed to encourage the success of all is necessarily doomed to failure. Because “high” is a relative term, it is necessarily exclusionary. While the benchmarks of education, income, and influence Taylor Griffin outlines appear fixed, if “high” is the standard, these hurdles must be raised to exclude “middle” and “low” achievers. The unfortunate physics of common-sense notions of success, like Griffins, makes the goal of “success for all” impossible. Such notions of success, like Willis invocation of class position, assume that there will always be winners and losers – models and those “duped” into second-class citizenship.

While much of anthropological engagement with education has looked to the “structure” of education and the society it serves as explanations of race/gender gaps in “success,” the most famous of anthropological explanations centers squarely on culture (K. M. Foster, 2004; Hamann, 2004). Signathia Fordham and John Ogbu’s “Acting White Hypothesis” presented a differing point of emphasis in engaging the “pathological” cultures of underachievement. Ogbu’s cultural ecological theory asserted that factors both external to Black communities (racism, cultural misunderstanding, etc.) and internal (anti-intellectualism, dysfunction, etc.) led to minority underachievement. Despite Kevin Michael Foster’s subsequent assertion that Ogbu focused on internal factors primarily because of the death of

research on that topic (K. M. Foster, 2004), Fordham asserts that Ogbu in fact shifted his own theoretical orientation toward internal factors as explanatory of achievement gaps (S. Fordham, 1996).

Like his more leftist-influenced colleagues, Ogbu assumed bourgeois notions of “success.” As such, he felt qualified to make value judgments on the behavior of his student subjects, evaluating them on the basis of what behaviors led to higher academic achievement. Thus, for Ogbu, “Black students in Shaker Heights school system did not work as hard as they should” (Ogbu, 2003) (32). Likewise, just as choosing to do things other than study (after-school activities, part-time jobs, recreation, etc.) is a fundamentally wrong choice, cultural patterns that in any way discourage achievement are necessarily negative, if not outright pathological.

The Acting White hypothesis, which became chief among Ogbu’s cultural explanations for underachievement, falls squarely into this category. According to Fordham and Ogbu, Black students are pressured to underachieve for fear of “Acting White” (S. a. J. O. Fordham, 1986). While this perspective gained great traction in the national media, among policymakers, in the philanthropic community, and public discourse, subsequent scholarship has challenged the validity of this claim. Tyson, Darity, and Castellino subsequently argued that all ethnic groups experience pressure not to be “geeks” or “nerds” (Tyson et al., 2005). Poor White students experience pressure not to be “high and mighty.” Perhaps more importantly, variation in the levels of anti-achievement pressure between schools suggest that administrators and teachers may play a significant role in creating a culture that embraces or rejects “successful” students.

In reality, the complex set of behavior and identity choices that can be lumped under a “nerd” or “Acting White” accusation includes course selection and speech patterns, but also clothing style, music choice, friendships, and extra-curricular activities. Prudence Carter duly notes these distinctions, as many students who assimilate to “White” norms in speech, may “still not possess cultural know-how about how to best fill out a college application” (Carter, 2005) (169). Conversely, students who excel academically but have the social skills to maintain ties to Black students may not be singled out for ridicule (Gayles, 2005). While these moves to controvert and complicate the rather simplistic formulations of early “Acting White” logic are important, considerable attention also needs to be placed on the personal psychological stress conformity to mainstream (read: White) norms of behavior entails.

The literature on conformity in education provides several strategies for motivating or allowing for the conformity of students to White norms. The first definition, which I call “old school” assimilation, involves a re-conceptualization of conformity as resistance. For Fordham’s high-achieving students and predominantly Black Capital High, “*warfare* is the appropriate term for academic achievement because they are resisting... the dominant society's minimal academic expectations for Black students” (S. Fordham, 1996, p. 255). This logic follows the African American axiom that “you have to be twice as good” as your White peers, and motivates a sense of racial pride to “out-White” the White man. This attitude, particularly in predominantly Black schools and historically Black colleges, is made manifest in academic competition, reflected in the excellence, for example, of Howard University’s trial law team. This strategy of motivation seems to work particularly well in all-Black environments, when Black students are able to exist without the threats to solidarity majority

White majorities present. These environs present the opportunity to be both Black and “assimilated,” with the support of like-minded, conformity-oriented individuals.

However, even in majority Black environments, and particularly in multi-cultural classrooms, the stakes of assimilation are often higher. As Lisa Delpit asserts, too often the acquisition of White speech patterns is tethered to the rejection of Black vernacular English. Teachers must remember that “the linguistic form a student brings to school is intimately connected with loved ones, community, and personal identity. To suggest that this form is ‘wrong’ or, even worse, ignorant, is to suggest that something is wrong with the student and his or her family” (Delpit, 1995). Delpit suggests some innovative solutions to this dilemma, solutions which I discuss more detail in the following chapter on teaching techniques.

However, Delpit, like every other education scholar I have encountered, also encourages the acquisition of “mainstream” speech patterns. While native dialects are important, “on the other hand, it is equally important to understand that students who do not have access to the politically popular dialect form in this country, that is, Standard English, are less likely to succeed economically than their peers who do” (53). Here again, as in the work of Willis, the limits of Delpit’s embrace of Black vernacular are circumscribed by an attachment to the material (economic) advancement of her pupils, and economic advancement, it would seem that can *only* happen with access to White capital flows.

These challenges are further complicated in more lengthy examinations of particular educational contexts. Lois Weiss, in her ethnography of African Americans at a community college, notes the ways the hidden curriculum undermines and antagonizes its students. In particular, the community college, in seeking to prepare its student for “mainstream” society,

“takes its role as distributor of dominant meanings very seriously” (Weiss, 1985, p. 78). What this translates to is a strict attendance policy in which students can lose financial aid for excessive absences or lateness. Weiss ultimately argues against this policy, which she asserts is ineffective. Yet, Weiss does embrace other aspects of the school’s mission to distribute dominant meanings.

The case of standard English is different. Students must, if they are to challenge the class structure and their own position as underclass within it (whether individually or collectively), be fluent in what we call standard English. The college’s position on this is rigid and I concur with its rigidity (165).

Here we see the limits of the critique of the hidden curriculum from a traditional social-change oriented perspective. Because of Weiss’ commitment to challenging “the class structure,” she must also urge conformity to mainstream (White) norms. Weiss takes her critique a step further, arguing in the tradition of Ogbu that

the culture that students themselves produce encourages their own continued ‘superexploitation’ as blacks in American society... significantly, it is the culture that students produce within the college that makes a significant contribution to low ‘success’ rates in traditional academic terms and the reproduction of a social structure that is strikingly unequal by class and race (159).

Weiss, as a proponent of social change, feels forced to confront the pathology of the “collectivist” student culture. At the same time, Weiss, following in the cultural relativist tradition, understands that “success” and “achievement” are socially constructed terms. She is even more explicit about that understanding elsewhere:

That is not to argue that standard English is more intrinsically worthwhile than non-standard English, but to acknowledge the stark reality of language in American society... If students are to engage in a critical analysis of society and their own position within it, they must possess skills that will enable them to analyze dominant discourse about their own position as well as those

that will allow them to re-capture their own history. Subordinate language practices, in and of themselves, will not enable this form of analysis or reconstruction. Again, however, this is not to suggest that the dominant culture is in any way superior to the culture out of which the subordinate discourses are forged... Dominated groups must become familiar with the discourse of dominant groups if they are to challenge the class structure differently (165-166).

Weiss, on the one hand, following in the cultural relativist tradition, argues against the notion that “standard English is more intrinsically worthwhile,” a position which, since the early 20th century, has been the veritable consensus of linguists. There are no “primitive” language systems, all language systems are “equal” in their ability to communicate and have specific, quantifiable rules for their use (Hudson, 1983). Similarly, she rejects the notion “that the dominate culture is in any way superior,” yet insists that “dominated groups” must learn the dominant culture. Weiss’ strategy articulates tenets that have served as fundamentals of minority and underclass struggle around the globe. Nevertheless, Weiss’ postulation necessarily dooms “dominated” peoples in some sense. Because they have to invest extra time and energy in learning a second culture (while members of the dominant community to not) these students must take time out of activities that might advance their financial standing, or improve the richness of their life in some way (social relationships, etc.).

Notwithstanding this additional burden, Weiss’ insistence on “rigidity” reflects the bias toward class struggle that privileges the attainment of her own bourgeoisie class position. In this sense, Weiss’ predicament can perhaps best be read through Marshall Sahlin’s critique of materialist worldviews writ large. While “historical materialism is truly a self-awareness of bourgeois society – yet [it is] an awareness, it would seem, within the terms

of that society” (Sahlins, 1976, p. 166). In other words, because of Weiss’ fundamental commitment to the notion that success or class improvement is tied to material reality, she must necessarily also advocate for a “rigid,” yea even hegemonic conformity to the aspects of mainstream society most crucial to the “success,” in raw economic terms, of the students she studies.

The coaches of Eastside High had a wide range of personal styles, speech patterns and levels of belief in “Standard English” as an essential educational outcome. I’ll talk more in the following chapter about the specifics of those choices and beliefs. But each of them was constantly re-thinking and re-conceptualizing “success” in ways that complicated simple materialist understandings, or a single-minded emphasis on challenging the class structure. While the coaches sited such “global” reasons for entering the profession of teaching, the day-to-day activity of education was focused on incremental measurements of success with kids. “I just try to come to class, be professional, and hope they learned something.” “I just want these kids to know about opportunities that I didn’t know about when I was coming out of school, the only thing I knew was to go into the military.” “I’m not into trying to make these kids into some little soldiers, that say ‘how high’ when I say ‘jump,’ I just want them to have an appreciation for their history, for who they are.”

These sort of incremental, gradualist approaches to “success” allowed coaches to embrace with open arms the lives of the players and students they touched. While each of them, like Barack Obama, carefully staked out points of solidarity and points of contention with youth culture, their ultimate rejection of assimilationist models of success gave both

their manner and their teaching technique a strikingly different tone. It is this subtle but critical innovation in teaching technique, pioneered by a host of educators around the country, that I want to focus on at length. I believe, as Gred Dimitriadis suggests, that “we must rethink traditional notions of ‘success’... if we are to do justice to the complex lives of young Black men” (Dimitriadis, 2003). While not jettisoning the idea of academic opportunity as a core value, the coaches of Eastside High each reflected communal, cultural, even “pathological” values they were not willing to give up for achievement. These non-negotiables intact, they pioneered a unique brand of teaching.

10. Sincere Teaching: “I’m Real with Those Kids”

Responsive teachers select and use instructional materials that are relevant to students’ experiences outside school, design instructional activities that engage students in personally and culturally appropriate ways, make use of pertinent examples or analogies drawn from the students’ daily lives to introduce or clarify new concepts, manage the classroom in ways that take into consideration differences in interaction styles, and use a variety of evaluation strategies that maximize students’ opportunities to display what they actually know in ways that are familiar to them (Villegas, 1997).

“You know what my problem is though? You know what the problem is with Gina and I? I’ll tell you. We’re too sincere. We’re too sincere, and it’s killing us.” (Bill in J. L. Jackson, 2005).

10.1 The Case for Real Teaching

In *Real Black: Adventures in Racial Sincerity*, John Jackson challenges the assumption that racial identification is based solely upon essentialism, on a belief that “authentic” Blackness, like authentic jazz or Mexican food, is based upon a set of identifiable, exclusionary traits. Instead, he suggests, racial identification is based upon “sincerity,” on genuine affective connections that aren’t easily quantifiable, but are felt. Reading this work in relationship to his more recent *Racial Paranoia*, Jackson has been arguing that this particular moment in American history is characterized by the impossibility of making explicitly racist claims (J. L. J. Jackson, 2008). As such, political correctness is mandated in the public sphere, with or without the actual transformation of the racial attitudes and opinions of the speaker. What results is what he terms “paranoia,” in which people are unable to determine whether an act is motivated by racial antagonism or as benign as its “correct” language or posturing implies.

What this means in real terms is that for people who self-identify as Black, sincerity is all the more important as a grounding principal of everyday life. Because virtually everyone

“says all the right things,” relationships of trust must be built upon instinct and “feeling,” making a subjective determination of where a particular individual stands, and perhaps equally importantly, what their motives are. For the teachers I worked with at Eastside High, this search for sincere, genuine relationship was a guiding principal for their interactions with one another. As I point out in “Don’t Tell Nobody This But I Love Y’all” above, these men take time to assess the character of potential intimate friends, and make valuations of the cost/benefit of disclosing their most intimate feelings to an individual. These confidants must be both trustworthy in their ability to guard secrets, and sincere in their value for relationship.

While the development of these bonds among Black men is virtually unexplored in the scholarly literature, the steps in this process are largely intuitive. Perhaps less obvious are the ways in which the search for sincere relationships underpins the approach these men have toward their work as teachers. As I state clearly in “Real Problems, Real Solutions?” the teachers of Eastside High are painfully aware of the “insincere” messages they receive from their superiors in colleagues. On the one hand, they are assailed by a rhetoric that promotes teaching creativity to students, even as music, art and other explicitly creative curricula are eliminated by bottom-line thinking. Administrators continue to do qualitative teacher evaluations, but teachers are ultimately accountable almost exclusively to the unfeeling numbers their students test as. Downtown compliance officers assert that the primary duties of special education teachers are filling out the appropriate paperwork, even as local leadership compels them to be a physical presence in the classroom.

The insincerity these educators experience is further compounded by the very culture surrounding teaching. As I entered fieldwork, one of my guiding research questions focused on what exactly Black males brought to an educational context. “We need more Black males,” was a mantra I heard repeated over and over again by educational leadership as I went through the bureaucratic steps to get my study approved. Several even encouraged me, as a Black male, to come teach at the public school level, because of the urgency of this need.

Given the startling disconnection of Black males from their disproportionately White and female educators, the yearning for Black male teachers makes sense. In a survey of 537 seniors at an academic magnet school, Pedro Noguera asked students to respond to a phrase: “my teachers support me and care about my success in their class.” While 71% of White females agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 80% of Black males disagreed or strongly disagreed (Noguera, 2008). Clearly, Black male students in particular are not buying what their teachers are selling, are not “believing” in their sincerity.

But what does the Black male teacher’s intervention entail? Simply Black bodies, men that “look like” their most troubled students? Common experiences of economic hardship? While all of these “bodily” and experiential assets Black males bring to the classroom were at times articulated by my friends and acquaintances in education, I noticed the glaring absence of anything *pedagogical*, having to do with the actual technique of teaching, in these declarations. Believing Black males were contributing more than simply physical presence and common experience to their students, I listened for the ways the coach/educators of Eastside High theorized their work in the classroom, and the ways in particular they felt their

approach to education differed from their peers. The style to teaching presented below is not presented as a classic “Best Practice” of working with Black males. Rather, this approach to teaching calls into question the very notion of capital “B,” capital “P” pedagogical technique. Because the approach of these educators is grounded in honest and truly interpersonal relationships, it is necessarily so informed by context as to be almost lacking in any identifiable or bullet-pointable laundry list of tricks. Rather, these teachers are actively seeking to transform the transactional relationship they feel the educational apparatus is forcing between them and their students. Through real teaching, they are actively putting the real lives or real people at the center of pedagogical discussion.

Over and over again, “realness,” “honesty,” and other words for what Jackson describes as sincerity were used to articulate the perceived differentiation of personal teaching styles. When I asked Matt Sapp why his house is a mecca for ex-players, students and mentees, he said flatly “‘cause I’m real with those kids, and they respect that in the long run. They might not like you right then, but in the long run they’re going to appreciate the fact that you were honest with them.” Declarations of realness were articulate often by various members of the staff, and often presented explicitly in opposition to other teachers. The perceived phoniness of colleagues was often reflected in the caricatures and imitations various coaches would do: “Class, class, sit down, that’s not the way we behave.” What for many of their colleagues was a genteel or even kind way of relating to students, were viewed by the coaches of Eastside High as insincere.

The literature on education and cultural competency has for years pointed to direct, even harsh communication as the style most in keeping with the cultural world of African

American youth (M. Foster & Peele, 1999). It has also demonstrated the ways in which teachers with more “White,” indirect styles of communication are often read by their students as insincere (Delpit, 1995). But literature on cultural competency has largely been written for an assumed White, mostly female audience. Thus, while it has been consistently demonstrated that styles of indirect communication are not the best cultural practice for working to lower-middle class Black kids, very little formal exploration has detailed the contours of culturally appropriate approaches.

Even studies that have explicitly focused on technique have in some ways fallen short of producing actionable educational approaches. Garrett Duncan’s enumeration of ineffective practices for working with Black males is in some ways both contradictory and confusing. For example, he states that poor teachers of Black males “seat Black males farther from them than they do other students,” but they also “seat Black males closer to them than they do other students.” Teachers sometimes “criticize Black males more frequently than other students for incorrect public responses,” but others “praise Black males more frequently than other students for incorrect public responses” (Duncan, 1999) (179). While all of these practices can potentially undermine Black males in the classroom, their contradictory nature points to a lack of a magic bullet, or even a coherent guide to practice available through Duncan’s analysis. Teachers must seat Black males close, but not too close, and neither over-criticize or unduly praise their Black students. While these precepts may be correct, the nuance of these decisions is precisely the instinctual gifting and thoughtfulness that make up a good teacher. If, for example too much discipline is bad, and too little is also bad, the only real answer is “better” teachers.

I think of “real teaching” as a way to talk about the things that the Black male educators I worked with did particularly well. Many of these approaches, as documented in the literature, have concrete educational impacts. More importantly, sincerity and honesty in teaching creates an environment that where genuine relationship, however limited, can occur. One of my players put it best, in distinguishing between those who he felt had his best interest at heart: “We can tell who really cares about us, and who is just trying to get something out of us.” Sincere teaching, particularly for kids in “failing” schools that may have more street sense than their teachers, is perhaps the only concrete and effective guiding principle of educational practice. Thus, cultural competency is not about simply “relating” to youth culture, but being honest about who you are, where you are and all the good and bad that comes with those realities.

Real teaching, as articulated by the educators I worked with, had some intuitive aspects: direct communication, personal vulnerability, honest description of the way racism and social power constrained students’ lives. But it also had distinctly counterintuitive aspects. For instance, commitment for realness affected the emotionally intimate speech of coaches in different ways. For Sapp, being real with players meant being extremely emotionally expressive to his close friends, saying “I love you” at times that made several of his colleagues uncomfortable, for example. However, most coaches tended not to be as verbally expressive or affirming. This reticence, I believe, was also informed by a value for sincerity. Rather than say something positive that they would later regret or disavow, coaches often chose to forgo the sort of declarations of love and family common in athletic discourse. This meant that there were certainly times when various members did not feel

verbally affirmed. It also meant that when Coach Moss declared “we are a football family,” his words could be believed. Thus, “keeping it real” ultimately arrived at its caricature, as a rationale for inexpressiveness. But the way that this decision is arrived at confounds simplistic understandings of realness. It is the same impulse that compels intimacy for trusted associates, and at once refuses intimacy with those “who don’t know me like that.”

10.2 Realness in Classroom Management

Realness also had counterintuitive consequences when it came to classroom management. Teachers absolutely committed to sincere relationships with students often had authoritarian approaches to classroom management. Thus teachers of the hip-hop generation who openly embraced and even celebrated youth expressive culture expressed decidedly autocratic conceptions of the classroom. Coach Moss expressed nostalgia for more authoritarian teachers. As a student growing up, “when you went in that classroom, that teacher had all power over you. And I hate to say that, but that’s the way it should be.” On the one hand, such a declaration, as I detail above, reflected dismay at what was perceived to be the dwindling significance of teachers in the era of “accountability.” On the other hand, the naked power construct of those teachers reflected a commitment to honesty around the unequal power relationships foundational to schooling. This represented an explicit rejection of what these teachers perceived to be the insincere egalitarian rhetoric of schooling.

A fundamental tension underlying schools is the tug of war between the democratic ideals school is imagined to impart, and autocratic structure of its power relationships. On the one hand, schools are fundamentally autocratic: students are compelled to attend schools, often against their will, by the threat of state violence. Men and women with guns

will literally come to your house, forcibly remove you, and place you and/or your parents in prison if you do not attend school [after various intermediately violent steps such as alternative schools]. Likewise, the increase of men and women with guns in schools reinforces the threat of violence that hovers over the institutions. Yet, autocratic rule in schools is consistently undermined by parent lawsuits, school board injunctions and progressive rhetoric that advocates that the physical and emotional well-being of students is important to schools.

On the other hand, schools promise democracy to their students. Parents are invited to attend “open houses.” Schools have traditionally governed by democratically elected officials, although increasingly appointed CEOs have taken over troubled school districts. School board meetings are “open to the public,” and may even include the token or meaningful input of select student representatives. But, at least in Eastside High’s school district, a long history of protest has made even these supposedly public venues uninviting and almost uninhabitable spaces. School board meeting attendees go through extensive security screening, are greeted at the door of the incredibly small room by two armed officers, are required to sign paperwork to enter the room.

Furthermore, the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that various civil rights simply do not apply to students, even if they are legal adults. The very notion of students as citizens appeared ludicrous to Clarence Thomas, who in a Supreme Court opinion argued that “it cannot seriously be suggested that the First Amendment ‘freedom of speech’ encompasses a student's right to speak in public schools.” Beyond simple prohibitions against the disorderly

expression of public speech, even the right of students to practice religion in school has come under fire.

Yet, without the “barbaric” practice of corporal punishment, schools are without requisite force to impose the will of administrators and teachers upon students. State violence is used to compel students to attend school, but to do little else. Only the most egregious instances of student violence are met with force. As such, schools must daily exist according to the principles first theorized by early social theorists. Schools function on a *social contract* between adult and student, to borrow a term from Hobbes (Hobbes, 1651). As the teachers indicated in the reflections captured above, the testing era has shifted these power relationships, increasing the power of the educational bureaucracy while diminishing the authority of teachers.

While the teacher/coaches of Eastside high recognized the relational, transactional, even contractual relationships between teacher and student, they explicitly rejected formal contracts. The sometimes-championed pedagogical practice of having students sign a contract upon entry into a class was widely ridiculed by the Black male educators I worked with. “Those kids don’t give a fuck about that piece of paper,” one educator stated succinctly. Yet, discussions of successful classroom and education management were constantly stated in contractual or transactional: “Listen, you don’t give me any problems, I won’t give you any problems.” Or “I promise you, if you do what I’m telling you, if you learn this test, you’ll kill this thing. Then I look good and you look good.” This educational practice represents an adaptation of a widely accepted pedagogical philosophy that effective education can only take place through the cooperation of student and teacher. The shunning

of “formal” contracts between student and teacher and the articulation of verbal contracts using vernacular language represents an innovative cultural adaptation on the part of these educators.

In the “grown-up accountability” era, the terms of these contracts, however, are largely outside the control of the educators. While the testing regime has transformed the way teachers conceive of their own authority, it has done nothing to diminish the power of the state to discipline and punish “deviant” students. The below example from Sapp’s work at an alternative school illustrates how the threat of state violence and the lack of compelling recourse in the classroom places the teacher in the awkward position of having no real power except the threat of what might be termed the “excessive force” of classroom expulsion, an expulsion that, in the case of this alternative school, would likely mean incarceration for the student.

See most of my kids are under court order to come to school. They are literally at the point where the court says ‘you come to school or we goin’ lock your ass up.’ But this kid, he done basically dropped out of school for all intents and purposes. He could get a job flipping burgers making six bucks an hour, or he can trap [sell drugs] and make some pretty decent money in a night. So they come into my class, they say ‘I was out all night, I’m smoked out. I got to get a little sleep.’ So what can I do? I say, ‘eat that free breakfast, go ahead and try to do your work. If you can’t make it, put your head down and be quiet. Don’t give me a hard time, I won’t give you a hard time.’ A lot of times, they eat that breakfast or that lunch, they put their head down and try to get an hour of sleep, and then they wake up and they’re good. I’m not going to fight no kid the whole day.

I’m real with those kids. I tell them how it is. It’s a whole lot of kids in that school that are out trapping [selling drugs], you know, living that life. I don’t try to tell them that the things they see in front of their house every day aren’t happening. I tell them to be smart, to think about what they are doing.

I'm real with those kids, and they respect me for that in the long run. They may not agree with you, they may not even like you, but in the long run they going to respect you more.

Sapp's realness here transcends the bounds of culturally competent educational practice. At its worst, cultural competence promotes an understanding of direct styles of communication and honesty as merely techniques designed to produce pedagogical results. Sapp's understanding of realness is different, is a value that informs both the functional and the dysfunctional aspects of educational practice. Sapp's realness compels him to be open and honest with kids even when he does not want to be, but it also informs his real-istic assessments of educational problems.

One of the significant issues Coach Smalls, an in-school-suspension supervisor, faced was the petty and at times mean-spirited ways he saw teachers relate to kids. Here, Smalls' commitment to fairness or the truth often trumped whatever assumed allegiance he would have with his peers and superiors. While Sapp's style of teaching meant not "fighting with a kid" all day, Smalls saw many teachers do the exact opposite

Teachers just pick with a kid the whole day, and eventually the kid just explodes...

I had one teacher come into ISS, and one of the kids said "don't you think its crazy that four of us from your class are in here"...

I'm like "you and Mrs. Bell teach on the same team [with the same group of kids] how come you are calling the principal's office every other day and she don't have any problems with the kids?"

Smalls described numerous other confrontations where he felt teachers were the real culprits.

A teacher comes in there to drop the kid off, she starts saying all this stuff about him, then the kid says something back, and they are like, 'you're not going to talk that way to me,' I'm like 'you were just talking that way to him.'

I don't do that whole 'trust the adult' thing. There are two sides to every story. I want the teacher and the student to sit there and say it both in front of me [and the student], because I know there are a whole bunch of teachers who lie on kids."

For Smalls, real teaching meant siding with his students when he felt they were in the right. It meant being confrontational with colleagues in a way that could negatively impact his stature in the school, even if all it earned him was the respect of students. His handling of these situations reflected a larger ethic which valued communal relationships with students.

For example, a kid asks me to use my phone, and I say 'here' [and hand it to him]. He walks off the other way with it. They [one of the other teachers] say 'are you going to let him just walk off with your phone like that?' I'm like 'where are they going to go?'

And if one of the kids says 'I'm hungry,' I give them a couple dollars to get something to eat. [On the other hand] if they have something to eat, I say, 'let me get some of that.'

...and that's the problem, because they don't teach you that in school... you do your student teaching at some good school, and you think you can control a classroom because the real teacher is right there, and they're not going to act out while the real teacher's there. But the only job you can get [once you are certified] is at a bad school, with a whole different type of kid.

Smalls insisted, like Sapp, that for the particular "type of kid" they worked with in "failing" schools, communal, real relationships were the only effective approach to educational style. But realness for these coaches did not always consist of the understanding approach of Sapp, or being an advocate for kids like Smalls. While all of the teachers I worked with at Eastside readily acknowledged the unfair and unjust barriers their students faced, they also asserted the ways in which kids growing up at the height of the hyper-consumer capitalism were "spoiled" with material goods. Coach Lucky, who grew up in rural North Carolina, was particularly adamant in reminding his players of their relative privilege. Coach Lucky spoke openly about the difficulties of his childhood, his complicated

relationship with a strict military father and the scars of growing up without financial resources. His openness transcended to his rants on the playing field. Amid a particularly difficult practice, he yelled at his players:

I don't feel sorry for you guys. Y'all didn't grow up in a Sears Roebuck house, a doggone house you buy from Sears and put together yourself. Y'all didn't have to wear seven dollar sneakers to school that your mom got from the grocery store. Y'all have everything.

Lucky's invocation of the seven dollar sneakers of his past certainly opened him up to ridicule from players in an American culture that highly prized material possessions. But his demonstration of real vulnerability in this way at once identified with the struggles his players faced and demanded a higher level of excellence from his "men."

But, even as coaches insisted in snatching players out of self-pity, they were also open and honest about racism, gender discrimination and other social barriers they felt their players had to contend with. Educational opportunity, for these coaches, was not constructed as a utopian wonderland where the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake could rescue the benighted souls of youth. Rather, they saw the educational system as part of a larger, largely unjust social structure. They saw educational opportunity not as a magic gateway to be walked through, but as a puzzle of mazes, a tangled web of "games" that they must teach their players and students to master, no matter how unscrupulous the rules.

10.3 Life's Really Unfair: Debunking the Myth of Fairness

In an 1887 essay entitled 'Public School Machines,' an educator from Winnetka, Illinois, rightly argued that society gave schools very mixed messages... how could a teacher honor the individual in an urban setting where organization, hierarchy, and the division of labor were the guiding forces of political economy (Reese, 2005)?

The coaches that I worked with at Eastside High viewed the society in which they lived and worked as fundamentally unjust. They viewed the challenges their students and players faced as the result of centuries of social policy designed to create racial and economic inequity. But they also believed that people, even people deemed to be powerless, had the power to change their circumstances, and deserved their share of the blame if they chose not to better their situation. These coaches walked a delicate line that the political polarization of both the public sphere and the academic sphere in America attempts to disavow. For the most part, scholarship focuses either on the notion of structural inequity *or* personal responsibility. Worse still, policymakers and others who should rightly be concerned *exclusively* with structure often point to personal responsibility as a scape-goat for failed policy. Equally ineffectual, argue the teachers I worked with, is an overemphasis on structure by those who work directly with kids. Real teaching means being honest about the corruption of the system, but also remaining committed to holding individual students accountable, despite their circumstance.

One particular teacher was transparent with his students and fellow coaches alike about the crooked rules of the “game” they were all playing. He was transparent about the unfair advantages more-White, more wealthy teachers, students and schools had. He was also honest about his own efficacy in gaining similarly unfair advantages for himself and his students:

Barack Obama said it, in our education system now teachers just teach to the test. That’s what I do, and my test scores are good as hell. I know what’s on the test, because I wrote half the questions. They said to all of us ‘we’re going to write the new test at NC State’ I said ‘umm-hmm, let me go check this out over here.’ I’m sitting right up in there. But in that whole big room, it was all white folks, only two African Americans. They know what’s on the test. How

else do you give a practice test, and half the questions are on the real test? I've seen teachers, the ones with good scores, proctoring a test. Now the ethics code says you are not supposed to look to see what's on the test. But I see them, walking around, taking a mental picture. So what do I do? I go around and take a mental picture too.

Real teaching did not mean buying into the myth of the American dream, that the U.S. was a land of equal opportunity where a little grit could level the playing field with four hundred years of generational wealth. Nor were coaches less than forthcoming about the particular race + gender discrimination their Black male players face. Sapp was gently instructional with Rod in explaining the “big black man” rules, a story I related in Chapter 1. But he was also at times harshly, biting transparent about the ways racism would affect the life chances of his players.

One afternoon, we just couldn't get it going in practice. A football practice is a really almost spiritual thing. It depends on the collective energy of the coaches, players and even managers or athletic trainers. It needs energy and excitement to work, and when a practice gets off to a bad start, it's like wading through quicksand, a sleepy mediocrity that's maddening. We had a practice like that. No *urgency*. Sapp grew increasingly frustrated. In his drills with his position players he started slapping bags around, cussing.

“I'm out here giving Grade 'A' coaching effort every day. And y'all come out here and don't want to do shit. Are you trying to tell me something? Do you want me to stop trying so hard? Do you want me to come out here and bullshit?” I could hear him across the practice field, and couldn't help but chuckle quietly with my own players as we went through our drills. I resorted to the last trick card in the coaching deck. I started participating in drills

roughing players (and myself) up to try to get some energy growing. I left that day with bruised up and down my arms from hitting players in their shoulder pads or face masks. We salvaged a decent day of practice out of it in the end. Coach Smalls ran the players hard after practice, and we gathered together after the final whistle in the growing dark. Players were breathing hard, unsnapping shoulder pads and other equipment as the coaches gathered for the ritual after-practice talk. Coach Smalls talked for a little while about the importance of the week, the need to get better at every practice. Several others of us chipped in our own commentary on the lack-luster effort players brought to practice that day. Sapp spoke with sarcastic anger.

Listen, y'all need to understand. You are Black men. I don't know if you've noticed, you are Black males. The world out there doesn't particularly like you guys. Nobody's going to give you a fair chance, so you've got to go out there and take it. You've got to care about this enough to go and get it. Go and get that D1 [NCAA Division One] scholarship. Go and get those grades. You got to take it man.

The biting brilliance of this comment is its realness. On the one hand, Sapp recognizes the way the deck is stacked against his players. On the other, he insists that they have the audacity to “take it,” to violently attack the cage that’s been created for them. To “take” good grades, to “take” a scholarship. Coach Smalls followed him. “Life isn’t fair. Sorry to be the one to tell you that. So what are *you* going to do?” Rather than blindly embracing the lie of the American colorblind meritocracy, these football coaches openly and regularly acknowledged the structural realities of racism, relative lack of social capital and a hostile educational environment. Yet, rather than allowing players to develop a victim mentality based upon (self)pity, coaches also embraced the potential and the accountability of individuals to take control of their own lives.

This is the ethic of personal responsibility in its correct application: in direct confrontation of an individual by a person with a sincere investment in their lives. All too often, the ideal of personal responsibility is applied to the development of policy, which by definition entails the altering of structures and the conditions in which people function. The development of policy must be informed by an analysis that takes seriously the environmental conditions that influence human behavior. Conversely, as coaches repeatedly noted, “feeling sorry for these kids” is a terrible pedagogical strategy. While an acknowledgement of social injustice is the bedrock of any honest relationship with Black young men, such a perspective necessarily must be counterbalanced by a direct, even confrontational, rhetoric of personal responsibility. Thus, when compared with lived reality, the sharply divided progressive/conservative public discourse appears all the more dysfunctional, all the more pathological.

10.4 Real Talk

Yo, I love your country ass
I love your city sass...
I love the way your crib smell like Votivo candle incense
The white voice you use on the phone when you handle business
(Talib Kweli “Hot Thing” 2007).

Reality: because American society is based upon the ethnocentric veneration of mainstream Whiteness, any population that does not speak standard White English at home is at an economic and social disadvantage. This phenomenon holds most true for populations that do not speak English as a first language. It also, however, holds for groups who speak other accents of English, from White kids in Catawba, NC to Black kids in Brooklyn. As a result, education that sees the economic viability of its students as a primary

motivation must reinforce the hegemony of standard White English as a cultural practice. The acquisition of these speech patterns, along with various other cultural forms, creates greater access to opportunity. While scholars have demonstrated that these “soft skills” *alone* do not make students immune to discrimination, they have pointed to the ways in which “acting White” can turn into cultural capital (Carter, 2005).

While the teachers at Eastside recognized the ways Acting White could produce opportunity for their students, their championing of White standard English, or lack thereof, reflected varying personal styles. In general, every coach sought to achieve White standard English when spelling or writing in a “business” or educational context. Handouts, playbooks, and diagrams on the whiteboard were all attempts at standard language. Some coaches were more successful than others. A couple of coaches were terrible spellers, and readily opened themselves up to good natured ridicule at their at times creative spelling choices.

But in terms of interpersonal communication, all coaches spoke some variety of Black vernacular English in relating to players and students, regardless of the context. These personal styles reflected a wide range. Thomas, a native of the D.C. area, generally spoke with correct grammar, although he actively incorporated slang into his speech. He would often “correct” the speech of players and coaches, and would readily ridicule what he felt were particularly egregious offenses. “Him downstairs,” was a grammatically ambiguous phrase he often used as a parody of particularly vernacular speech. Other coaches, like Sapp and Smalls, generally spoke in Black vernacular English. Smalls, when around White colleagues, would often modify his speech to be more “proper.” Sapp was adamant about

not doing that (although, in truth, he probably did a little bit). Sapp was adamant about “just being yourself” in a variety of environments, and sought to mitigate the extent to which his fellow coaches and players felt a need to conform to mainstream expectations in that particular way.

In the last chapter, I talked at length about Barack Obama’s complicated relationship with hip-hop and youth expression more generally as a way of introducing the contours of Black respectable embrace and rejection of youth culture. Obama, in trying to demonstrate his commitment to young people, voiced a great appreciation for hip-hop music as “art.” Yet, when pushed on the specifics of youth expression, he reinforced the notion that employers have the right to discriminate on anything but what an individual “can’t control.” The coaches, like Obama, each staked out particular ground in common with the culture of the youth they worked with. But, in viewing themselves as a transformative force in the lives of youth, they also carefully marked particular aspects of youth culture to pointedly reject. For Coach Thomas, as detailed above, “proper” grammar was a big deal, worth correcting and even ridiculing his players.

For Coach Moss, the particular target of his ire was baggy pants: “I just hate baggy pants, I can’t stand to see some dude walking with his ass hanging out. I hate that.” He would make players pull up their pants when he saw them in the hallway. Like Thomas, he’d also pick with players or students he knew well, pulling up their pants to give them a very mild “wedgie” or something like that. But, he generally didn’t harp on language like Thomas, or on hats like Sapp. Sapp hated to see players wear hats inside.

I’m not like Brian, I don’t really mind the baggy pants. I’m a big dude, I like to wear my stuff loose. You can’t be showing your drawers or nothing, but I

like my stuff baggy, so I don't mind it when the kids do it. My thing is hats. I can't stand hats, where I can't see your eyes.

The pregame talks reflected the "pet" youth culture rejections of the various coaches. All the players, dressed in their game pants, socks and sneakers or flip-flops, would come into Health classroom to check-in. Coaches would go over last minute adjustments, make sure all the starting lineups were set, and give pregame motivation. When Coach Moss spoke, he'd make sure all the players took off their "do" rags, silk head scarves that were another of his pet peeves. When it was Sapp's turn, he would take things a step further: "You know how I do. We're gonna take off all our hats. Sit up straight in your desk, and listen."

While Coach Moss and Coach Smalls, both of whom were senior in authority to Coach Sapp, did not require players to take off hats, they allowed Sapp to require that of his particular part of the speech. Likewise, while Sapp wanted the players to forgo hats when he spoke to them, he let them to do as the other coaches allowed otherwise. Coach Smalls was big on time. He was always punctual, and expected his players and staff to be as well. As the number two in command, a continuing thorn in his side was the more laid-back approach to schedule that Coach Moss and other members of the staff reflected. Coach Smalls, though embracing of youth culture in many ways, and a speaker of Black vernacular English, certainly did not embrace the notion of a more relationally focused, less stringent African American approach to time.

Each of these coaches, like the Black respectable class Obama exemplifies, staked out particular points of solidarity and opposition with youth culture. While they alternately rejected vernacular language, baggy pants, do rags, hats or tardiness, these coaches largely embraced youth culture. Each of the coaches listed above listened to hip-hop, explicit,

parental advisory hip-hop as a core part of their music choices. Rather than a “closet” habit that was hidden from players, coaches pulled from hip-hop lyrics as inspirational and even personal development material. “I don’t even listen to Rick Ross like that,” coach Smalls told the team, “but if you haven’t yet, you need to check out this song, ‘push it to the limit,’ that thang is hot. You got to understand, we have to push it, we got to work out here.” Coach Smalls would make mixtapes with the clean versions of songs to play before games. Coach Johnson would make them with the dirty versions for the weightroom. Coaches regularly used vernacular language, current slang and age old curse words in communicating with players and each other.

The coaches, in their selective embrasure of youth culture, confound the rather narrow categories for class and cultural positioning within Black communities much of the scholarly literature has describe. Given a long history of the portrayal of African American men as violent, emotionally vacuous, and definitionally poor, scholars seeking to subvert these dominant narratives must accomplish their objectives in subtle ways. One of the most salient techniques for countering the notion of Black poverty in general is the championing of a notion of decency. This strategy creates real and concrete us/them distinctions between respectable and underclass black people. These categories do not fall simply along economic lines. Elijah Anderson asserts that despite the poverty of his subjects, “most residents are decent or are trying to be” (Anderson, 1999). Anderson intentionally and forcefully reifies a decent/street binary, asserting that “the decent family and the street family in a real sense represent two poles of value orientation, two contrasting conceptual categories” (35). For Anderson people *really* are one of these two categories as a fundamental aspect of their

nature. Though decent and street people may co-exist in the same family, truly decent children “code-switch” into “street,” but keep their decency intact. But there is something fundamentally different about decent people, and not everyone who thinks they are decent *really* is decent.

The sort of class conflict Anderson reifies is also reflected in *Slim's Table*. Duneier talks to Black men in a multi-racial diner about their understandings of the problems facing the Black community. The critiques of these mostly-older men against welfare mothers, young “thugs” and the like are catalogued at length by Duneier, perhaps as a way of demonstrating the diversity of experiences and opinions within even “inner-city” Black communities (Duneier, 1992). But the coaches I worked with don't fit neatly into the decent/street, young/old binary these constructions create. These men are at once oppositional and a part of institutional power. They embrace youth culture and push it away, they talk “street” and show up on time to work every day. Are they really “decent” people pretending to be street, or street people masquerading as decent? Clearly, in the messiness of real life, such reified categories have limited value.

For these coaches, real teaching meant not thinking in terms of what was “allowable” for teachers or other decent/respectable/middle class people. It meant thinking pragmatically about cultural practices, critiquing them while gaining pleasure and strength from the positive things they possessed. It meant enjoying the insider comfort of speaking styles of English some of their colleagues might not completely comprehend. It meant getting “hype” to woefully explicit hip-hop on the way to a game. It meant telling kids “y'all need to stop listening to that ignorant music all the time. That stuff's cool, but if you listen

to it all the time, it *will* start to mess with your head” (Coach Wilbon). It meant being all of who they really were, with all the conflicts and contradictions they were still (will always be) in the process of working out.

So, even as coaches encouraged their players to “be themselves,” they also tried to give them select tools to increase their economic opportunity. Coaches attempted to give players options for who they could be in a particular setting. While they generally allowed players to be free with language, they made clear the appropriateness of context. “J.C., you can’t just be cussing like that, in front of all those ladies and kids,” Coach Smalls fussed at a player. “The coach from Tennessee was there, he didn’t even want to talk to you after he heard all that shit coming out of your mouth.” This and other messages stressed the importance of *context*, that players should be free to “be themselves,” but should be able to put on certain “decent” cultural forms when appropriate. Being real for these teachers meant being honest about the costs of actions. But it also meant that coaches generally avoided personal identity transformation as the preferred means to opportunity. In other words, coaches generally did not ask players to reject the cultural contexts which birthed them, but rather to be critical of *all* their world and to put on mainstream culture in the appropriate venue.

This technique parallels and innovative approach Lisa Delpit proposes as a remedy to the denigration of vernacular language that is often thought to be the necessarily evil of education. Rather than chastise the “incorrect” speech patterns students use in class discussion, Delpit seeks to encourage fluency in these native speech patterns as the best way to promote higher-level cognitive development. Rather than teaching that White is right, she

teaches students literally to “act” White. Delpit proposes having students memorize lines of White speech patterns to be characters in a drama or puppet show. Likewise, she gives an example of a student news broadcast in which the students try to imitate the speech patterns of Walter Cronkite. By “acting White,” these students learn White speech patterns as a mode of operating in particular situations, rather than the “correct” personal identity. By “acting White,” Delpit allows students to learn White without transforming to the type of student that the “Acting White” accusation most appropriately applies to.

10.5 Real Costs

In environments that often appeared hopeless, realness also had real costs. Sapp related the ways he tended to be skeptical about life in general: “I like to see myself as a realist, but I guess I’m really kind of sort of a pessimist, I like to prepare for the worst.” The same sincerity that aids the development of real, transformative relationships with students heightens the emotional impact when students fail, or lose a loved one, or die unexpectedly. Realness meant that coach Sapp helped Trey rehab his leg, after a bullet wound in his foot became infected and needed amputation. Realness meant burying Mickey, a player shot at a party in what appeared to be a case of mistaken identity. It meant crying with players as they buried their fathers, aunts and classmates. If, as my education experts suggest in “Real Problems, Real Solutions?” above, teacher burnout is the major problem facing high-poverty schools, real teaching may be a difficult, if necessary strategy.

11. “You Got to Have a Heart of Stone to Work Here”

Oh I love being an educator. Actually teaching, I love that. When I’m working with a kid who just isn’t getting it, but they’re really trying to get it, that makes my day. That makes me want to be like “forget football practice, I’m staying here, we’re going to get this” (Matt Sapp)

After practice on an October afternoon, a group of coaches stood around talking. We usually moved from the practice field up the hill toward the lockerroom. Often, we wouldn’t quite make it there. Others would go in briefly to gather their things, then join the pow wow before heading to their cars. We’d be hesitant to leave, enjoying meaningless chatter or meaningful talk, procrastinating returning home to grading and the drudgery of everyday life. This particular afternoon, Coach Thomas looked particularly stressed. I asked him what was up.

“Nothing man, just tired. You know, trying to work with these kids. Trying to get better, trying to be a better coach, just working everyday to improve myself. I believe I can, therefore we will, brother” (Thomas had a habit of incorporating motivational quotes into ordinary sentences). “These kids just need so much, I’m like trying to help here, but they need help here, here and here. What can I do? You know, you just do your best, you just try to be prepared, be professional. But at the same time, there’s only so much I can do.”

Tony chimed in. He was working as a teacher’s aid at an elementary school in an adjacent county, and was having considerable trouble adjusting to the new situation. “This girl was in class, and she didn’t know how to read at all, so I’m helping her and I’m like, ‘you need to ask your mommy to help you practice.’ She said ‘my mommy works at the hospital and she gets off at eleven [pm] or sometimes two [am].’ I didn’t even ask where her daddy was.”

I said, “yeah that’s why I couldn’t teach elementary school. When I was teaching in D.C., this sweet little girl comes into my class acting out. I pull her out of class and she busts in to tears saying ‘they shot my mom,’ afraid she’s dead. The next day, I asked her about it and she tried to shrug like it was no big deal, ‘they just shot her in the leg.’”

Sapp jumped in, “It ain’t just elementary school. These kids up here will curse your ass out, and you know the shit they got going on, and you feel bad, but at the same time, you can’t just take their shit. Man, you got to have a heart of stone to work at this school.”

There just hasn’t been much space in an educational literature preoccupied with testing, teacher pay and experimental education to talk about teachers’ feelings. And, if the larger social science literature is any indicator, even if such a conversation should happen, the feelings of Black men, long thought to be all but non-existent or internally extinguished, would likely not be at the fore of that conversation. But they were of primary concern for the men I worked with at Eastside high. When we talked, we certainly discussed techniques for classroom management. We also gossiped about school politics and district hirings and firings. But often our most potent conversations were about the way the classroom and the football field impacted our hearts: drained our energy, made us happy, left us hopeless, made us believe. “You can’t just coach with this here,” Coach Harrison would often say, pointing to his head. “You got to coach with your heart.” In the informal evaluation session the younger coaches on the staff gave each other each year, I was often critiqued for being too cerebral. “G, you’re real smart, but you got to coach from your heart, you got to be more

emotional.” On days when we had trouble getting going I would often quote Bruce Lee. “I need emotional content.” Not anger. But passion, involvement, commitment.

“Teaching’s the same way,” Thomas said. “You got to believe in these kids, you have to make yourself believe every day. “But it’s hard.”

I’ve done hard jobs before. I’ve worked construction in the Texas sun, I’ve waited tables, waded through swamp to pick out golf balls at a driving range. I know a little bit about hard. Teaching is something different. Teaching, doing that job well, demands a balance of prim professionalism and messy passion. What is that heart that Thomas, Moss, Sapp, Wilbon and Smalls all say education demands? What sort of heart is it? What sort of emotional cartwheels does it require?

Real teaching means loving your students, but not being “soft.” It means believing in your students, but refusing to be discouraged when your best efforts come to nothing. It means working for the betterment of an educational system that on any given day you may or may not believe in, a system too large to be much influenced by your limited power. It means turning your heart to stone and back again.

In this delicate dance, the community of football coaches was often a source of indispensable support. Matt Sapp, describing his work as an educator during our education policy focus group, described his affection for that community:

I love being around all you guys – like Thomas, I love being around Woody, I love being around you Gilmer, I love you Wilbon. For the real, I just love you guys, you bring me out of my shell, you help me be a better person.

The football community was an intentional network of support built on trust, and invested in weekly through hanging out and sharing intimate and trivial conversation.

But the football family, like all families, was far from simply a source of support. There were times when being an Eastside High football coach seemed to require a heart of stone. Of course, we dealt almost daily with players who protested ways they felt wronged in legitimate or imagined ways (and usually a mixture of both). We dealt with the overbearing pressure of parents who felt their sons should be playing more, and with the rejection of players who quit, cussed us out or changed schools. These were the little everyday hurts that were just “part of the deal” of coaching high school football. Much more hurtful were the ways coaches themselves could be petty or mean to one another. Much more heartbreaking were the ways that the fabric of the Eastside coaching community were rent apart.

The 2008 season was an incredibly rewarding one for me. The seniors were a group that I had worked closely with since they were sophomores, when I spent a lot of time helping out on JV. It was fun to see them make a journey from wide-eyed kids to bona fide ballplayers, watch their bodies and demeanor transform from boyishness to maturity. We had a very cohesive team, with solid leadership from the senior class. Our season got off to a rough start, with an early tie to a team we should have beat, and a loss against our archrivals in our conference opener. After that point, we had 9 straight wins, finishing the regular season, knocking out archrivals out of the playoffs, and advancing to the state semi-finals. We faced a tough team with a strong defense and a commitment to running the football. They ran it all night, but our defense played admirably. Early in the game, our middle

linebacker intercepted a pass, returning it for a touchdown. We played most of game with a 7-0 lead.

The offense, on the other hand, struggled. Through the first half, we put together only one substantial drive, and did not score a single point. We eventually gave the opposing team the ball on our own 40 yard line, and they managed to score. Again, the defense made a stand, stopping to two point conversion to give our team a 7-6 lead. Our offense simply had to run out the clock to win. We could not. We gave the ball back to the opposing team, and they drove down the field into field goal range. On fourth down, they kicked a field goal. They missed. Our sideline exploded in celebration. I knew better. There was a penalty flag on the field. A referee called “roughing the snapper.” They kicked again. They made it. They won. We lost.

A sportswriter who has covered high school athletics for nearly half a century, in sympathy with our plight, put it something like this:

I've never seen that penalty called. I've never talked to anyone who had seen that penalty called [words paraphrased and citation omitted to protect anonymity of school].

It was quite simply a heartbreaking loss. A loss that was made all the more crushing by the fact that our head coach was leaving the state. His wife had been offered a promotion, but had to move. They decided that it was best for their family to make the jump. He brought the players together in the locker room to tell them.

We talk a lot here about family, about how important family is. Well, for the last five years, my wife has made a lot of sacrifices so I could be here with this family. She has gone out of her way to take care of my boys, to earn money for our family, to do all these things so I could be here with you. Well, now she has the opportunity of a lifetime, and I'm going with her, which means I won't be able to be here and coach. I will still be here through

January, to finish out the semester, and to help our seniors get in college, because you don't walk out on a commitment. But after that... you'll have a different coach.

One of the juniors, a star player from a rough neighborhood who would be vying for a Division I scholarship the next year, raised his hand. "Are you sure, coach? I'm just saying, could you stay for just one more year?"

"No," Coach Moss said. "We always say here that family comes first. Well I have to do what my family needs me to do."

I stood there, leaning against the wall, tears streaming down my face. I knew that a chapter of my life was coming to a dramatic, unfulfilling close. Football had been for me, after my immediate family, the focal point of my life for three years. It had allowed me to wade through an academic environment I felt treated me with veiled hostility. It provided structure and support for me through personal and family tragedy. And, that night, with that call that a referee made for reasons of his own, that world was crashing down around my ears. I hugged players and cried with them for half an hour, then sat in the darkness of the coaches office for God knows how long.

I could feel it coming. I knew that two coaches on the staff, two coaches who did not get along, were applying for the head coaching position. I knew the majority of the varsity and junior varsity staff would support one of those candidates, and the majority of alumni would support another. I saw through my tears a fuzzy world around me, could feel the coming months of uncertainty as the Athletic Director went through the process of hiring a new coach. It was nearly three months before a choice was made. In that time, various coaches picked sides and players were inevitably caught in the middle of the

controversy. Wounds were created that will be slow or impossible to heal, and less than half of the 2008 coaching staff remain.

So the “football family” I describe in this project no longer exists as it did from 2006-2008. I don’t have a cute way to put a bow on this story. I don’t have a way that ties it all together, that uses a conception of the *fissiparous* nature of social movements, for example, to explain why things fall apart (Kaufman, 1996). I don’t like things like that, things that I can’t explain well, that don’t make sense, or fit into the overall structure of the arguments I’m trying to make here. But I think it is important in this way to tell the whole story. I think it is important because the coaches I worked alongside made clear to me that even these uncomfortable and painful moments are important. “You got to tell the whole story,” Coach Sapp said. “There are a lot of GREAT things that happened at Eastside, but there are a lot of really fucked up things that happened to. I think what makes a story interesting is that drama, that tension between the good and the bad.”

I’m not sure if it’s interesting, but I am sure that it is. My time at Eastside High, though washed in the feelings of camaraderie of working with men who cared deeply about their players and students, also includes moments of painful heartbreak. That cold winter night when we won and then lost a game to go to the state finals was the most easily identifiable of those moments. But there were many more. We buried two players at Eastside. One died of a heart failure in a pick-up basketball game with his uncles, cousins and friends, just months before enrolling for his first year of college. Another was shot in what appeared to be a case of mistaken identity in an upstairs room at another player’s house party. We buried him with the jerseys he played in at Eastside and another local high school.

There were little, painful but less identifiable heartbreaks too: the player who never could quite get his act together, the parents who only called to fuss about playing time for their sons, the thoughtless things said in the heat of battle or the drudgery of practice. Sometimes it seemed that coaching at Eastside, like teaching, required a “heart of stone.” Sometimes it was painfully obvious that I didn’t have that kind of heart, that I could not so easily steel up and love at the appropriate moments. “I know the end before the stories been told,” Sade sings through my iPod. “It’s not that complicated, but you’re going to need a bulletproof soul.”

I consider Eastside’s new coach a good friend. Life won’t let me be there coaching everyday next year. But he says I’ll always be welcome. I enjoy visiting the weightroom, slapping fives and hugging players I haven’t seen in awhile. It will never be the same. But I’m still excited about coaching one day again. Next year, I’m doing a tour of all my former players. I’m going to college football games across the state, the Northeast and the South. I am very grateful to all my fellow coaches, and to all my players, who gave me the opportunity to experience football family.

Even if nothing lasts forever.

12. Conclusion

With a new president and a still-forming Department of Education, the time is ripe for re-thinking educational policy and pedagogy. But, counter-intuitively, much of this re-thinking really doesn't need to be "thinking" at all, in the strictest sense. We've tried that already, tried developing the newest, cutest, sexiest curriculum, tried learning styles and kinetic this and that. We need to continue to do that. But those of us who are concerned with improving the education of underserved populations like Black males must also recognize the limits of these tools. As a veteran of decades of reform warns,

we have to be careful about all reforms that are essentially cognitive, that is, all reforms which take the form of saying that we just need to get some particular information into the heads of people in schools, and that will make a fundamental difference. It is an ahistorical, apolitical way of understanding the world (Payne, 2008, p. 63).

Just as effective educational reform demands that we not create a fetish for the new, the sexy and the cerebral, it also compels a re-examination of some of the oldest, most ordinary ways of engaging youth. Given the sheer size of high school (and middle school, and amateur) athletics, continued engagement with how to use this medium to better impact students is needed.

After all, change is not about flashing lights, big speeches, or doctoral dissertations. It's about building communities of support, places that nurture good people to do the heartwork of transforming our world.

Works Cited

- Ambler, M. (2008). Memorandum: Update on CMS Bonus Programs from <http://documents.cms.k12.nc.us/dsweb/Get/Document-19883/bonus+program+memo+2007-2008.doc>
- Anderson, E. (1999). *Code of the Street: Decency, Violence, and the Moral Life of the Inner City* (1st ed.). New York: W.W. Norton.
- Apple, M. W. (1982). *Cultural and Economic Reproduction in Education : Essays on Class, Ideology, and the State*. London ; Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- APWire. (1991, January 1). George Allen, Coach, Dead at 72; Led Redskins to Super Bowl VII *Associated Press*,
- Ariès, P. (1962). *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (R. Baldick, Trans.). New York, NY: Knopf.
- Asim, J. (Ed.). (2001). *Not Guilty: Twelve Black Men Speak Out on Law, Justice, and Life* (1st ed.). New York: Amistad.
- Baker, L. D. (1998). From Savage to Negro: Anthropology and the Construction of Race, 1896-1954. from <http://www.netlibrary.com/urlapi.asp?action=summary&v=1&bookid=6871> An electronic book accessible through the World Wide Web; click for information
- Barron, J. M., Ewing, B. T., & Waddell, G. R. (2006). The Effects of High School Athletic Participation on Education and Labor Market Outcomes. *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, 82(3).
- Bateson, G., Jackson, D. D., Haley, J., & Weakland, J. (1956). Toward a Theory of Schizophrenia. *Behavioral Science*, 1(4), 251-264.
- Boger, J. C., & Orfield, G. (Eds.). (2005). *School Resegregation: Must the South Turn Back?* Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.

- Bourgois, P. I. (1995). *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio*. Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Bowers, R., Gilmer, M., & Littles, M. (2009). *Family Matters*. New York, NY: Association of Black Foundation Executives (ABFE).
- Brown, R. W. (1993). An Estimate of the Rent Generated by a Premium College Football Player. *Economic Inquiry*, 31(4).
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Bye-bye Baggy Pants? (2008). [Radio]. In F. Stasio & L. Thomas (Producer), *WUNC State of Things - North Carolina Public Radio*.
- Carlson, D., & Scott, L. (2005). *What Is the Status of High School Athletes 8 Years After Their Senior Year?* Washington, DC: US Department of Education - National Center for Education Statistics.
- Carter, P. L. (2005). *Keepin' it Real: School Success Beyond Black and White*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Checker, M. (2005). *Polluted Promises: Environmental Racism and the Search for Justice in a Southern Town*. New York: New York University Press.
- Chin, E. (2001). *Purchasing Power: Black Kids and American Consumer Culture*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Clark, K. (1950). *Effect of Prejudice and Discrimination on Personality Development*. Midcentury White House Conference on Children and Youth.
- Cunningham, H. (1995). *Children and Childhood in Western Society Since 1500*. New York, NY: Longman.

- Curry, L. A., Snyder, C. R., Cook, D. L., Ruby, B. C., & Rehm, M. (1997). Role of Hope in Academic and Sport Achievement. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 73(6), 1257-1267.
- Curtis, R. L. J. (1998). Racism and Rationales: A Frame Analysis of John Hoberman's Darwin's Athletes. *Social Science Quarterly*, 79(4), 885-891.
- Darity, W. A., & Goldsmith, A. H. (1996). "Social Psychology, Unemployment and Macroeconomics". *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 10(1), 121-140.
- Darity, W. A., Mason, P. L., & Stewart, J. B. (2006). The Economics of Identity: the Origin and Persistence of Racial Identity Norms. *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization*, 60(3), 283-305.
- Darity, W. A. J., Myers, S. L. J., & Chung, C. (1998). Racial Earnings Disparities and Family Structure. *Southern Economic Journal*, 65(1), 20-41.
- Davis, G. G., & Muhlhausen, D. B. (2000). *Young African-American males : continuing victims of high homicide rates in urban communities*. Washington, D.C.: The Heritage Foundation.
- DeGaris, L. (2000). Be a Buddy to Your Buddy: Male Identity, Aggression, and Intimacy in a Boxing Gym. In J. McKay, M. A. Messner & D. F. Sabo (Eds.), *Masculinities, gender relations, and sport* (pp. 87-107). Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications.
- Delpit, L. D. (1995). *Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom*. New York: New Press : Distributed by W.W. Norton.
- Dimitriadis, G. (2003). *Friendship, Cliques, and Gangs: Young Black Men Coming of Age in Urban America*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Dollard, J. (1990). The Dozens: Dialectic of Insult. In A. Dundes (Ed.), *Mother Wit from the Laughing Barrel: Readings in the Interpretation of Afro-American Folklore* (pp. 277-294). Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press.
- Du Bois, W. E. B., & Eaton, I. (1899). *The Philadelphia Negro; a Social Study*. Philadelphia,: Published for the University.

- Duncan, G. A. (1999). The Education of Adolescent Black Males: Connectin Self-Esteem to Human Dignity. In L. E. Davis (Ed.), *Working with African American males : a guide to practice* (1st ed., pp. 173-186). Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications.
- Duneier, M. (1992). *Slim's Table: Race, Respectability, and Masculinity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Earle, G. (2008, November 4). Kick in Pants from O: 'Brothers, Stop Sagging'. *New York Post*, from http://www.nypost.com/seven/11042008/news/politics/kick_in_pants_from_o_136815.htm
- Eckard, E. W. (1998). The NCAA Cartel and Competitive Balance in College Football. *Review of Industrial Organization*, 13(3), 347-369.
- Ferguson, A. A. (2000). *Bad boys: Public Schools in the Making of Black Masculinity*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Foley, D. (1990). The Great American Football Ritual: Reproducing Class, Race, and Gender Inequality. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 7, 111-135.
- Fordham, S. (1996). *Blacked Out: Dilemmas of Race, Identity, and Success at Capital High*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Fordham, S. a. J. O. (1986). Black Students School Success: Coping with the Burdern of Acting White. *The Urban Review*, 18(3), 176-206.
- Foster, H. L. (1974). *Ribbin', Jivin', and Playin' the Dozens: the Unrecognized Dilemma of Inner-City Schools*. Cambridge, MA: Ballinger Pub. Co.
- Foster, K. M. (2004). Coming to Terms: a Discussion of John Ogbu's Cultural-Ecological Theory of Minority Academic Achievement. *Intercultural Education*, 15(4), 369-384.
- Foster, M., & Peele, T. B. (1999). Teaching Black Males: Lessons from the Experts. In V. C. Polite & J. E. Davis (Eds.), *African American Males in School and Society : Practices and Policies for Effective Education* (pp. 8-19). New York: Teachers College Press.

- Franklin, A. J. (1999). Therapeutic Support Groups for African American Men. In L. E. Davis (Ed.), *Working with African American males : a guide to practice* (1st ed., pp. 5-14). Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications.
- Gayles, J. (2005). Playing the Game and Paying the Price: Academic Resilience among Three High-Achieving African American Males. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 36(3), 250-264.
- Gilmer, M. (2007). Rebel Song: Soweto's Black Sunday Movement as Language Antipolitics. *Transforming Anthropology*, 15(2), 141-145.
- Gilmer, M., Littles, M., & Bowers, R. (2009). *Momentum: Sustaining Efforts to Improve Life Outcomes Among African-American Males*. New York, NY: Ford Foundation.
- Giroux, H. A. (1983). *Theory and Resistance in Education: a Pedagogy for the Opposition*. South Hadley, Mass.: Bergin & Garvey.
- Goldsby, J. D. (2006). *A Spectacular Secret : Lynching in American Life and Literature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Goldsmith, A. H., Sedo, S., Jr., W. D., & Hamilton, D. (2004). The Labor Supply Consequences of Perceptions of Employer Discrimination During Search and On-the-job: Integrating Neoclassical Theory and Cognitive Dissonance. *Journal of Economic Psychology*, 25(1), 15-39.
- Gorn, E. J. (1986). *The Manly Art: Bare-Knuckle Prize Fighting in America*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Greenwood, P. B. (2007). *Character And Caring in the Context of American Football: An Examination of the Relationship Between Positive Youth Development and Achievement Goal Theory.*, North Carolina State University, Raleigh, NC.
- Gwaltney, J. L. (1980). *Drylongso: a Self-Portrait of Black America* (1st ed.). New York: Random House.
- Halberstam, J. (1998). *Female Masculinity*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

- Hamann, E. (2004). Lessons from the Interpretation/misinterpretation of John Ogbu's Scholarship. *Intercultural Education*, 15(4), 399-412.
- Hebdige, D. (1979). *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. New York, NY: Methuen.
- Henry Louis Gates, J. (1988). *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hobbes, T. (1651). *Leviathan*. Bristol: Thoemmes Continuum.
- Hoberman, J. M. (1997). *Darwin's Athletes: How Sport has Damaged Black America and Preserved the Myth of Race*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co.
- Hudson, D. (1983). *Linguistic Equality*. Paper presented at the Linguistics Association of Great Britain.
- Humphreys, B. R., & Ruseski, J. E. (2009). Monitoring Cartel Behavior and Stability: Evidence from NCAA Football. *Southern Economic Journal* 2009, 75(3), 720-735.
- Hurston, Z. N. (1990). *Mules and Men* (1st Perennial Library ed.). New York, N.Y.: Perennial Library.
- Hutchinson, E. O. (1996). *The Assassination of the Black Male Image*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Ifill, S. A. (2007). *On the Courthouse Lawn: Confronting the Legacy of Lynching in the Twenty-First Century*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Jackson, J. L. (2005). *Real Black: Adventures in Racial Sincerity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Jackson, J. L. J. (2008). *Racial Paranoia: The Unintended Consequences of Political Correctness*. New York: Basic Civitas.

- Joe, S., Baser, R. E., Breeden, G., Neighbors, H. W., & Jackson, J. S. (2006). Prevalence of and Risk Factors for Lifetime Suicide Attempts among Blacks in the United States *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 296(17), 2112-2123.
- Johnson, M. K. (2002). *Black Masculinity and the Frontier Myth in American Literature*: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Katz, J. (1995). Reconstructing Masculinity in the Locker Room: The Mentors in Violence Prevention Project. *Harvard Educational Review*, 65(2).
- Kaufman, P. (1996). *Church, Book, and Bishop: Conflict and Authority in Early Latin Christianity*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Lewis, O. (1966). *La Vida: a Puerto Rican Family in the Culture of Poverty - San Juan and New York*. New York,: Random House.
- Littles, M., Bowers, R., & Gilmer, M. (2007). *Why We Can't Wait - A Case for Philanthropic Action: Opportunities for Improving Life Outcomes of African American Males*. New York, NY: The Ford Foundation.
- Littles, M. J., Bowers, R., & Gilmer, M. C. (2008). *Stepping Up and Stepping Out: Profiles of Philanthropy Responding to an American Crisis*: Association of Black Foundation Executives.
- Lutz, C., & Enloe, C. (Eds.). (2009). *The Bases of Empire: The Global Struggle against U.S. Military Posts*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Majors, R., & Billson, J. M. (1992). *Cool Pose: the Dilemmas of Black Manhood in America*. New York: Lexington Books; Maxwell Macmillan.
- Marschall, M. J., & McKee, R. J. (2002). From Campaign Promises to Presidential Policy: Education Reform in the 2000 Election. *Educational Policy*, 16(1), 96-117.
- Messner, M. A. (1990). When Bodies are Weapons: Masculinity and Violence in Sport. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 25(3), 203-218.

- Miller, J. G. (1996). *Search and Destroy: African-American Males and the Criminal Justice System*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Miller, K. E., Melnick, M. J., Farrell, M. P., Sabo, D. F., & Barnes, G. M. (2006). Jocks, Gender, Binge Drinking, and Adolescent Violence. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 21(1), 105-120.
- Mintz, S. (1995). *Moralists and Modernizers: America's Pre-Civil War Reformers (The American Moment)*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- NAACP/PLDF. (2005). *Dismantling the School-to-Prison Pipeline*. NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.
- A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*. (1983). Retrieved from <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/NatAtRisk/index.html>.
- Nixon, H. L. I. (1997). Gender, Sport, and Aggressive Behavior Outside Sport. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, 21(4), 379-391.
- Noguera, P. (2008). *The Trouble with Black Boys... and Other Reflections on Race, Equity, and the Future of Public Education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Ogbu, J. U. (2003). *Black American Students in an Affluent Suburb: a Study of Academic Disengagement*. Mahwah, N.J.: L. Erlbaum Associates.
- Paige, R. (2002). *The Secretary's Annual Report on Teacher Quality: Meeting the Qualified Teacher Challenge*. Retrieved from www.ed.gov/offices/OPE/News/teacherprep/index.html.
- Payne, C. M. (2008). *So Much Reform, So Little Change: The Persistence of Failure in Urban Schools*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.
- Petterson, S. M. (1997). Are Young Black Men Really Less Willing to Work? *American Sociological Review*, 62(4), 605-613.

- Porter, M. (1997). *Kill Them Before They Grow: the Misdiagnosis of African American Boys in America's Classrooms* (1st ed.). Chicago, Ill.: African American Images.
- Rainwater, L., Yancey, W. L., & Moynihan, D. P. (1967). *The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy; a Trans-Action Social Science and Public Policy Report*. Cambridge, Mass.: M. I. T. Press.
- Reese, W. J. (2005). *America's Public Schools: From the Common School to "No Child Left Behind"*. Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press.
- Riessman, F. (1962). *The Culturally Deprived Child*. New York, NY: Harper & Row.
- Rist, R. C. (1980). Blitzkrieg Ethnography: On the Transformation of a Method into a Movement. *Educational Researcher*, 9(2), 8-10.
- Royster, D. A. (2003). *Race and the Invisible Hand: How White Networks Exclude Black Men from Blue-collar Jobs*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Sack, A. L. (2008). *Counterfeith Amateurs: An Athlete's Journey Through the Sixties to the Age of Academic Capitalism*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Sahlins, M. D. (1976). *Culture and Practical Reason*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Sandiford, K. A. P. (1999). Shooting Hoops Against Darwin's Athletes. *The Sports Historian*, 19(2), 112-127.
- Scott, D. M. (1997). *Contempt and Pity: Social Policy and the Image of the Damaged Black psyche, 1880-1996*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Sheley, J. F., Joshua Zhang, Charles J. Brody, James D. Wright. (1995). Gang Organization, Gang Criminal Activity, and Individual Gang Members' Criminal Behavior. *SOCIAL SCIENCE QUARTERLY*, 76(1), 53-68.
- Stack, C. B. (1974). *All our Kin: Strategies for Survival in a Black Community* ([1st ed.]). New York,: Harper & Row.

- Stack, C. B. (1996). *Call to Home: African Americans Reclaim the Rural South*. New York: BasicBooks.
- Starn, O. (2004). *Isbi's Brain: In Search of America's Last Wild Indian*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company Inc.
- Stevens, N. (Writer) (2009). Sen. Charlie Alberson talks with Nick Stevens about Bill 377 [Audio Recording]: HighSchoolOT.com.
- Taylor Griffin, S. (2000). *Successful African-American Men: from Childhood to Adulthood*. New York: Kluwer Academic.
- Tucker, J. A. (2004). *A Sense of Wonder: Samuel R. Delany, Race, Identity and Difference*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.
- Turner, V. (1967). *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Tyson, K., Darity, W., & Castellino, D. R. (2005). It's Not "a Black Thing": Understanding the Burden of Acting White and Other Dilemmas of High Achievement. *American Sociological Review* 70(4), 582-605.
- Villegas, A. M. (1997). Assessing Teacher Performance in a Diverse Society. In A. L. Goodwin (Ed.), *Assessment for Equity and Inclusion: Embracing All our Children* (pp. 261-278). New York: Routledge.
- Weis, L. (1985). *Between Two Worlds: Black Students in an Urban Community College*. Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Willis, P. E. (1981). *Learning to Labor: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs* (Morningside ed.). New York: Columbia University Press.
- Young, A. A. (2004). *The Minds of Marginalized Black Men : Making Sense of Mobility, Opportunity, and Future Life Chances*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

Biography

Micah Gilmer is a Partner and Director of Research with Frontline Solutions, a social change firm that provides support non-profits, foundations and social enterprises in the areas of Community Engagement, Organizational Development and Research. Gilmer provides leadership to applied research teams, directs the creative process for reports and oversees public communication. He attended UNC Chapel Hill as a Morehead-Cain Scholar, graduating with honors in 2003. He can be contacted at www.helpingchange happen.com