AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

THE PERSEVERANCE OF A SHARECROPPER’S SON

BY

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To understand God as creator, we first need to understand that He has self-existence, whereas we are all created beings. His creations include all living things - plants, animals, and mankind – and He gave them all the ability to reproduce. Therefore when we understand that we are creatures, created by the Creator, we then understand that we are ultimately accountable to that Creator.

The main reason some people claim to be atheists is that to admit the existence of a Creator would force them to admit their accountability to someone greater than themselves.

Understanding and acknowledging that we creatures are ultimately responsible to a Creator is what it means to be able to reproduce only after our own “kind”– in other words, we can reproduce only what we are. It is “vital,” therefore, that we pursue Christ-likeness in our character, so that we will be able to encourage that same quality in others.

To understand and appreciate God as Creator properly, we must also understand that, as loving Creator, God’s nature is to provide for His creation, seeking our accountability, love and complete trust.

As an at-risk child, I was faced with a choice–to follow what others believed of me and simply give up on my aspirations, or to question what others thought and make a future for myself.

As a believer, I know that I’m different from the rest of God’s creations; no matter who I am, or where I was born, I know that I am incredibly important to God. God has determined that each of us is to have His own image and likeness.

I’m not only body and soul but a spiritual being with intelligence, perception, and the ability to determine my own destiny.
I am accountable and responsible to God for the way I use all that He has given me. I should never be pleased to live on a level of existence lower than that to which God has called me and for which He has equipped me. Because of all He has given me, I should make it my aim to be a faithful steward of the life He has entrusted to me (Psalm 8:4-8).

As the child of a sharecropper, those are some of the principles I was taught. I also learned that perseverance and diligence pay off, not only in the cotton fields and classrooms, but also in sports, and life!

I am thankful that we, as creatures, all need to be accountable to our Creator. We need to be accountable so that what is produced as our own kind, will understand that we are creatures created by the Creator, and understand that we are ultimately accountable to that Creator. And that any true success in life does not come from any quick fix scheme or recipe and certainly there should not be any room in one’s life for them. If this were so, why would we need our Creator’s son to die for our sins? In order to have a way of redemption to separate us from the lies of this world system, get rich quick schemes and the evils of greed and pride which alternately contaminate everything we care about, we need strong religious principles. If you look closely you can see this for yourself in our economy today. Greed and pride have almost destroyed it, along with us!

I have always tried to follow my mother’s words of wisdom and advice to let God and Christ mold me. I can still hear her words “don’t knock it until you have tried it!”
I would like to also acknowledge my uncle J.D. Fountain (the youngest of the twelve children and only living child of grandpapa Lem and grandma Rita Fountain) and his family; my oldest living brothers, Sam and Sim and my only sister, Lueretha, for an enlightenment of our family’s early years. Through them, I will take you on an “apostasy trip” back in time that might change your loyalty to some former attitudes and beliefs as it did mine.

I would like to also acknowledge Mr. Robert (say it ant so Joe) Weirauch my beloved friend who’s been a fountain of inspiration with words of wisdom, encouragement, and his continuous generosity to my family and FAM.

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I would like to also acknowledge my father in-law, John Rustad for his meticulous demand for detail, and a proper style of speaking and written English.

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I would to also acknowledge Jessica Huebner for her meticulous demand for detail, and accurate style of writing in editing this autobiography.
Last, but certainly not least, in my zigzag journey from life as a dirt-poor, southern black child – to life on the tough streets of Chicago – to college life – to life here in Wausau (the city my family and I have come to think of as home).

I have experienced both the evils of poverty and prejudice; the unconditional love and kindness of my lovely wife Jean, my daughter, Nicci, my son, Marshall, and others who have unselfishly helped me grow and succeed. For the latter, I remain eternally grateful. Most importantly, I have experienced God’s blessing and strength. I truly believe that without my faith in Him, none of this would have been possible.
# Table of Contents

Acknowledgment

Title ......................................................................................................................... 9

Abstract .................................................................................................................... 10

Preface ..................................................................................................................... 11 & 12

Chapter I Introduction ............................................................................................ 13

  **Significance & Need for the Study** ................................................................. 16
  **Purpose and Objectives** ................................................................................ 17
  **Definition of Terms** ...................................................................................... 19
  **Assumptions** .................................................................................................... 20
  **Limitation of the Study** ................................................................................ 20

Chapter II. Literature Review ................................................................................. 21

  **Introduction** ...................................................................................................... 21
  **Slavery** .............................................................................................................. 21
  **Sharecropping** ................................................................................................ 34
  **Socioeconomic Status** ..................................................................................... 41

Chapter III Ancestors and Travel ....................................................................... 47

  **Introduction and Selection of Respondents** .................................................. 47
  **Research Design** ............................................................................................. 47
  **Historical Travels of First Generation** ............................................................. 50
  **Second Generation** .......................................................................................... 58
  **Third Generation** ............................................................................................. 60
  **Fourth Generation** .......................................................................................... 64

  **My home town & Some Lessons Learned** .................................................... 66
Chapter IV Finding ................................................................. 110
  INTRODUCTION ........................................................................ 110
  DEMOGRAPHIC INTERVIEWERS ............................................. 110
  THEMES ................................................................................. 112
    CHILD LABOR/SHORTENED FORMATIVE SCHOOL YEARS .......... 112
    MODERN CHILD SLAVERY IN AMERICA ............................... 114
    SINGLE PARENT .................................................................. 123
    SPEAKING A DIFFERENT VERNACULAR .............................. 130
    POVERTY ON ACADEMICS .................................................. 142
  RECOMMENDATIONS ............................................................ 149
Chapter V Recommendation ..................................................... 150
  INTRODUCTION TO FAMILY ADVOCACY MENTORING (FAM) 150
  RESEARCH HISTORY OF MENTORING .................................. 151
  PROJECT DESIGN ................................................................. 152
  TIMELINE AND IMPLEMENTATION ......................................... 153
  CONCLUSION ......................................................................... 160
References .................................................................................. 172
Perseverance of a Sharecropper’s Son

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Abstract

My life began in 1947 in a home that was called the “Big House,” located in Anchor Curve, Mississippi. This was also the house where four previous generations my family were born. Anchor Curve isn’t even on the map. It’s simply a small unincorporated cluster of ramshackle farmhouses, located deep within the steamy cotton fields of the State of Mississippi …an area known today as: “The Delta.”

Thanks to the Delta’s cheap labor, rich soil, and proximity to the huge tow-boats and barges that ply the Mighty Mississippi River, this was, and still is, the heart of America’s cotton belt.

During my years in Anchor Curve, something became very evident to me. The difference between success and failure in this world, was having strong, loving, positive people, guide, support and listen to children at a much younger age than most mentoring programs are targeting today. Children can’t do it alone – nor should they have to.

As a child, I had experienced the pains of poverty and the evils of prejudice, as well as the unconditional love and kindness of my family and many others who unselfishly helped me grow and succeed as a person. They made me strong. They showed me what it means to be respected and to give respect. They made it clear how important getting good education was to succeeding in life. They helped me navigate the trials and tribulations of youth to become an empowered adult.

Over the past 10 years, other people have helped me develop and implement a successful after school educational, mentoring and tutoring program I named: “Family Advocacy Mentoring,” also known as FAM (see Chapter V) and to complete my Masters Degree in Human and Community Resources at the University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point.
Preface

Dr. George Washington Carver

Dr. Carver took a holistic approach to knowledge, which embraced faith and inquiry in a unified quest for truth. Dr. Carver also believed that commitment to a Larger Reality is necessary if science and technology are to serve human needs rather than the egos of the powerful. His belief in service was a direct outgrowth and expression of his wedding of inquiry and commitment.

Dr. Carver’s Favorite Saying...

“It is not the style of clothes one wears,
neither the kind of automobile one drives,
nor the amount of money one has in the bank, that counts.
These mean nothing.
It is simply service that measures success.”

“Our nation currently agonizes over questions about ethics and society in the wake of egregious, moral abuses in our public and private lives. The life of Dr. Carver reminds us that such abuses will continue until we reunite ethical and technical reasoning in the context of a profound faith that holds all inquiry and action accountable.”
Dr. Carver's Favorite Poem: "Equipment..."

Figure it out for yourself, my lad,
You’ve all that the greatest of men have had,
Two arms, two hands, two legs, two eyes
And a brain to use if you would be wise.
With this equipment they all began,
So start for the top and say, "I can."

Look them over, the wise and great
They take their food from a common plate,
And similar knives and forks they use,
With similar laces they tie their shoes.
The world considers them brave and smart,
But you've all they had when they made their start.

You can triumph and come to skill,
You can be great if you only will.
You're well equipped for what fight you choose,
You have legs and arms and a brain to use,
And the man who has risen great deeds to do
Began his life with no more than you.

You are the handicap you must face,
You are the one who must choose your place,
You must say where you want to go,
How much you will study the truth to know.
God has equipped you for life, but He
lets you decide what you want to be.

Courage must come from the soul within,
The man must furnish the will to win.
So figure it out for yourself, my lad.
You were born with all that the great have had,
With your equipment they all began,
Get hold of yourself and say: "I can."

Edgar A. Guest--- Recited by Dr. George Washington Carver during his commencement address at Selma University, Selma Alabama on May 27, 1942
Chapter I
Introduction

This autobiography will outline how this writer, a descendant of uneducated slaves and sharecroppers, became a College Graduate, teacher’s aide, mentor and entrepreneur.

The idea of doing an autobiography came from a suggestion by one of my U. W. Stevens Point Professors, Dr. Marty Loy, who commented: “Your perseverance through tremendous odds would be a better read than another abstract paper on truancy.” The truancy paper had been my original intent.

So let’s start.

For many generations, dating back to the early 1800’s, America’s sharecroppers (my great grandfather, great grandmother, great granduncles and great grandaunts included), were not allowed to learn to read! And like the children of many other families in my circumstances, our parents were falsely indoctrinated with the idea that we couldn’t learn.

I was my mother’s fifth child in what eventually became a family of seven (six boys and one girl). My mother and her siblings received the equivalent of only a third grade education. My siblings attended, but never finished high school. All had experienced abbreviated school years due to forced child labor in the Mississippi cotton fields.

For me, all of that was to eventually change.

These factors will be examined as conditions which affected my development and greatly impacted the development of others who were in similar situations.
According to Schlesinger (1933)

“In 1878 the South was forced by the Federal government to create public school systems to help educate freed slaves, as well as many poor white children who had little more than a passing acquaintance with formal education.”

It is no coincidence that in 1918, Mississippi became the last State in America to enact a Compulsory Education law. This law requires public school students to attend classes for a given number of hours each week, for a number of days each year, or until a certain age, typically 16 or 18 (p. 160).” Even so, State officials tended to look the other way in rural areas where children were expected to work in the farm fields. This meant that the school year for thousands of rural Mississippi children was, unfortunately, much shorter than the school years of students living in States where the law was more strictly enforced.

Children of sharecroppers were needed for working the cotton fields and were held out of school for that purpose. In my case, I was allowed to attend school during my grade school years, with the exception of two time periods. The first was spring cultivation, which included weeks of “chopping” to thin out the cotton, followed by weeding, which helped prevent the cotton plants from suffocating. The second time period was the fall harvest (October/November), which also lasted several weeks. For me, these shortened school years were in play until the tenth grade (in 1966).

Our local educational system was completely in the dark when it came to recognizing the symptoms of learning disabilities such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), even though, according to the Child Development Institute, LLC, the condition was first described by Dr. Heinrich Hoffman in 1845.
I suffered from a form of this disorder (Inattentive Distraction) which was misdiagnosed and improperly treated until I met Dr. Steven A. Benson, a Neurophysiologist, in December 2009.

My Advisor, Dr. Loy, suggested that I write my life story, without knowing that I was receiving much the same message from family members, teachers, FAM’s staff, and co-workers from various public health, correctional and residential treatment facilities.

Their message was essentially: “Your story of perseverance is one that all children, teens and parents need to hear, especially young minority males who often drop out of school.”

And I agree! Many of today’s youth (regardless of race or gender) are the product of broken homes and the current truancy epidemic! This has rendered them undereducated and either underemployed or unemployable. As a result, members of this young rejected population are now facing lives of desolation and/or crime without the faintest hopes or dreams of pulling themselves out of this insidious condition.

After considering the idea of an autobiographical project, discussing it with my wife and other family members, and reading more literature reviews on ethnographic research, I decided to research and write about my life, from the early days in Anchor Curve, Mississippi, to where I am today.

The purpose of this project is to document my life – from my early years as a sharecropper’s son in the cotton fields of Mississippi, to my present life in Wisconsin. I will share my beliefs, places traveled, and events which played important roles in molding my life, from birth to the present. Also, I will give readers an overview of my character, family, community, commitment to education, faith, and a lifetime dedication to helping others.
This study will also exemplify my commitment to education—an education that has helped me persevere through many difficult phases of my life, to the happy, fulfilling family and professional life I enjoy today.

Of my worldly achievements, I am most proud of my work in developing and implementing a successful after school children’s program which I named: **Family Advocacy Mentoring, Inc.** (FAM). FAM is dedicated to the principal that it is never too late... nor too early to provide children and their families with positive, life–shaping influences. FAM’s educational mentoring and tutoring program has served numerous at-risk, latch key and non-traditional academic children and their families over the last ten years.

**Significance & Need for the Study**

The significance and need for this study can be summed up in a few words:

“Perseverance and diligence lead to life’s successes!”

My mother instilled in me what today’s researchers Abigail and Stephan Thernstroms called: “A Culture of Success" in learning!” This includes:

- Placing a high priority on education
- Sacrifices by parents to help their children meet expectations
- Embracing traditional values, morals, and responsibility
- Respect for authority
- And finally, rules requiring children to dress neatly, arrive on time, pay attention, and avoid fighting & foul language.
Mother also instilled in us why the prophet, King Solomon of the Holy Bible, urges us to get wisdom! What she and King Solomon meant was that Wisdom is the principle thing! It teaches us to receive understanding. Wisdom knows the truth and gives us the ability to apply it to any given situation. Understanding is knowledge, shaped by wisdom’s insight!

From this concept called wisdom, I have learned that pursuit of knowledge, in and of itself, produces nothing more than data---an accumulation of facts that are useless if we do not properly apply them to life situations. Wisdom, not knowledge must become our priority, since knowledge, without wisdom and understanding, is meaningless!

In the Good Book, King Solomon, (Proverbs 9:10) states that Wisdom must begin with the fear of God and the knowledge that the Holy One understands us! “Without a respectful fear and knowledge of the Creator of the Universe, there is no wisdom or understanding. That’s why Proverb (14:1) declares: A fool has said in his heart, there is no God. The one who fears and reverences the Lord is considered wise, while the one who denies God is a fool. Our attaining true Wisdom begins with our relationship with God and Wisdom grows as we draw nearer to our Savor. This relationship with Him deepens as we begin to know His nature and His ways.”

**Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose for writing my autobiography is to present my perspective on how God can take an ordinary person from any social status or background and lead him or her to do extraordinary things. God has taken me from life as a sharecropper’s son, to a life of commitment to helping children and others.
The most important **themes** in this narrative are: 1) Poverty; 2) living in a single parent home; 3) speaking a different vernacular; 4) shortened early school years and the effects of a relatively primitive educational system in Mississippi at that time.

The literature reviews will define and give an analysis of: (1) slavery; and (2) how sharecropping, as a form of cheap labor, has impacted the lives and socioeconomic status of those involved.

The specific objectives of this study are to:

- Consider my life’s lessons of perseverance (from my birth in the cotton fields of Mississippi to the time present) as a possible roadmap for the success of others.
- Share how my strong belief in God and Christ helped me to persevere as an at-risk child, through many, often difficult phases of my life. A child who descended from generations of uneducated slaves and sharecroppers, to the life I lead today.
- Explain how forced child labor through the 1880’s and shortened school years through the 1960’s, negatively affected the education of children.
- Explain why I’ve spent my adult life as a child advocate.
- Explain why I developed Family Advocacy Mentoring, Inc.
**Definition of Terms**

The following terms should help clarify the autobiographical and ethnographic research used to support my themes:

- **Dandies** - Elegantly dressed land owners, men.
- **Slavery** - The practice of one individual owning another.
- **Slave** - One owned and forced into service by another.
- **KKK** - Ku Klux Klan
- **Lynching** - Being put to death by hanging, by an unruly mob.
- **Sharecropper** - A farmer who works another’s land in return for a share of the crop.
- **Plantation** - Agricultural estate worked by resident laborers.
- **Anchor Curve** - A small unincorporated cluster of houses surrounded by cotton fields.
- **Water boy** - One who carried water in a pail to the farmers working the fields.
- **Slave Auction** - A place where individuals are sold to the highest bidder like animals.
- **Slave Auctioneer** - One who calls the sale of public property, in this setting SLAVES, to the highest bidder.
- **Negroes** - Slang for the black race.
- **Black as ebony** - Meaning as black as ebony wood.
- **Brown** - A bi-racial person.
- **Darkey** - A very dark person of African descent.
- **Yellow** - A lighter bi-racial person.
- **Shortened school year** - One that allows children more time to work in the cotton fields at harvest times.
Assumptions

People who have seen me working in the community, at FAM, at local schools and as a student at the University of Wisconsin Steven's Point, are usually unaware of my background. Over the years I have become convinced that the perseverance, diligence and my faith in God and Christ (which I learned early-on) are precisely the qualities that the children in our lives need more and more of in our vast competitive society.

I was an at-risk child due in part to primitive educational standards, a shortened school year and forced truancy. I understand the environment these nontraditional academic children are coming from, whether it’s the fear and brutality faced in the concrete jungle of some big city, or the narrow-mindedness often found in small town America; I know the struggles these children and their parents face. It is precisely because of these experiences, I have spent my career as a child advocate.

When I was in grade school we did not have today’s modern conveniences, technology, and lifestyles, but rather, segregation to contend with. Part of the segregation scheme was to tolerate shortened school years, making children like myself miss months of school due to forced child labor. I missed out on, or was excluded from involvement in traditional learning experiences, proper instruction, early establishment of classroom study habits and the privilege of achieving an early, solid educational foundation.

Limitations of the study

The purpose of my “son of a sharecropper” autobiography is to reveal how forced child labor and shortened school years negatively affected me and so many people.
CHAPTER II
The Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to examine the factors that hindered the perseverance and success of sharecroppers and their children. I would like to show and emphasize how my determination led me to persevere in school, sports, college and in my life as a successful educational entrepreneur.

The following categories were selected from literature reviews to provide readers with an understanding of what it took to persevere, as an heir of slaves and three generations of sharecroppers. This literature review will attempt to define and offer an analysis of slavery and sharecropping. Both of these schemes were motivated by cheap labor and had a horrendous impact on the lives of those involved.

Slavery

Introduction

When the first Africans arrived on the shores of British North America in 1619, they came physically and materially naked, (Debarked of their traditions and heritage) but bearing rich cultural baggage. Black Africans brought with them unique gifts that contributed substantially to civilization’s growth and development on the North American continent. Therefore American agriculture was built upon the backs of Africans who were enslaved upon American soil.
To fully understand slavery, we must first define it by looking at its byproducts. For example, if slavery were a tree, then its byproduct could be the paper that this project is written on. Therefore, if the byproduct of a tree is the paper that comes from it, then what process does the paper have to go through to become that byproduct?

And, if a byproduct of slavery was (and still is), cheap labor, do these photographs represent the physical and mental processes that slaves and sharecroppers had to endure by being that byproduct—cheap labor? So does this entitle the slave owner to dominate other human beings in order to obtain cheap labor because of these owners’ personal, horrific pride, greed and prejudice? If so, then the trees used for papermaking are specifically grown and harvested for that purpose.

To meet tomorrow's demand, forest products companies and private landowners in Wisconsin plant millions of new seedlings every year. To begin the process, logs are passed through a de-barker, where the bark is removed, and through chippers, where spinning blades cut the wood into inch pieces. Those wood chips are then pressure-cooked with a mixture of water and chemicals in a digester. Slaves are also put through a “debarking” process that removed their family traditions, customs, morals and values. They were then given their Masters’ names, persona and were not allowed marriage without permission.

Characteristically, the individuals sold into slavery were those that fit a specific category or stereotype, such as the uneducated speaking a different vernacular or those from a society totally different from the one they were acclimatized or acclimated to.
Even if the victims could escape, they often feared leaving because they lived in a strange land and did not speak English; they had grown to dependent on their captors, even if only to survive. A strategic effort to keep the slaves uneducated became power because their masters knew that education represented emancipation.

**A slave’s plea for freedom**

According to Mitchell (2010) the work of the Underground Railroad became the focal point of pro and anti-slavery agitation after passage of the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850. Part of that year's grand legislative compromise aimed at halting the slide toward civil war, the law required federal marshals to capture escaped slaves in Northern Free States and denied jury trials to anyone imprisoned under the act. Abolitionists and supporters of slavery - each for their own reasons - tended to exaggerate the extent of the railroad's operations, historian James McPherson observes, but there was no denying its effectiveness. As the decade progressed, the Fugitive Slave Act gave the work of the Underground Railroad new urgency.

Perhaps no one embodied the hunger for freedom more completely than John Henry Hill. A father and "young man of steady habits," the 6-foot, 25-year-old carpenter was, in Still's words, "an ardent lover of Liberty" who dramatically demonstrated his passion on January 1st, 1853. After recovering from the shock of being told by his owner that he was to be sold at auction in Richmond, Hill arrived at the site of the public sale, where he mounted a desperate struggle to escape. Employing fists, feet and a knife, he turned away four or five would-be captors and bolted from the auction house. He hid from his baffled pursuers in the kitchen of a nearby merchant until he decided he wanted to go to Petersburg, Va., where his free wife and two children lived.
He stayed in Petersburg as long as he dared, leaving only when informed of a plot to capture him. Hill returned to his kitchen hideout in Richmond before learning that Still's Vigilance Committee had arranged— at the considerable cost of $125 - for him to have a private room on a steamship leaving Norfolk for Philadelphia.

Four days after departing by Richmond on foot, Hill arrived in Norfolk and boarded ship, more than nine months after escaping from the auction. "My Conductor was very much Excited," Hill later wrote, "but I felt as Composed as I do at this moment, for I had started that morning for Liberty or for Death providing myself with a Brace of Pistés." On October 4, Hill wrote still to inform him that he had arrived safely in Toronto and found work. We never alighted on the ground in any community, fearful of being apprehended by people looking for that $50 rewards for their capture (pp 42-49, 8p)."

Boyle (2010) on Ira Berlin’s book The Making of African America his parents bought their first house in 1960 on the Detroit's East Side, six years after emigrating from Ireland and this was going to be their home forever. In the early 1970s the first African-American couple moved into the neighborhood. They were young teachers, he thinks. Immediately the "for sale" signs began to appear, one or two at first, then more and more until the panic was complete. Within a year or so whites were selling their homes for whatever they could get for them. Running for the suburbs as fast as they could, his parents waited awhile before joining the rush in 1977. Their cherished sense of place swept aside by the terrible power of race.

Boyle kept thinking of them as he read Ira Berlin's majestic new history: "The Making of African America;” The Four Great Migrations what Berlin calls a "contrapuntal narrative" of movement and place, fluidity and fixity," the story of a people uprooted and searching for home.
Boyle continue to elaborate on how Berlin builds this new narrative around four massive migrations: the horrific Trans-Atlantic passage that brought slavery to North America in the 17th and 18th centuries; the forced movement of a million slaves from the East Coast to the inland South's cotton kingdom in the early 1800.

The Great Migration of six million *African-Americans* from the South to the urban North in the first half of the 20th century; and the current influx of immigrants from Africa, South America and the Caribbean, a movement so large that in the last decade of the 20th century it accounted for a quarter of black America's population growth.

Each of the migrations followed a similar pattern, Berlin says. They were triggered by the inexorable demand for labor: Planters needed slave to work their fields. Northern factories needed men and women to work the machines. Today, the service economy needs cab drivers, doctors, domestics and software engineers. The movements shattered longstanding relationships and traditional patterns of behavior, often violently, sometimes under the sheer weight of distance.

Finally, in the book's most moving section, Berlin brilliantly evokes the horrors of the Middle Passage: the shackles; the branding irons; the decks choked with the smell of urine, feces and fear.

He shows us how *slavery's* inland march tore black families apart, and he forces us to feel the inconsolable grief of separation. He follows the rise of systematic segregation in the late-19th-century South as it strangled the promise of independence and equality that Emancipation had created. He traces -- too quickly -- the creation of a segregated North in the first few decades of the 20th century: the way that employers pushed *African-American* workers into the lowest-paying, most dangerous jobs they had to offer; the way that real estate agents,
bankers, insurance agents and white homeowners restricted black migrants to the most dilapidated neighborhoods, hemming them into ghettos many of them would never escape.

And he touches on, though doesn't detail, the profound inequalities that continue to plague *African-American* communities -- poverty, segregation, incarceration -- despite the obvious triumphs of the last 40 years. Here, then, is the other piece of Berlin's contrapuntal narrative: the interweaving of *African-American* assertion and racist reaction, the making and remaking of America's relentless racial system.

Not that Berlin sees victimization as the main theme of black history. "The Making of *African* America" is primarily a story of the resilience, creativity and courage *African-Americans* drew upon as they engaged in the difficult process of piecing together new lives in an unfamiliar land. That's his parents' story too. And more than likely, it was the story of that young black couple that moved in down the block: ordinary people looking for a decent house, a measure of security, a piece of land no matter how small, a home of their own. People like us -- except for the color of their skin. And as this brilliant book shows again and again, that made all the difference (P.17).

Bergner (2010) provide an astonishing view of Perkinson’s book *The land of Lock and Key* “prisons are sacred places. There our society claims control over the lives of men and women; there we assume the roles of gods. Whether the prison sprawls over thousands of acres like the penitentiary farms of the Deep South, or compresses its convicts on tight tiers, the air within holds a particular density."
Race and *slavery* lie at the heart of Perkinson's vision of *American penology*, and a profound dismay infuses the rhetoric of his opening pages. "Freedom is the United States' founding creed," he declaims in the book's first sentence, and immediately he adds pronouncements from Thomas Paine, Andrew Jackson and Barack Obama making the same point. "*African-American* men today go to prison at twice the rate they go to college."

As Perkinson sets out to tell the story of America's movement from, in his words: "the age of *slavery* to the age of incarceration," with the latter period beginning in the mid-1960s and continuing to the present day, he concentrates on Texas in part because the modern surge of its inmate population has far outstripped even the spike in national numbers. Between 1965 and 2000, the number of prisoners in the country rose by 600 percent. In Texas, the growth was twice that. These new black prisoners were rented out to an array of private businesses under a system known as convict leasing, which replicated *slavery* for its brutality and may well have exceeded it in disregard for human life.

Black prisoners in Texas cut sugar cane and picked cotton on the plantations of the state's agricultural barons. They built the railroads that took the cotton to market. White convicts were leased out as well, but often for less arduous labor. Whipped and driven to work despite malaria and dysentery, or shot trying to escape, blacks fell dead nearly twice as frequently as whites. And the death tolls were high. At one work camp, where the men chopped timber for railway ties, almost a quarter of the convicts perished in a period of four months.

It is the Southern tradition that has proved, in Perkinson's telling, to have the lasting nationwide legacy, both in the current warehousing of inmates and in the racism now powerfully embedded in *American* penology. Much as emancipation brought on a penal backlash against Southern blacks, so did the civil rights movement -- except that this later reaction was national.
Equal protection, desegregation and President Lyndon B. Johnson's war on poverty were quickly followed by tougher drug laws and crackdowns on crime that, with conscious intention or not, made blacks a target. Since the triumphs of the civil rights movement, the disparity between black and white incarceration rates has almost doubled. In the early 21st century, the country, Perkinson suggests, has in a sense become the late-19th-century South (p.16).

**Mixed Signal from the Law**

“If a man beats his male or female slave with a rod and the slave dies as a direct result, he must be punished, but he is not to be punished if the slave gets up after a day or two, since the slave is his property (Exodus 21:20-21).”

In an agreement too Smith (2008) “for its time, the law given through Moses was uniquely enlightened, demonstrating a sense of justice unknown in any other culture. Even the classic punishment of “eye for eye and tooth for tooth,” often through to be vindictive was in face a limitation on the extent to which revenge could be brought.

Yet what can one say about his enlightened Law when it provides punishment when a slave dies from his master’s beating, but not when the slave is able to get up after a day or two, *since the slave is his property!* The modern mind rightly recoils from humans ever being regarded as property to be bought and sold, whether beaten or not. How could God even permit the institution of slavery? Is this just another case where God is painting pictures perhaps showing how we slaves to “sin” have been set free to be servants of righteousness? If so, it’s a painting for which millions of oppressed souls have paid an incredibly high price!
It is only a desperate guess, but maybe God is taking people where he finds them and gradually leading them to higher moral ground. For a morally immature human race, maybe it had to be baby steps first. No answer should leave us completely comfortable, other than that a righteous God is to be extraordinarily trusted.

*A question for doubter is: If I am ever tempted to give up on God when I don’t understand how He acts, who would be my alternative (p. 65)?”*

**The old Story tellers**

I know from my history books and family story tellers that the African Americans had been enslaved in what had become the United States since early in the 17th century. By the time of the American Revolution and eventual adoption of the new Constitution in 1787, slavery was actually a dying institution. However, by 1800 or so, African American slavery was once again a thriving institution, especially in the Southern United States. One of the primary reasons for the reemergence of slavery was the invention and adoption of the cotton gin. This machine allowed southern plantation owners to grow a variety of cotton, short staple cotton, that was especially well suitable for climate of the Deep South.

Like all laborers and especially the slave's day usually consisted of long hours of physical backbreaking labor. For field hands like me and my ancestors, the workday usually began at dawn and ended around sunset, usually with a one-hour break for the noon meals. African American slaves had to work under constant supervision and the threat of physical punishment by the plantation’s overseers to eliminate attempts of escapes. No matter how kindly a slave owner might have been, the slaves did not possess that one prized possession that many come to America seeking, their freedom.
The old story teller, grandparents, parents, uncles, aunts, brothers and sister would also speak of the harsh conditions and the absence of freedom, how powerless they were under the regime of plantation owners and the slave system.

The slave cabins (or "quarters") provided one of the few places where slaves could be more or less free from constant supervision by slave overseers. There the slaves created a vibrant social and cultural life beyond the reach of their masters.

While no rational person would wish to be a slave, the slaves were active agents in their own lives. And though their lives were circumscribed in many significant ways, they sought to make the best of their circumstances. They succeeded, to a remarkable extent, a testimonial to the endurance of the human spirit.

According to Zuckerman (2003), “slavery and the black family were America's defining historical challenge. Today it is race. There is very good news and very alarming news. Our national objective remains to ensure that blood and group identity do not determine destiny. Today, many white Americans look at how far we have come. Many black Americans and other minority races look at how far we have to go. Both narratives have validity (p.2)”.
Modern Slavery in America: A Contemporary Problem...

Lack of Public Awareness

Bales, Fletcher, Lendman and Stover (2004) report “the lack of public awareness of slavery in America makes their report very important. People are literally living next door to slaves without knowing it.”

The new study documents how modern slavery operates in the United States. Perpetrators use a range of crimes – fraud, coercion, physical and psychological violence to hold their victims captive. They confiscate passports and threaten to turn their captives over to the authorities if they refuse to obey. In some cases, perpetrators and their associates threaten or physically attack the families of victims in their home countries.

According to Bales (2005), the President of Free the Slaves says that the form of slavery will continue to change. It is important to remember that slavery is a crime and that criminals are always looking for new ways to exploit people. Victims of forced labor are trafficked into the United States from at least 38 different countries, with China, Mexico, and Vietnam topping the list.

In Berkeley, Calif., cases documented in the report include: a businessman who enslaved young girls and women for sex and for work in his restaurant; a Florida employer who threatened violence to force hundreds of Mexican and Guatemalan workers to harvest fruit; and two couples in Washington, D.C., who brought Cameroonian teenagers to the United States with the promise of a better education and then forced them to work 14 hours a day as domestic servants, without pay and under the threat of deportation.
Among the report's major findings:

- While forced labor exists across the United States, reported cases are concentrated in states with large immigrant communities, including California, Florida, New York, and Texas.
- Victims of forced labor are trafficked into the United States from at least 38 different countries, with China, Mexico, and Vietnam topping the list. Some are born in the United States and later held captive.
- Forced labor occurs in poorly regulated industries with a high demand for cheap labor—sweatshops, restaurants, and hotels, in addition to agriculture and domestic work. A lack of official monitoring in these areas means unscrupulous employers and criminal networks can gain complete control over workers.

According to Fletcher (2004), a researcher at the Human Rights Center and professor at UC Berkeley's law school, “the most shocking aspect of this report is that modern-day slavery still exists. Slavery is a problem the public thinks we solved long ago, but, in fact, it's alive and well. It has simply taken on a new form.”

Lendman (2009) cited “this is the plight of America's vulnerable and those we exploit abroad. Whether in restaurants, hotels, agriculture, domestic work, sex trade, or on US offshore military bases, seldom do courts provide justice.

Called human trafficking or forced labor, modern slavery thrives in America, largely below the radar. A 2004, UC Berkeley study cites it mainly in five sectors:

- Prostitution and sex services - 46%
- Domestic service - 27%
- Agriculture - 10%
- Sweatshops or factories - 5%
• Restaurant and hotel work - 4%; with the remainder coming from…

• Sexual exploitation of children, entertainment, and mail-order brides.”

Stover (2004), writes that “new federal laws have been passed to combat these crimes, but the researchers found that much more needs to be done – especially at the local level. Police officers, rather than federal agents, are most likely to encounter forced labor but often mistake it for illegal immigration, and treat victims as part of a criminal enterprise. The researchers recommend: launching a broad-based public awareness campaign; improving monitoring of industries vulnerable to forced labor; increasing training and coordination among law enforcement officials in the United States; and strengthening protections for survivors of forced labor.”

Stover also “discovered that victims may be verbally abused, beaten or sexually assaulted by their captors.”

These repeated attacks, especially against children and teenagers, can result in serious physical and psychological trauma. Even if victims can escape, they often fear leaving because they do not speak English, are unfamiliar with U.S. currency, and are unsure of how to use local transport. In a strange land, victims can grow dependent on their captors, if only to survive.

These studies were conducted by researchers from Free the Slaves and the Human Rights Center, which collaborates closely with the International Human Rights Law Clinic at the UC Berkeley School of Law (Boalt Hall). Florida State University's Center for the Advancement of Human Rights also assisted with the research.

The report covers the period of 1998 to 2003 and is based on quantitative and qualitative data, including: a survey of 49 service providers experienced in forced labor cases; an analysis of 131 cases of forced labor reported in U.S. newspapers; eight case studies of forced labor in
various regions of the United States; and interviews with government officials, service providers and labor advocates. (UC Berkeley News Center A-Z list of websites Directory).”

**Sharecropping**

**Introduction**

To fully understand sharecropping you must analysis its byproduct as cheap labor, just as that of slavery. They both employ the practice of cheap labor that has been illustrated by researchers throughout history. The differences are the schemes of work on the half to obtain Promised Land and shared profit by owners.

Sharecropping practices emerged following the emancipation of African-American slaves. Sharecropping came to define the method of land lease that would eventually become a new form of slavery.

Without land of their own, like my ancestors, many black families were drawn into schemes of sharecropping where they worked a portion of the land owned mostly by white, “Boss Men,” for a share of the profit from the crops. The Big Boss Men would provide all the supplies, seeds and equipment, and give the sharecropper a purchase order to buy food and other supplies from the Company Store.

In many cases the store was owned by the Boss Man himself, or a relative. The land owners allowed the sharecroppers to run a tab throughout the year that would be settled up once the crops, usually cotton, were gathered. When accounting time came, the sharecroppers were
somehow always “a few dollars short” of what they ostensibly owed the Store. Sharecroppers with no other means of paying the hypothetical “overage,” invariably began each new planting season with a substantial deficit.

As their deficits grew, sharecroppers found it virtually impossible to escape from their circumstances, even by legal means. The hard, back-breaking field work, physically and often psychologically destroyed sharecropping people who could seldom envision escape for themselves or their children. Their lives consisted of endless days of deplorable nutrition, inadequate housing, hard labor and the unbeatable accounting schemes of the Company Store. Those with courage to match their imaginations escaped under cover of darkness to the North that fabled land of opportunity.

“We Didn’t Get Nothing!”

The Plight of many Black Farmers...

Hinson and Robinson (2008) stated that: “The purpose of black farmers was only to work the land, but never to own the land.” The progression from working the land through slavery, to peonage, and to land ownership is explored. Africans arrived on American soil carrying with them a rich legacy in caring for the land, and while they did so in America, it was under the most onerous of conditions. This was the sentiment of many black farmers, including my Mom and ancestors.

Once freed, blacks became prodigious land owners. But with the onset of the twentieth century, various systemic factors impacted landownership for blacks. These same factors along with mechanization, herbicides, government policy, and the courts, all served to undermine farm ownership for black Americans.
The “Pigford Class Action Suit,” is central to understanding the complexities of the plight of the black farmer and the attempts of various advocacy groups to maintain black land ownership (p. 20).”

**Fables of the Reconstruction: Reconstruction of the Fables**

When the physical war ended, then the real practical problems presented themselves. How was slavery to be effectively abolished? And what was to be the status of the Negroes? . . . The legal solutions of these questions were easy. The difficulty with this legalistic formula was that it did not cling to facts. Slavery was not abolished even after the Thirteenth Amendment.

There were four million “Freedmen” and most of them were on the same plantations, doing the same work that they did before emancipation, except as their work had been interrupted and changed by the upheaval of war.”

According to Marler (2004) Du Bois wrote: “to keep the Negro laborer poor, to confine him as far as possible to menial occupations... and to force him into peonage and unpaid toil.

Du Bois was neither the first nor the last to describe southern sharecropping as a type of “peonage” somewhere between slavery and freedom. C. Vann Woodward, who wrote Du Bois in 1938 to express his “indebtedness for the insight which your admirable book, Black Reconstruction, provided me,” would later characterize New South sharecropping as a form of peonage. Emancipation inaugurated new forms of resistance by white southerners, especially the still-powerful planter class.

Here Ransom and Sutch are on solid ground when they show how the suppression of adequate educational facilities for southern African Americans was a key component of the long-term restriction of their economic opportunities.
If freed people did enjoy only severely restricted employment alternatives, then the notion of a “free labor system” is badly undermined, because it implies both a range of occupational choices, and not just forms of land tenure, and the opportunity to enjoy them. A systemically inhibited “right” to seek local employment for a perverse form of compensation confined within a single stagnant rural industry that offers almost no chance for personal advancement does not a free labor system make. (p. 113)

In Smith’s (1968) literary portrait of Frankie Mae tells what can and do happen if you question Big Boss Men, or landowner’s figures. The young girl, Frankie Mae, who has learned rudimentary math skills, finds that she is no match for the figures at the company store. When at thirteen Frankie Mae questions Mr. White Junior's addition; the landowner barely restrains himself from shooting her and her father. However, he sends her away with these words: "Long as you live, bitch, I'm gonna’ be right and you gonna’ be wrong. Now get your black ass outta here.” Now this defeat leads to Frankie Mae's realization that education can never provide the way out of her family's plight. She gives up school and slumps into the destructive existence that sharecropping engendered. At fifteen she has her first child. By nineteen she has three more. She dies giving birth to her fifth child. Several years after Frankie Mae's death, her father, inspired by the civil rights movement, works for change by going on strike against Mr. White Junior. (p. 3).

According to Middleton (1999) the roots of the poverty are buried in the cycle of Delta land use since its initial clearance for agriculture.

King Cotton and his plantations had taken over the Mississippi Delta's fertile soils by the eve of the War Between the States. Emancipation of the slaves didn't do much to alter the agricultural nature of the area. Instead of working the plantations in slave gangs, the Delta's
blacks became sharecroppers working their individual plots (although most of the land was still owned by the planters).

Slowly, sharecroppers moved away from their nucleated quarters by the planters' mansions and took up residence in cabins built on the plots that they worked. During the 1930s, a period of dramatic change began in the rural South. Farms and plantations started to become mechanized and reorganized, and so began a mass black exodus from the land.

The introduction of tractors in the 1930s was followed by mechanical cotton harvesters in the late 1940s and by the increasing use of herbicides in the 1950s. That led to many sharecroppers abandoned their cabins and moving into town, or out of the South altogether, to the cities of the US North and West. The agricultural landscape had come full circle and huge neo-plantations, hauntingly reminiscent of their antebellum counterparts, had become the order of the day. (p. 48).”

**The Twisting Course of Freedom in the Mississippi Delta**

Wood (2009) tells of Fanny Lou Hamer and Senator James Eastland appear to be the perfect historical foils for each other. The granddaughter of slaves, Hamer was born in 1917, into poverty on a cotton plantation in Sunflower County, Mississippi. She became, however, one of the most remarkable women of the black freedom struggle, toiling for the political rights and economic uplift for her fellow black citizens throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Eastland, on the other hand, inherited his father's large and profitable cotton plantation, also in Sunflower County. In 1943, at the age of thirty-nine, he was elected to the U.S. Senate, where for thirty-five years he fostered a reputation as a forceful anti-Communist and staunch segregationist.

Chris Asch weaves together the stories of these two formidable figures in his compelling narrative, tracing their histories across the social landscape of the twentieth century. Yet Asch is
not interested in simply providing paired biographies. Rather, he sees Hamer and Eastland's stories as deeply rooted in the history of an actual landscape, in the scorching sun and flat, sprawling fields of the Mississippi Delta. Sunflower County lies in the heart of the Delta. A place that James Cobb has called "the most southern place on earth," because of the ways in which it embodied the extremes of Southern life: overwhelming poverty and almost archaic plantation affluence; brutal racial oppression; and breathtaking cultural richness.

Eastland and Hamer personify these extremes and can help make sense of them. More particularly, Asch sees Sunflower County at the "epicenter of the 20th century struggle for and against black freedom" in this country - a struggle that the biographies of Hamer and Eastland crystallize (P.566-571; p. 54).

In a Brown (1932) poem, *Southern Road*, he painted equally vivid pictures of the inability of sharecroppers to escape their predicament and of their endless efforts to make do with what they had. His collection of poems documents the lives of rural blacks tied to unyielding soil and uncompromising landowners. It is a true reflection of my ancestors historic past.

“Swing dat hammer— hunh— Steady, bo'; Swing dat hammer— hunh— Steady, bo'; Ain't no rush, bebby, Long ways to go.”

“Burner tore his—hunh— Black heart away; Burner tore his—hunh— Black heart away; Got me life, bebby, An' a day.”

Gal's on Fifth Street— hunh— Son done gone; Gal's on Fifth Street— hunh— Son done gone; Wife's in de ward, bebby, Babe's not bo'n.

My ole man died— hunh— Cussin' me; My ole man died— hunh— Cussin' me; Ole lady rocks, bebby, Huh misery.
Perseverance

Doubleshackled— hunh— Guard behin'; Doubleshackled— hunh— Guard behin'; Ball an' chain, bebby, On my min'.

White man tells me— hunh— Damn yo' soul; White man tells me— hunh— Damn yo' soul; Got no need, bebby, To be tole.

Chain gang nevah— hunh— Let me go; Chain gang nevah— hunh— Let me go; Po' los' boy, bebby, Evahmo!…"

Sharecropping as an impetus to migrate north occurs in some of the works of Richard Wright and John O. Killens. A different kind of freedom is suggested in "A Summer Tragedy" (1933), a short story by Arna Bontemps, where a defeated elderly couple simply gets into their car and drive into a river. The story captures the spirit of complete despair.

McCoyer (2006) examines the "levee camp" as a social and cultural site for reconstituting rural black workers' masculine identities in the early twentieth-century Mississippi-Arkansas Delta. The construction of the Mississippi River's levees during this period depended heavily on the labor of black mule-drivers drawn from the Delta's cotton plantations. In spite of this dependency, the levee camps' exploitative commissaries and harsh disciplinary violence quashed workers' efforts to reclaim a sense of autonomy that was increasingly denied them on the region's plantations.

However, partly in response to the perceived erosion of their authority within the sharecropper family, levee workers successfully used the notorious after-hours culture of the levee camps to construct a hyper-masculine image of themselves as "rough mens" who had been to the levee camps, enjoyed the sexual attention of camp women, and were manly enough to survive the murderous violence of white bosses and other "rough mens" alike.
Using a series of 1930s labor investigations as well as early Delta blues hollers and songs about the levee camps, this article shows how black workers' efforts to cultivate this hyper-masculine levee worker image ultimately proved detrimental to their class interests. Levee contractors and foremen welcomed levee camp gambling, prostitution, drinking, and fighting as ways of reducing workers' wages and maintaining labor control in the camps. Ultimately, the levee camps provide a useful example of an all-male work site where gender had important, if unintended, ramifications for workers' class position (pp. 57-80).”

**Modern Sharecropping**

Contemporary sharecroppers are being masqueraded as migrant workers are still a byproduct of cheap labor but without the inclusive dark schemes of:

- Sharing proceeds…
- Promise of land ownership...
- Purchase orders for supplies, food, clothes and equipment from the company store.

However, the migrant workers and the sharecroppers do have a few things in common: the hard back-breaking work of stooping and bending. Physically destroyed and mentally blighted, neither one could envision an escape for themselves or their children. Their lives were an endless round of poor diet, indecisive weather, and unrewarded cheap labor that would eventually place them in a socioeconomic class of poverty.

**Socioeconomic Status**

The socioeconomic status of slaves and migratory workers in America has always been defined by their race. Income has always played a significance role in forming a person’s or family’s social status.
According to the University of California Press: Since (1984), the United States have had four basic foreign labor procurement policies in its history:

1. **Black Africans who were enslaved and who, even after the emancipation, constituted a coerced labor force...**
2. **White Europeans who, for the most part, were given opportunities to acquire land and decent jobs and put on a clear, fast track to citizenship...**
3. **Migratory workers...**
4. **Contract laborers and settlers with (legal and illegal) status from Mexico, the Caribbean, French Canada and most recently Central and South America, who had and have been hired to work mainly at low status jobs with the expectation that many of them would return home and few would remain and become citizens.**

Labor immigration under capitalism is linked by a theoretical framework concerning the role of capitalism in generating push and pull factors in labor migration and in influencing the class stratification of ethnic groups in the United States (p.1).”

According to Zill, Collins, West, and Hausken (1995), “low maternal education and minority language status are most consistently associated with fewer signs of emerging literacy and a greater number of difficulties for preschoolers. Having inadequate resources and limited access to available resources can negatively affect families' decisions regarding their young children's development and learning. As a result, children from families with low socioeconomic status are at greater risk of entering kindergarten unprepared than their peers from families with median or high socioeconomic status.

Socio-demographic risk factors that have been found to be associated with problems in learning after children start school are also correlated with the accomplishments and difficulties children bring with them when they arrive at kindergarten.
Five family risk factors were examined:

- mother has less than a high school education…
- family is below the official poverty line…
- mother speaks a language other than English as her primary language…
- mother was unmarried at the time of the child's birth…
- only one parent is present in the home.

Half of today's preschoolers are affected by at least one of these risk factors, and 15% are affected by three or more of them.

The risk factors are found to be associated with fewer accomplishments and more difficulties in children, even after other child and family characteristics are taken into account. The relative importance of individual risk factors varies across developmental domains. Nevertheless, low maternal education and minority language status are most consistently associated with fewer signs of emerging literacy and a greater number of difficulties in preschoolers (pp. 35-38).”

**Readiness to Learn at School Among Five-year-old Children in Canada**

Thomas (2007) states it is well documented that poverty decreases a child’s readiness for school through aspects of health, home life, schooling and neighborhoods. Six poverty related factors are known to impact child development in general and school readiness in particular.

“They are: the incidence of poverty; the depth of poverty; the duration of poverty; the timing of poverty, e.g. age of child, community characteristics, e.g. concentration of poverty and crime in neighborhood and school characteristics; and the impact poverty has on the child’s social network parents, relatives and neighbors. A child’s home has a particularly strong impact on school readiness. Children from low-income families often do not receive the stimulation and
do not learn the social skills required to prepare them for school. Typical problems are parental inconsistency (with regard to daily routines and parenting), frequent changes of primary caregivers, lack of supervision and poor role modeling. Very often, the parents of these children also lack support.

Canadian studies have also demonstrated the association between low-income households and decreased school readiness. A report by Thomas concluded that children from lower income households score significantly lower on measures of vocabulary and communication skills, knowledge of numbers, copying and symbol use, ability to concentrate and cooperative play with other children than children from higher income households (pp. 26-23).”

According to Mistry (2008), “current study examines the effects of socioeconomic status (SES) on preschool children's cognitive and behavioral outcomes and whether these relations are mediated by the quality of children's home environment and moderated by family nativity/birth status. Data comes from 1459 low-income families (257 native and 1202 immigrant and native families, respectively). Results indicated that among both immigrant and native households, maternal education along with household income or welfare receipt, were the strongest predictors of a composite SES. Path analyses estimated direct and indirect effects of SES and revealed greater similarity than difference in the processes by which SES influences immigrant and native children's preschool outcomes.

Language/literacy stimulation and maternal supportiveness mediated the relations of SES to children's cognitive outcomes among both immigrant and native families. In contrast, parenting stress mediated the effects of SES on children's aggressive behavior among native, but not immigrant, households.
A child’s intellectual development is strongly influenced by parents’ education and SES. Their development is strongly influenced by parents’ psychological stability, especially in American children (pp193-212)"

**Dignifying the Poor**

“When you make a loan of any kind to your neighbor, do not go into his house to get what he is offering as a pledge. Stay outside and let the man to whom you are making the loan bring the pledge out to you (Deuteronomy 24:10-11).”

One of the most laudable aspects of the laws of Moses is the detailed attention given to respecting the dignity of all Israelites, no matter what their situation in life.

According to Smith (2008) “requiring contributions for the poor is not surprising. What are extraordinary are all the rules protecting the poor from humiliation. Consider, for example, that marvelous provision to stay outside a debtor’s door when claiming a pledge. The man may need a loan, but there is no reason to rob him of his pride! What about not taking anything necessary for a man’s livelihood as a pledge? Or not keeping a man’s cloak in promptly at the end of every day.

Even with today’s unprecedented prosperity, the poor are still among us. How we should meet the needs of the poor is an age old debate. Do we give them handout? Teach them to fish instead of giving them fish? Attempt to meet their needs through government programs, or channel our benevolence, instead through church or personal contributions? Then there are always those pesky street beggars to deal with. To give or not to give? Lost in all the debate is not so much whether to give or how much we give. What the poor need most in not a handout,
but a hand up. Not just benevolence, but opportunity. Not simply charity, but dignity. To give the one without the other is to impoverish the poor all the more (p.66).”

_The question for serious reflection is: How can we generously put money into the pockets of the poor without simultaneously robbing them of their greatest asset?_
Chapter III
Joseph Lewis Johnson’s Ancestors and Travel

Introduction

This biography will reveal the essence of a journey. A journey as far back as possible into my family’s history, from well before I was born, to today. A search for answers as to: who actually were my ancestors; where did they come from; how and when did they get here; what were their lives really like; and how will the answers affect my life today?

Before I began this quest, all I really knew about my past was that I was born a sharecropper’s son and grew up in what was called the “Big House” in the cotton fields of Anchor Curve, four miles south of Louise, Mississippi (More about that, later.)

I will also share my beliefs and the events which played important roles in molding my character, from birth to the present. Also, I will give you an overview of my beautiful family, community, commitment to education, and my lifetime dedication to helping others.

Research Design

This autobiography is partially a work of oral history and storyteller’s lore which was passed on from generation to generation in my family. Other parts of my story are deeply rooted in research and historical fact. Also, included in this chapter are detailed accounts on the research design, selection of respondents, and analysis.

Part of this autobiography is also being written using a qualitative approach as the selected method for the study, Brewer (1986). Stone (1981) describes autobiography “as being simultaneously historical record and literary artifact, psychological case history and spiritual confession that can be an educational essay and/or an ideological testament (p. 2).”
Other researchers such as Berryman (1999) believed that an autobiography is a series of “paradoxes” that can be fact and fiction, private and communal, lessons and lies.

Research has revealed that when writing one’s autobiography, generating data can, and usually does become problematic. Also, that as researchers and practitioners, we are required to reveal in all its complexity and as authentically as we can about the how’s and why’s and what they mean about the field or context of which we research. Cherry (2000), Ellis (1999) and Prideaux (1991) wrote that:

_We must write about what we really prefer not to write about. It is not about presenting ourselves in a good light – in charge, competent, controlled, organized and so on, or how we might like to be seen. Rather, it is about writing rich, full accounts that include the messy stuff – the self-doubts, the mistakes, the embarrassments, the inconsistencies, the projections and that which may be distasteful. It is about writing of It (p.3)._ 


1. **Should ring true and enable connection...**

According to Annie Dillard (1989), part of what makes the biographical writing attractive to the readers are the promise of recognition and connection with the readers to experience that alternately sheds light on the one’s self and one’s connections to others. Why are the readers reading if not in the hope that the writer will magnify and dramatize the readers days, to illuminate and inspire them with wisdom, courage and the possibility of meaningfulness will
press upon their minds the deepest mysteries so they feel again the majesty and power of bewildered.

2. *Should promote insight and interpretation...*

Polkinghorne (1988) states that the writer must articulate three levels of narratives that he thought best fit the writing of one self-autobiography were: experience, telling and interpreting. He emphasizes that the purpose of telling and interpreting is to enable readers to experience the narrative as if they lived it with the sympathetic of the interpretation.

Other cites are:

3. *Must engage history forthrightly and the author must take an honest stand...*

Lopates (1995) believes that a successful personal essay should have a conscience:

That “arises from the author’s examination of his or her prejudices. Must be able to pass judgment, or else their work will be toothless.... The idea is to implicate first oneself and the reader in a fault that seems initially to belong elsewhere (pp. 16-17).”

According to Hannabuss (2000), “Autobiographies are well-recognized form. The Biblical Books of Job and Jeremiah are autobiographical, as are Augustine’s *Confessions*, John Bunyan’s *Grace Abounding*, Coleridge’s *Biographia Literaria*, and refracted through fiction, Charles Dickens’s *David Copperfield*. Often they are attempts at self-vindication or retrospective clarification, trying to make sense of the past, trying to justify past actions or make sense of life’s right or wrong (p. 4).”
If we look at the circumstances that surrounded the writing, we can see why some must suffer; this is a question especially throughout the Book of Job:

1. Is it because of sin and being punished…?
2. Or not sorry enough for wickedness…
3. Or perhaps suffering is some kind of test.

Like the Biblical Books of Job and Jeremiah which have asked readers for thousands of years, to answer the same question: WHY?! It is my hope that this autobiography can help answer my WHY? I personally think it is God’s will for this story to be told.

My hope is that the circumstances of my life might aid in helping others improve or enrich theirs. Biblical biography books start with the book of Genesis and the beginning of life and ends with the book of Revelation, the conclusion.

As the researcher for my thesis autobiography I have chosen to use the storyteller’s lore of my uncle, J. D., my oldest brothers, Sam and Sim, and my only sister, Lueretha, for the enlightenment of ancestors and my early years. Their recollections begin….

**Historical travels**

**From The Vicksburg, Mississippi Slave Market to Anchor Curve**

The historical travels of my ancestors set the stage for this venture into history. For more background information and enlightenment of my early years, I consulted the following respondents: Uncle J.D. Fountain (the youngest and only living child of Lem and Rita Fountain), my oldest living brothers, Sam and Sim, and my only sister, Lueretha. Through them, I will take you on a trip back in time that may change your attitudes and beliefs, as it did mine. For me, it began with listening and recording anecdotes and oral history as told by the above family members.
Though I had heard many of the stories before, what I learned was that in Vicksburg, Mississippi, roughly around 1850, slave traders invaded the community of then childhood friends Robert and Rebecca (who would later marry and become my great grandma Rebecca and great grandpa Robert Fountain).

They were around fourteen or fifteen years old when, along with other family members, they were forcibly ripped away from their families and parents and taken to the slave market in Vicksburg, Mississippi, where they were sold to a plantation owner named Jack McDougal of Louise, Mississippi.

Shortly after leaving the slave market in Vicksburg, in route to his plantation in Louise, Mississippi some 60 miles away, great grandpa Robert’s relatives and a young slave Rebecca (who would later become great grandmother Rebecca) began to cry, weep and beg Mr. McDougal to return to Vicksburg and get Robert Fountain. Moved by this outcry, Mr. McDougal stopped the wagon train in a wooded area, populated by reptiles, mosquitoes and various other bugs. Leaving his son in charge, he returned to Vicksburg to search for and to buy great grandpa Robert. When Mr. McDougal reached Vicksburg, Robert was being “auctioned off” and Mr. McDougal outbid the other bidder with a bid of “fourteen hundred and fifty dollars!”
TYPICAL ADVERTISEMENT IN THE 1800’S

According to Dr. John Theophilus Kramer (1859), (Library of Congress, “The Slave – Auction,”) his motive for writing was not a political one. He was plainly trying to answer the question, “Can slavery and Christianity go hand and hand together (p.4)?” He gave a faithful picture of what he saw with his eyes. While working and residing in some of the slave states for more than ten years, he wondered how a white Christian can treat a Christian of color like a beast. Who gives the right for a white Christian to sell his black or yellow brother or sister at a public auction for money? Dr. Kramer had personal ill feelings against the owners of slaves in the Slave States of the Union, but was particularly adverse to the institution of slavery itself.

As a Christian, I certainly understand and agree with Dr. Kramer that any individual who could be even remotely involved in the selling of human beings would become an enemy of mine.
As a Christian I am obligated to speak out against the wrong doing of any person, regardless of their race, creed, color or national origin. To not speak out, only takes us back to barbarianism and diminishes the growth of civilization.

**A SLAVE-AUCTION!**

“They were born as slaves, through the iniquity of men. They are redeemed to be free men, through Christ Jesus, intones the auctioneer.

The slave auctions in the Deep South were held in such places as broad halls, situated on the most frequented streets of large and well-known cities in the South. In the decades prior to the American Civil War, marketplaces where enslaved Africans were bought and sold could be found in every town of any size in Mississippi. Natchez was unquestionably the state’s most active slave trading city, although substantial slave markets existed at Aberdeen, Crystal Springs, **Vicksburg**, Woodville, and Jackson.

You will be astonished when you shall find yourself, in place of a lion's den or a mantrap, a nicely fitted---up refreshing place. Nothing frightening is presented to the eyes. Several chunky and richly dressed gentlemen are helping themselves to fine liquors and delicacies, abundantly spread out before them and placed upon an elegantly shaped bar. Beautiful pictures, ornamenting the walls, attract the eyes of some amateurs of art; while others, preferring nice lots and buildings, are studying the designs of several large maps showing various city lots and splendid buildings and advertising “Slaves for sale at auction.” In the surrounding area is a platform, table, writing-desk and a few chairs. Two colored waiters are busy placing several hundred spacious chairs facing the platform.
There are many gentlemen entering and soon a large assemblage has gathered, occupying most of the chairs. You can see elegantly dressed dandies smoking their sweet scented Havana cigars while examining their surroundings.

The doors are opened. Four ladies, splendidly dressed in black silk and satin and glittering with precious jewels, are entering the hall. Eight or ten gentlemen, who were already comfortably seated next to the platform, jump up from their chairs and politely offer their seats to the fair guests.

Without the above heading or introduction, one could be asking him or herself, what is the reason for this pomp. What are these ladies and gentlemen waiting for? Possibly a court day and the people are waiting for the Judge. Oh! It cannot be, for the courthouse or a prayer-meeting place, would not have a liquor bar, would it?

A Slave Auction! Great God in heaven! A Slave Auction! And that man upon the platform is the auctioneer!

Suddenly the doors were opened, and a large number of Negroes entered the hall. There were men, women and children, and some babies upon their mothers' arms. Their color differs from that of the ladies and gentlemen sitting upon the chairs. Some are as black as ebony is white, some brown, some yellow. Not one among the slaves raises his or her head or eyes to take a glance or to look at their soon to be owners in the sitting assemblage.

Some girls are weeping noticeably, and all are looking sad–sad–sad! Readers, if you should happen be of a caring nature, think of the little babies upon the arms of their deprived and distressed mothers! And ask yourself this, can those babies feel their misery? I think, “Yes indeed, they can, – even if they will not ever remember.”
I also believe that every mother will endorse these words. I shall never forget reading of the deep sorrow I perceived in the faces of all those unfortunate little children upon an auction stand (p.5).

**THE AUCTIONEERS CALL**

According to Dr. John Theophilus Kramer, 1859 (A parallel to what my great grandfather, Robert Fountain, experienced!) “Robert… field hand… about age fifteen… Gentlemen, there is a young blood and a capital one! He is a great boy; a hand for almost everything. Besides, he is the best dancer in the whole lot, and he also knows how to pray, oh so beautifully! You would believe he was made to be a minister! How much will you bid for him?”

“#14? One thousand dollars!”

“Good! But that is not half the price he is really worth. Gentlemen, if you will bid two thousand at once, it may not suffice to buy him. One thousand dollars for a boy who will be worth in three years, fully twenty-five hundred dollars cash down? Who is going to bid two thousand?”

“Twelve hundred dollars!”

“Twelve hundred dollars! Sir, I did say, he would soon bring two thousand. I am always pretty near certain of what I say. Twelve hundred for Robert! Sir, splendid fellow that! Eleven hundred and eighty dollars more than for his namesake of old in the land of Egypt. Twelve hundred dollars! Gentlemen, bid more!”

“Twelve hundred and fifty dollars!”

“One thousand two hundred and fifty dollars! All, right; but more I more I more!”

“And fifty!”
“And fifty? And fifty? And fifty for Robert, not the Hebrew!”

“Thirteen hundred!”

Thirteen hundred? A bad number, gentlemen! Don't let him rest at thirteen hundred.
And fifty!

Thirteen hundred and fifty is said to be a lucky number in lotteries. I don't know as it is true, but I do know that thirteen hundred and fifty dollars will not buy Joseph!

Fourteen hundred!

Well, no ticket of any lottery will cost that much, but Robert must bring more! Fourteen hundred dollars!

And fifty!

One thousands four hundred and fifty dollars. It looks like rain for cash will not out, and I am unable to procure a magnet which will draw gold for value received! Fourteen hundred and fifty dollars! Too small an amount for Robert. Seventeen years only! A strong, healthy, fine-looking, intelligent boy. Fourteen hundred and fifty dollars!

“Gentlemen, Robert is worth more than Harvey, upon my word! One thousand, four hundred and fifty… going! Fourteen hundred and fifty for the first… second… going?

Fourteen hundred and fifty dollars going! Going! Going! And last, gone! He is sold to you, sir!

Please state your name. (Pp.11-13)”
ON THE TRAIL TO LOUIS

Once Mr. McDougal returned to the wagon train with Robert, to his entire slave assemblage, Mr. McDougal looked like a good “boss-man” who could be trusted and respected.

The remaining journey to Mr. McDougal’s plantation was one of dangerous episodes of fighting off all kinds of creatures that lurked along this dangerous, uninhabited road. They had to literally fight for their lives the entire journey. The small towns that were on the wagon trail seemed like they were hundreds of miles apart but they were only about fifteen to twenty miles apart. Thick woods covered each side of the road and they could not see five feet past either side of the road. As they passed through these woods, on each beside them, they had to just trust in God and keep praying and moving.

Fighting the heat, with almost no wind, ladies and young girls were often forced to walk between the wagons. Blood sucking parasites, like mosquitoes and horseflies, took liberty with them while they were stepping in and around horse manure. The young boys and men were on both sides of the wagon to fight off whatever came after them. Each night came awful danger in just finding a safe place to camp and sleep, especially around “Panther Creek Swamp.” Just thinking about the name “Panther Creek Swamp” filled them with dread, and yet they had to go through it. This was a place that was filled with panthers looking to take whatever came through there for a meal.

As they went through, they decided not to spend a night near this area that was infested with panthers. As they traveled through the area, wagons without kerosene lanterns were attacked and several people were killed or mauled by the vicious panthers.
After being on Mr. McDougal’s plantation for a few years, and having been good slaves, Rebecca and Robert promised that if they were allowed to marry, they would have children to help work in his cotton fields, thus producing more crops. Great grandfather and great grandmother kept their promise. They did not try to run away. They stayed and worked their entire lives for Mr. Jack McDougall along with their nine children… six sons and three daughters. Their love for each other and family must have been one of total commitment for they stayed and finished the job as they had promised. Five generations were born on that plantation in the same house, “The Big House,” even though it changed owners.

Robert and Rebecca did not talk much about their maternal and paternal families because, I assume, they did not know that much about them. They were sold at such an early age, it was probably too upsetting to speak about their loss!

**The second generation is the first generation of freed slaves**

Louise, Mississippi, 1885 was the birth place of our second generation of sharecroppers. Grandfather (“Grandpa”) Lem Fountain, the oldest of nine children from the marriage of Great Grandpa Robert Fountain and Great Grandma Rebecca Fountain. Lem would later court (or as it was called then “sparking”) and marry Rita Smith, the daughter of Ike and Lizzie Williams-Smith (a descendent of Blackfeet Indian tribe, born 1874).

Although Rita Smith and Grandpa Lem Fountain were ”sparking,” Rita’s family forced her to marry another man. As the story goes, Rita was secretly forced to marry this gentleman of an affluent family and they were married for three days before Grandpa Lem was made aware of this.
Grandpa “Lem,” shot gun in hand, proceeded to take Rita away from this gentleman affluent, had the marriage annulled, and they were then married! From that union twelve children were born, seven boys and five girls, with my mother being the second oldest (but the oldest girl). Before and since my research began there has been minimal to no contact with the Smith side of our family. In my recent efforts to contact them for history of Grandma Rita, my requests went unanswered accept a responding statement of do not attempt to contact us; we have nothing to say to you…

**UNDER WHAT CONDITIONS DID MOST MISSISSIPPI BLACKS LIVE AFTER THE CIVIL WAR?**

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<th>Lynching’s</th>
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*Note that this list was published only every fifth year. One can only imagine the number of other lynching’s that occurred in the intervening years.*
Third Generation: Lizzie Josephine Fountain  
Born September 6th, 1913 - Anchor Curve, Mississippi  
Died October 23, 1989 - Madison, Wisconsin

Lizzie Josephine Fountain, my mother, was born September 6th, 1913. She was the second oldest of twelve children, seven boys and five girls, and like her and all the Fountain children, they were born in the same house, “The Big House, Big Moma Rita’s House,” on the same plantation, by a midwife, Nancy Hughes.

It was a time in history when Thomas Woodrow Wilson, a Democrat in Baltimore, won the nomination for president on the 46th ballot and went on to defeat Roosevelt and Taft in the Presidential election. President Wilson proceeded under the standard of the New Freedom to enact a program of domestic reform, including the Federal Reserve Act, the Clayton Antitrust Act, the establishment of the Federal Trade Commission, and other measures designed to restore competition in the face of the great monopolies. In foreign affairs, while privately sympathetic with the Allies, he strove to maintain neutrality in the European war and warned both sides against encroachments on American interests.

Our country was seeing changes that we still can see today in most communities. Those changes did not change the course of my ancestor’s community or history for generations to come.

My mother, her four sisters, and seven brothers were still seen as nothing but insignificant sharecroppers: poor people without an education, destitute, with nothing to offer “Mother America” except their unbreakable labor in those (blank) cotton fields.
From the past, through the present, and into the future, four generations of my family were always looked down upon by both whites and more affluent blacks, as those “sharecroppers” or simply “those Fountains.” Even though the affluent blacks who owned their land and who’s children could attend school on a regular basis, didn’t make them better than us. In God’s eyes we are all created equal. Still, there remains a division placed between the “have’s, and the have-not” ever since God formed human life.

Genesis (chapter 3), the Garden of Eden with temptation and the fall of man (Chapter 4:9); Cain killed his brother Abel… “God never intended that individuals be alone or that he only cared for him selves. From the beginning God has wanted a love relationship with mankind and for each of us to love one another. Am I my brother’s keeper?” Cain displayed the lovelessness and lack of humanity that also resulted from sin! This has set the stage for this continuous downfall of many earthly lives due to their greed.

This is why our mother always taught us that we must treat each person by the content of their heart! And that the color of an individual’s skin does not define their character – even though this was a time when the color of your skin literally determined where you sat, ate, and lived. Luckily, however, my mother dreamed of better things for my sister, five brothers and myself.

In Louise, Mississippi, opportunities for black people were few – unless one aspired to spend his or her life working in vast, steamy cotton fields full of poisonous snakes and mosquitoes and horseflies.

As you know by now, my mother was a sharecropper. My father (whom I never met), was said to have been a carpenter who came from somewhere in Texas.
In those days, “MaDear,” as my mother was known, was the go-to person in the whole community! In her role as matriarch, she helped care for the sick, the newborn, the elderly and anyone else in need. By profession, MaDear was a hard working and expert cotton picker. For her labors, she earned but a paltry three cents per pound of cotton picked. However, she seldom saw any of the actual money. Instead, she received “Orders” (credit) in the neighborhood grocery store, which was owned by the cotton plantation’s “owner family.” At the end of each month, her orders were ostensibly “totaled up” and rarely exceeded the amount she was told that she earned. Mother accepted having no options, and took whatever amount the “Boss Man” decided to give her.

An excellent cook, MaDear was able to earn some extra cash, cooking her delightful soul food for the local gentry! All told, she made barely enough to support us kids, though we never knew it.

I was mom and grandma’s eager helper wherever they went. Now I look back on the adventure and where their lives took them, whether to those God forsaken cotton fields, the kitchen, or the washboard and washtub. What an adventure! Their daily task was to work in the fields from sunup to sundown, with time in between to cook, wash, sew and take care of all the unplanned things that required their attention.

Mom & Grandma would walk miles to help sick friends. Then there were “The Big Boss-man’s” weekend parties where mom would have to clean their beautiful big brick homes, cook fancy southern meals, serve them, and clean up afterwards, while continuing to work all week in the cotton fields. In addition, she was often called on to be a nanny to the kids while the Boss-man and his wife went out to parties with other plantation owning friends, in Louise or Yazoo City.
Since around the age of four or five, I had always been mom’s helper, always working to help her cook, clean, wash, iron and sew for the owners. However, even though she had to walk miles to work at their parties, she could always make a few dollars and bring the leftover food back home, often including great treats for me and my sibling. Being mom’s helper was an education that has helped me through life.

Mother never wanted any of her boys to grow up needing a wife to handle the fundamental necessities of cooking, cleaning, sewing or washing clothes. We were all taught to do these essentials for ourselves.

Being her helper was not always easy, and some negative repercussions developed as I got older. For example, if I didn’t know “my place.” You see, the families that mom regularly cooked for (and was also a nanny during their vacations and on weekends), had two children: a son about my age; and a daughter a couple of years older. We had been playmates, but suddenly this all came to an end. The summer of 1954, at the age of seven, I began to take on more responsibility as the “water boy” in the cotton fields. I was no longer able to be my mom’s helper at the parties, and at the time I couldn’t understand why.

Mom just said, “One day you will understand!!! Meaning that I was getting to the age where I couldn’t be a playmate with a white girl. (Ironically, I later married a white girl!)

I was also at an age where I was getting interested in playing sports. But having spent most of my time in the kitchen with mom and grandma, I was ill prepared for the playing fields. So when it came time to pick teams, you can guess where I came in. Let’s just say, “Not first,” and leave it there.
I still sought the reason why I couldn’t go with mom to parties at the Boss-man’s house. Was it because I did a bad job on some of my chores and mom had gotten in some trouble because of it? Or did I occasionally eat too much leftover food? So there were two different worlds. And I didn’t know which one I belonged to. I did know for sure that, for whatever reason, I could no longer be mom’s helper.

Joseph Lewis Johnson: The Fourth Generation

Yes, I am a descendant of slaves. I know this with certainty. As a sharecropper, my paternal grandfather, worked the same land his father and mother worked as slaves in Anchor Curve, Mississippi.

My ancestor’s faith in God and Christ helped them persevere through the Deep South’s insidious scourge of slavery. After the Civil War, a new form of slavery evolved (and is still with us in parts of Country today). I call it: “Slavery, Light!” Most people call it: “Sharecropping!” Though there probably were, and still are, some fair and legitimate sharecropping situations, this ominous scheme kept my family poor and undereducated for four long and miserable generations.

Fortunately, for me, I inherited my family’s faith in God and Christ as well as their perseverance, which equipped me to become a college graduate, teacher and businessman.

As luck would have it, I was born at 4 a.m. on November 10th 1947, the fifth child into an impoverished family of seven (six boys and one girl), living in a blighted area of cotton fields, “Anchor Curve,” four miles southeast of the small town of Louise, Mississippi. World War II and the Korean War had recently ended and soldiers like my; uncle George Fountain who was an orderly in his Army Mash Unit; uncle Adam Fountain who was wounded in battle and ended up
at uncle George’s Mash Unit, and uncle Ivory Fountain who serviced fourteen years in the Marine Core as a sergeant and MP. They eagerly headed back home to start families and fought to carve out their futures as a part of the beginning of the baby boom era. Louise, however, was not the most opportune place in the Nation in which to do so.

While continuing to fight the prejudice of poverty and social injustice, mom decided to name me after “The Brown Bomber,” Joe Louis Barrow, the greatest fighter of all times. Louis was born on May 13th, 1914, (he was the seventh of eight children) to his mother and father, Lillie and Munroe Barrow (Mun).

In addition to being a cotton picker from Alabama, Mun also fought poverty…. Mun also fought poverty and social injustice for most of his childhood and adult life in the blighted cotton fields of Alabama. Mom was born only eight months before Mun, on September 6, 1913, but in the blighted cotton fields of Mississippi. Mom, intending to honor me by naming me after the great Joe Louis, missed only slightly when she spelled my middle name “Lewis” instead of “Louis.” Joe Louise’s father, like many other parents from the southern cotton fields, died fighting for social equality for his family. His son, Joe, having grown up in the Old South, had acquired the instinct and anger of a fighter, even amidst the evils of racial discrimination and intolerance.

During this time there were significant inventions that would impact lives for many years to come including the Transistor and the Mobile Phone. The start of the Cold War, which lasted close to four decades, is also seen as a time when the worlds two Super Powers, USA and USSR, worried about the dominance, politics and influence of each other on the other countries in the world. And many couples started their lives living with parents due to the continuing shortages in housing, which is not so today.
How much things cost in 1947:

- Average Cost of new house: $6,600.00
- Average wages per year: $2,850.00
- Cost of a gallon of Gas: 15 cents
- Average Cost of a new car: $1,300.00
- Loaf of Bread: 13 cents
- United States Postage Stamp: 3 cents
- Jackie Robinson took to the field for the Brooklyn Dodgers, becoming the first Negro to play in Major league baseball.

My home town and some lessons learned!

The population of my hometown, Louise, was less than 500 people. Main Street consisted of a post office, two furniture stores, two grocery stores, a drug store that sold Greyhound bus tickets, an ice cream parlor and a café which boasted the conventional “WHITEST ONLY” and “BLACKS ONLY” signs in the proper sections. The only industry was the dusty, noisy cotton gin located along the railroad tracks on the south edge of town.

West of the railroad tracks was the “entertainment” district, consisting of two run-down juke joints (bars) where one could drink, gamble, fight and be entertained by ladies of questionable morals. Louise was totally segregated.
Louise Residential Areas

The residential areas of Louise consist of several communities all segregated and somewhat separated by Main Street. On the southeast end of town you have the more affluent black residents: The teachers, the land owners, the small neighborhood merchants, the barbershop and owner, the mom and pap’s grocery stores, and the preacher.

On the opposite end of town, northwest, is another black community that consisted of your upper-middle to lower class residents: Few teachers and mostly day workers, who hire out their service to other framers and plantation owners and another cotton gin.

And of course everything east of Main Street belongs to the white families: The plantation owners, the proprietors, the teachers, the merchants, the town civic leaders, and Main Street pompous and their children which all lived in lovely brick and colonial style homes with well kept cosmetic lawns and gardens, cultivated weekly by their black gardeners (house boys).

On those hot and steamy Saturday evenings after all week in those…cotton fields many people saw Louise as the place to be and let off a little steam.

The children

If we were fortunate enough to have some extra money by working Saturday at other plantations, we had the wherewithal to stroll up and down Main Street from the Ice Cream Parlor on one end to the Post Office on the other end eating foot long hot dogs, chocolate dipped ice cream cones, pineapple milkshakes, fruit flavored sodas and peanuts poured in the bottle. Great times and delicious treat!
The Parents

For our (friends and cousins) mothers it was a time of great concern for our safety and well being. Their jobs were to look after us the best they could while shopping for the best deal they could find with their limited purchasing resource. The stores in Louise were not tailored for sharecroppers like us; they catered to the land owners and plantation owners. For those reasons most of our clothing had to be purchased in Yazoo City. The stores there had a bigger and more affordable selection of items to pick from.

Mom could once years after all the crops were in. Then the big Boss Man would “settle up” with her for that year. Ninety percent of the time she owed him money, so what were we working for?! (Just food and shelter.)

The men

The men of Louise! As I look back now, I can see why they were attracted to the “entertainment” district across the tracks. This district consisted of two run-down juke joints (bars) where the men could drink wine and other hard liquor (moonshine), gamble, fight and be entertained by ladies of questionable morals. This part of Louise was also segregated. For the blacks, as for the whites, this was an anything goes type of entertainment. I think the blacks believed that these weekend rituals would ease their pains and blank out the harsh reality of the work week. They knew that as long as they did not kill one another; insult a white man, or especially a woman, that whatever else they might do would be overlooked by Big Boss Man. They would be able to go home, nap on Sunday and return to work on Monday morning.
Belief

Most blacks believed our life to be a normal way of life and in their complacency would be surprised, I'm sure, if told that they were being condemned to a life of impoverished mediocrity should they try to enter the larger society. This situation prevailed not only in the cotton fields of Mississippi but was evident wherever unsophisticated, undereducated blacks gathered together. The attitude of "living for the happy hours of the weekend, baby," was prevalent.

This mentality of living for the weekend reminds me of the deceptive philosophies that take people, even Christians, captive.

Carl Sagan (1980) stated that "the cosmos is all that there is, ever was, or ever will be." By this statement we can infer that Sagan is really saying that there is no God. This philosophy is known as the cosmic cube.

Many people believe this philosophy because the cube, appearing to be so large, certainly must contain everything. The cosmic cube contains matter, energy, you, me and all that exists. The slave owners placed blacks neatly into their cosmic cube where they would work and have babies to do more work. Fear and an uneducated, submissive mentality gripped their minds.

When Slavery Allegedly Ended

Abraham Lincoln's (1863) Emancipation Proclamation was an executive order during the American Civil War which declared freedom for all slaves in the Confederate States of America.

Slavery had ended before my grandfather's generation began in 1885! Thanks and praise to God and Christ for President Lincoln ending slavery, at least on paper, in 1863.
Thanks to my mother, at the start of the third generation, who wanted her children to escape the slave "cosmic cube" and to know God and Christ in a world outside of the cotton fields where we could be nourished, educated and grow as our maker had intended.

**Truth**

Many want to define "truth" as "that which conforms to reality." However, they sometimes make this their own personal truth for supporting their own world-view of things.

These pseudo-truths that are deeply embraced profoundly affect how they think, feel and ultimately act.

Although many of these people would call themselves "Believers," it seems to me, they act much like those who rarely experience a personal sense of significance, who spend money and time on things that fail to satisfy, who need to wonder about life's ultimate purpose. I must admit that I sometimes find myself here too. Are we losing our bearings as a people and a nation?

Unfortunately, it seems today that many people don't think there is any absolute truth or universal standards. But I believe differently. I believe that “Truth” supports and points toward a Biblical Worldview: A formal worldview based ultimately upon that nature, character, and being of God as it is expressed in His infallible Word (the Bible) and His creation. It becomes the foundation for a life system that governs every area of existence.

**The summer (1954) My first year of school**

The summer of 1954 was a happy time, yet a sad time too, for my plantation chores were coming to an end. This would also end my time as mother's helper. It was time to prepare for my first day of school. The big day would be September 4th. I could hardly wait!
Now I would get to ride the big yellow school bus with my older sister and brothers and all the other kids that caught "Big Yellow" in front of our house. I had worked hard and waited all summer long for this big day---the first day of school. During that first year I experienced several things: making friends was not going to be easy, school was going to become more difficult, and I wanted to play sports after seeing my brother, Willie, "The Catch," on the baseball diamond and my brother, Sim, "Mr. Cool," on the basketball court.

Since 1951, I had always been mom’s helper. Helping her with the cooking, cleaning, washing, ironing, sewing and taking the grocery list (“note” is what it was called then) to the Neighborhood Family’s grocery store, approximately one fourth of a mile away.

We could go and purchase groceries or cigarettes from the store as long as mom wrote them a note and signed it. Many days, as I took that note to the store, gave it to the storekeeper and watched as she filled the order, wanting a piece of that hard candy and could not have it because it was not on note. And scared to death to ask for a piece or try to add it to the note.

Each time, after she had finished filling the order and giving it to me, she would say, “Tell sis (what she called mom) I say hello and what a nice boy that she has to do her shopping for her.” I then would think to myself, “If I’m so nice then give me a piece of that hard candy!”

We would walk approximately a mile to work the plantation owner’s parties, and we could sometimes bring home some leftovers. And that was a treat in itself. The family that had the two children around my age would also give mom additional food and clothing to help out. Being her helper was an education in itself, for all of her children. It was her way in helping us face life’s essential challenges. She never wanted any of her children to grow up needing a wife or husband to take care of any of our essential needs when it came to the fundamentals of cooking, cleaning, darning, washing or ironing.
To me, they were great! Willie was one of the greatest baseball players, and Sim, the greatest on the basketball court. They were both students at Montgomery High School. The school was named after a very rich black man, Hudy Montgomery, who made his fortune as a trapper and tradesman of raccoons, minks, beavers and muskrat hides in Louise. While playing center field at a home game, I saw my brother Willie make one of the greatest catches I had ever seen. There were runners on first and third bases. I don't remember the ball or strike count on the batter, but he hit a deep fly-ball to center field. At that time, our athletic department did not have the money to purchase shoes for the players of any sport.

As Willie was chasing after that deep fly-ball, wearing only his regular shoes, he over ran it as he was trying to make the catch. His feet slipped from underneath him and while falling to the ground on his back, he made the catch. The runner on third base was trying to score and realized that he had made the catch.

The runner was returning to third base and Willie got up and threw the ball to the third baseman for the out. The crowd cheered wildly. From that day on I wanted to be a baseball player like my brother, Willie.

As for Sim, he was really Mr. Cool on the basketball court. He displayed one of the most accurate jump shots and fall away hoop shots of his time. The only person who could give him some competition was one of his teammates, whom we called "Boy-Blue."

Of course, being my mother's helper all those years deprived me of valuable practice time, making my chances of being a good athlete look very slim. To achieve Sim's basketball skills seemed impossible. He was really good!
I had spent ninety percent of my time with mom and grandma and being water boy for those who worked the cotton fields, which left my athletic skills undeveloped. Therefore, when it came time for picking teams, for basketball or baseball and not to mention football, I you can guess where my stock or team popularity was…! Let’s just say “not first” and leave it there for now.

**The Water Boy**

In 1955 a second grader, I was introduced to the job of water boy and Wednesday’s "Corporal Punishment" days at school.

As the water boy! What a job! Carry water in a two gallon pail to the workers in the fields and all this without even spilling any of the water or letting any dirt or any kind of bugs get into it. To carry water in a pail for long distances required certain skills of water carrying diplomacy you would have to develop. You could not just pick up that pail of water and start walking with it. You needed to develop the “lean as well as the walk” for carrying water in a pail of long distances. If you did not, you would tire quickly.

The proper way was to develop the lean to the left side when using the right hand to carry the water pail and just the opposite when using the right hand. In either case, I had to walk with short steps. This way the weight of the pail wouldn’t get your arms exhausted so quickly and the short steps would eliminate kicking up dirt that would get into the water. This was an all day job each day with miles to walk carrying gallons of water in the blazing hot sun and dirt.
Wednesday’s "Corporal Punishment" days, the dreaded spelling quizzes. Those Wednesdays were the most frightening and embarrassing times for myself and possible others children like me who had a difficult a time understanding our standardized teaching method of using memorization skills, especially when it came to spelling quizzes. Not knowing that I was suffering from a learning disability that required a systematic approach to teaching spelling (I have a learning disability, Inattentive Distraction, a form of Attention Deficit Disorder, and I am dyslexic), therefore I had to endure this ritual for several years.

Our educational system didn't know the adage, "If a student isn't learning, check the teaching." In our school, if a child had problems learning, it was the student's or the parent’s fault, and if that student didn't get a score of 70% or better on their spelling quizzes, they would get a spanking or beating that day.

That would consist of as many lashes as the teacher deemed you needed with a gin strap who’s diameter was three sixteenth of an inch thick and a four inch in width. All of this would happen in front of my classmates and any other students or teachers who might pass by our classroom.

So, to say the least, I was a regular participant in this Wednesday’s ritual for the next four years. Those memories are very vivid today, despite my efforts to suppress them, they often come back to preoccupy my thought.

When I am faced with recalling any part of my childhood, I can hear their remarks as clearly as I did then, "You are stupid! Lazy! Why won't you study like the other students? Just concentrate on what is before you! Stop being a daydreamer! Oh, you're just one of those uneducated Fountains." My teachers’ were right about a couple of things I could not concentrate and I was a daydreamer!
Those remarks labeled me as someone who I wasn’t and not by my choice. I could not help being distracted or interpret some things different from others. And when I did try to participate in some of the classroom discussions, and though I had the correct answers, the teacher would say that’s not what we are talking about and other students would laugh at me. After I was retained twice in elementary school, I ended up being the oldest in my class. My report cards read: “F, F, F,” “all F’s” and “RETAI NED.” I could only imagine what the teachers and other students were saying about me behind my back. Seeing my classmates being promoted to the next grade and leaving me behind made me feel angry, sad, unwanted and wondering what was wrong with me.

Why was I born this way, unable to study and complete assignments like the children without drifting off into space? Many nights at home, when everyone was sleeping, I would sit in the corner of the room I shared and just cry. What was wrong with me? Why did God make me this way? Why couldn't I learn like the other children? Also I still wondered why I couldn't go with mom to the plantation owner's parties. Why did I have to miss so many days of school each year working in those damn fields while the white children and the black children, whose parents owned land, could attend school each day each year? Why were sharecropper’s children the only ones that missed school and were treated so differently?

Why didn't we have nice clothes and shoes? Why didn't our mom have nice homes and cars? Our mother never owned a car or had a driver license; she scarcely made enough money to feed and clothe us.

Initially, I thought there were no places, people, or anything that could help with the difficulty I was experiencing. I was wrong! God had made me this way and He would help me overcome it, just like mom had said He would.
I was able to develop some coping skills by watching and listening to those around me, just as I did to learn the game of basketball by looking, listening and watching. These coping skills would help me through high school.

Our mother was not an academically educated woman; she only had a third grade education which left her helpless to be able to help me with my yet to be discovered learning disabilities. She never scolded me or my siblings about our schoolwork or grades. Although, it seems as though she could have since I got very bad grades. She knew something was wrong as I struggled so in school, and I suspect she knew that some day it all would be corrected.

Today, I personally hold my elementary teachers responsible for not recognizing that I had a learning disability. Instead, they used hard-line tactics as an attempt to motive me and other students who could have been suffering from the same or similar learning disabilities (Dr. Daniel G. Amen, 1999 a clinical Neuroscientist, Psychiatrist). Because of their lack of enlightenment about learning disabilities, my teachers instead labeled me like they labeled others: "Stupid; lazy; daydreamer; lacks concentration; unmotivated, except when it comes to sports; just one of those Fountains." Oh how tired I got of hearing that I was just one of those Fountains!

What mom lacked in academic knowledge she made up for by teaching us the value of good ethics when it came to our work, our faith, our belief and our knowledge of God and Christ. "Never, never give up, she would always say.” To me this means persevere, persevere! Always seek your hopes and dreams! Always trust in God and Christ; they will make a way for you. Her favorite words were, "He may not come when we want Him, but He is always on time. Be patient!"
We might not have had much when it came to material things or nicer things like clothes, shoes and a home, but what we did have was the love and kindness from a woman who gave her all for her children and anyone else she knew who needed help.

Even though most of our clothes were hand-me-downs that might need stitching or darning, she demanded that we keep them and ourselves clean. "Cleanliness is next to Godliness," she would say. Mom also demanded that the house and yard be kept clean, even though our yard only consisted of dirt! No grass. No plants. No flowers. Whenever my sister and I reminisce, we always have to laugh about the times when mom would make us go outside to sweep the dirt in the front yard to make it look high-quality for anyone who passed by.

Up to third grade, I thought that the most embarrassing moments were Wednesday’s "Corporal Punishment" days, the dreaded spelling quizzes, and the stupidity of whipping and retention that accompanied them. These were some of the most embarrassing occurrences, but an incident that took place at the beginning of the third grade was even more embarrassing.

In September (1956), as a third grader, on one of those hot and steamy days after eating lunch, I was having a great time playing different kinds of games.

I was riding on the merry-go-round that turned so fast you had to hang on for dear life with all you might to keep from being thrown off. This made all of us dizzy and thirsty, and after waiting in line at the drinking fountain and taking my turn, I drank a great deal of water. I went back to class and got out my reading book in preparation for my reading class, which I was not looking forward to. However, our reading teaching had to attend a meeting at the principal’s office. This gave some relief. But she left one of her "high-quality," favorable students in charge to write down the names of any students who talked or did not read in her absence.
There were several children out of their seats and a couple of boys sitting in back of me were talking. As usual, I was quiet and did not want to bring any attention to myself in fear of being called on to read. When the teacher returned from her meeting, her name taker turned in her list. Unaware to me, my name was on her list for talking and there was no debating the consequences. The consequence for your name being on the list was that you had to remain in school during recess and could not use the bathroom. To say the least I was very upset because I was not talking and was being punished for something I did not do. I did not understand nor could I question why my name was on that list.

At 2:00 p.m., recess time, I could not go outside and play nor use the bathroom. About fifteen minutes before dismissal time at 3:00 p.m., I had to use the bathroom very, very badly after drinking all that water. I thought I had only one option, which was to hold it until school was out at 3:00 p.m. But not so, the other option was that I wet my pants. I could not hold it any longer, as hard I tried, so I wet my pants!

In my attempt to cover it up, I waited until my classmates had left the room, hoping that no one would recognize that I had wet my pants. Once outside of the classroom, I quickly went to the water fountain and put water over the sides of my pants because the front and back of them were already wet. I then headed outside to the play ground and started rolling around in the dirt pretending to be playing.

This way I hoped to deceive everyone of how I really had wet my pants. Once on the bus, for that four miles ride home, the other children starting asking why my clothes were wet and dirty. I told them that I was hot and poured water on myself to cool off and then I went to play while waiting for our bus to arrive. This embarrassing moment stayed with me into the 4th grade.
Some of classmates did tease me for a short time by calling me “pee boy,” but they soon stopped for whatever reasons. Maybe my older brothers or my sister, the enforcer, has something to say to them.

As I look back on that incident, I realize that it affected me both mentally and physically, as well as positively and negatively. It taught me that no disciplinary action of any kind, that any teacher could dish out, should be worth the emotional and psychological embarrassment this incident had caused me. And that no other person has the right to place any of God’s children in a compromising position such as the one I had to endure.

That type of embarrassment could and probably has scarred some children for life. The positive side to this heinous example of disciplinary tactics, if there is one, is that if this autobiography is ever published, a child can see that with God’s help anyone can recover from anything!

The fall of 1957, as a fourth grader for the second time at the age of eleven after being “RETAINED,” would be a very trying time in my life. I had to regain my self-respect and change the ways that most of my new classmates and few friends had responded to that incident.

I also wanted to get the older girls back to pinching my cheeks. Now, I believed that the only way to regain myself respect was to become a Willie, Sim, or Boy Blue, in sports.

In order to achieve their successes, I had to work hard at developing my baseball and basketball skills. This included finding ways to improve my grades so I would be able to compete in sports in junior high and high school. To start these new found challenges of mine, I needed a place to practice and better ways to study. Academics were always a concern of mine, but my main focus or challenges were to improve my basketball skills.
There was not a basketball court, backboard, hoop or basketball to be found anywhere around our house. I had to develop and implement my own equipment.

I began by taking a wire clothes hanger and nailing it to the back of our house by its hanger, hook and stem. Then bending the body of the hanger down and bending it open to make a round hoop. Now I had my basketball court, our backyard. My backboard on the back of the house was completed with the rounded clothes hanger as the hoop. Now, all I needed was a basketball and I made one out of one of mom’s stockings and some cotton.

Each chance I got, I was outside playing on my “basketball court” with my homemade stocking basketball, using imaginary dribbling to make moves to the basket, or stopping to take that last second jump shot. This became a ritual and obsession for me. It took the place of food, other games, friends, and being mom’s helper, etc… If anyone was looking for me they knew just where they could find me: out back of our house, on my court, doing my thing: …Playing the game that I hoped would eventually change my life.

Those imaginary moves of dribbling with my homemade stocking basketball, and taking that last second jump shot or lay– up while crashing into the back of the house, made things that much easier for me once I got onto a real court.

On a real court, there would be so much more maneuvering space behind the backboard, especially doing lay–up drills, or while driving to the basket for a slam-dunk. And best of all, there would be no back of the house to crash into. Wow!
I believe in destiny and that things happen for a reason. Mom had started a job as a cook at this new place, a bar (“The Roadhouse”), across the road from our house. How convenient for her; now she would not have to walk miles to work at those plantation houses. And things had just begun to start to get better for us.

The Roadhouse was segregated, white only, with the main group being hunters. They came from all around the state of Mississippi and as far away as Arkansas and Tennessee to go deer hunting in the woods in back of our house. This was a time to stay inside and not out playing. The deer hunter came in droves, and deer would sometimes be right by our house. Hunters would stop at the roadhouse to get something to eat, to drink and to feed their horses before and after the hunt.

On Christmas morning, in 1956, I was outside playing Cowboys and Indians, wearing my two new holster cap pistols that I had gotten for Christmas. That’s when I saw the bar owner’s son, who seemed to be a few years older than me, outside shooting off some fire crackers. We never engaged in playing any games or talking, and I thank God that we didn’t because of the events that occurred that Christmas morning. I can imagine what would have happened to me if I was there and he blamed it on me.

As he was shooting off his large fire crackers, I was standing in our front yard just looking at him, wishing that I had some fire crackers to shoot off as well. The wind had begun to blow harder. He had a large sum of fire crackers left to shoot off but only a few matches.

When he had gotten down to his last match, and in his attempt to keep a fire going, he began to gather together some of the dried grass and sticks to build a fire with his last match. After gathering dried grass and sticks, he lit them on fire with that last match.
The wind started to blow harder and blew that fire into the other dry grass; that fire then headed straight for the roadhouse. The owner’s sons started screaming and calling for his father. “Father, father,” he was yelling: “Come quick!” He ran toward the front door of the roadhouse. His father came running out to see what was wrong. He saw that the fire his son had started was heading straight for his bar, burning out of control. Neither our neighborhood of Anchor Curve nor the town of Louise, four miles away, had Fire Departments! The nearest fire department was in Yazoo City which was about fourteen miles away.

The owner’s frantic attempts to extinguish the fire by using a bucket to carry water from inside the roadhouse to the fire, all failed. By the time the Yazoo City fire department arrived from fourteen miles away, the roadhouse had burned down!

Then the owner took his frustrations out on his son by beating him on the head and body with a big dipper. The owner’s son was just standing there crying with blood streaming down the side of his head.

This was a sad day for all of us: the owner; his son; the deer hunters; mom and our entire family. We all had suffered a great loss! I assume the greatest loss was for the owner and his son. Even though we were never friends, nor even talked to each other, I felt really bad for him and his father for the way things happened to them on that Christmas morning in 1956. I was sorrier for mom and the rest of us, because I thought that the fire had destroyed another opportunity for us to have a better life.

By the summer after the Roadhouse burned down (1957), I was blessed with a place to perfect my basketball skills right in front of our house.
After the roadhouse had burned down, the owner had salvaged what he wanted. Underneath the remaining rubbish was a slab of concrete that had “basketball court” written all over it. But that was short lived. The older guys took advantage of that space to build their own basketball court: they cleaned it up by removing the remaining rubbish, built a backboard, attached a real basketball hoop to it, and fastened them to a huge post that stood about eleven feet tall. They were now in the basketball playing business.

I could now watch my brother and his friends whoop it up, and if they were short a player, they would use me as their substitute. What a joy it was to play with those guys, even though most of the time they would “school” me, making me look really stupid. But I was still learning the game that I had grown to love, from the best the best players. Those were the times I treasured the most.

With the kind of weather we had in the Deep South, I could play hoops with my brother, mentor and friends almost year round. Too bad that during this time, small southern colleges and universities did not recognize the recruitment possibilities of these talented black athletes.

Of course, the educating of Joe on the basketball court was not the only education I had received at that time. My basketball education had to take a back seat to the daily ritual of sharecropping during spring, cultivating and planting (late April-early May), and fall harvesting (October, November/part of December). What extra time I did have, I tried to perfect my athletic skills and get my homework done to prepare for basket ball tryouts and school my freshman year.

My private educations began on one hot summer day at Big Mom’s house, the Big House, by my brother; my sister; my uncle; my cousin, his girlfriend and some of their friends, both girls and boys conversation.
I was sitting on one of my friend’s bicycles by the front porch holding on to a fifty gallon barrel, used for catching rainwater, pretending to be riding the bike even though I did know how to ride a bike. Their conversations mostly focused on sex, talking around it hoping I wouldn’t understand. It all seemed to be harmless and they were just having fun, as usual. As mom came from the kitchen toward the front porch for me, the conversations ceased and one of a less intense tone took place. I thought that she wanted me to help her with some chores in the kitchen or she wanted to get me away from around my older siblings, uncle, cousin and their friends, supposing that they wouldn’t be annoyed with their kid brother hanging around. Otherwise, she thought that I might hear or learn something that would corrupt her innocent son. Little did she know that the chore she was about to send me on could have likely done just that.

The chore that she needed me for was to take a corn sack and go to the cornfield to pull some corn for supper. I wasn’t happy to leave the conversations that were taking place and go to the cornfield; it just had begun to heat up! I thought I was getting an education on how to handle those older girls who would always pinch my cheek as I entered or exited the Big Yellow. After I had gotten the corn sack, I was walked toward the cornfield that was about seventy five yards in back of the Big House. One of my sister’s friends called to me: “Skeeter wait, I want to help you with pulling some corn so it won’t take you so long. I know you didn’t want to leave our conversation. What did you think of it?” Not knowing just what to say, and at the same time trying to be cool while being scared to death that I would make a fool of myself, I replied, “It seemed okay I guess.” Once we were inside the cornfield and out of sight of the Big House and the others, she asked me if I knew what we were talking about.

Worried about not looking stupid in the eye of such a beautiful girl, I answered, “Yes, sex.” I thought this was my lucky day.
Little did I know, she wanted to do more than pull some ears of corn and complete a conversation that hot sweltering afternoon in that cornfield. As we began to pull ears of corn, she was standing by my side and she placed her arm around my shoulder. It didn’t seem real, being touched in such a soft manner. My heart was beating a thousand times a second and I was frozen in time not knowing what was going to happen next. She shifted her position to the front of me and rested her hands on my waist, as if it were her privilege. The next thought that came to mind was what would happen if I protested and ran? I just stared at the cornstalks in fear, unwilling to bring myself to look her in the eyes or hug her as much as I wanted too.

Casually she moved her hands from my waist to the front of my short pants; I could hear insects, frogs and grasshoppers begging for a cool breeze.

As she told me to “lie down,” I was filled with fear. Her voice did not sound the same as it did when she was on the porch of the Big House talking. It was as if it was coming from somewhere mysteriously as she pressed me back on to the ground. She moved me on top of her, making strange noises while undoing my pants. As she moved back and forth under me, I thought that mom or someone would come looking for me to remove me from this inescapable moment.

She finally had my pants down and she pulled me into her; it delivered a warm and somewhat pleasurable pain that left me bruised and sore for weeks. Years later, I learned that neither she nor I understood the art of foreplay that is needed in that sort of an encounter. She then instructed me in a voice different from anything that I had ever heard before, to…
Her next words were that she better go back now and join the others and not to say anything about this; and if she hurt me, she was sorry. For months I felt sullied and in a stage of fright and disbelief, not knowing what to do or say to mom or anyone about what had happen to me. For many years to come, that encounter placed an inexorable fear of older girls and young women on me. It was to the point that many of my friends would tease me and ask me if I was gay, due to my reluctance to be engaged in some of the girlish extracurricular activities they were involved. I was a sophomore in high school when this incredible, beautiful girl befriended me in an unbelievable, platonic relationship. Because we were from different socioeconomic classes of the have and have not, no one knew of this platonic relationship except us, just like no one knew of my cornfield education at such an early age.

The Move

My new basketball court was short lived because the summer of 1959 mom remarried and my sister, Lueretha, my two younger brothers, Jessie and James, and I all moved to the “big” city of Louise. My three older bothers Sam, Willie and Sim had really moved to Greenville, Mississippi.

This was a time when the younger generations began to question some of the tactics and working conditions surrounding the schemes of sharecropping. Therefore, when a sharecropper’s son or daughter became of age, usually seventeen or eighteen, and began to question or take offense to the rules of the plantation owners, their parents would send them away to relatives in the North in fear of their safety or even their lives. There were also the fears of friendship developing between the black males and white females, which could and sometime did lead to interracial relationships taking place. It was okay for the white male to have as many relationships as he wanted with our black females.
However, these two types of interracial relationships caused two heinous murders in our community. One was by a gruesome castration and the dragging of the body of a young black male, Eddy Davis Jr.

On a Saturday night, in August 1960, he was dragged by a car for miles to his parent’s home where he was left for his parents to find after the murderers blew their car horn. Eddy was just eighteen years old and a friend of my brother, Sim; he was dating a biracial girl… The lynching was one of an armed black man, Rainy Pool, in 1962, who had forbidden his black daughter to continue to date a white man.

Also during this time, in 1961, mass arrests and violence were touched-off when Freedom Riders, actively seeking to spur integration, made Mississippi a major target. There was not even token integration of public schools in Mississippi until 1962, when the state government, under the leadership of Gov. Ross R. Barnett, tried unsuccessfully to block the admission of James H. Meredith, an African American, to the University of Mississippi law school. In the conflict, the federal and state governments clashed, and the United State’s Department of Justice took legal action against state officials. The Ku Klux Klan (the KKK) was out in full force. Two more people were killed in riots, and federal troops had to be called upon to restore order. Racial antagonisms continued and resulted in many more acts of violence: Churches and homes were bombed; Medgar Evers, an official of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), was killed in 1963; three civil-rights workers (two white, one black) were murdered the next year; and there were many less publicized outrages.

I know now, that because of all the mayhem the South was experiencing, especially in our community with the two murders and the KKK on the prowl during this time in history, is why mom continued to forbid me from being her helper.
She had foreseen the possible dangers or repercussions that could have come from me developing a friendship with her employer’s son and especially their daughter.

After the two heinous murders in our community, the freedom riders came to Louise, MS, in 1963. Their march brought them less than 200 yards from our home in route to their encampment at Mr. Hudy Montgomery estate. It was exciting to have the Freedom riders come to our town and so close to our house. But it was also disappointing because my mother would not let us attend any of the rallies!

She was afraid of the consequences that could come from being associated with the freedom riders. She said, “We still have to live here and try to make a living after they have left.”

These incidents of murders and mom not letting me attend the Freedom Rider’s rallies angered me so much until I was looking for things to reach out in anger against. Then I would remember Dr. King’s words and belief of non-violence and his famous speech: “I Have A Dream… Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred. We must practice non-violence.” That one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal." Also, that our children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.

Being born and raised in a small town in the heart of the Delta, there is an entirely different attitude held as far as the right norms and values instilled in one. And I believed and understood what Dr. King meant about “having a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a desert state, sweltering with the heat of injustice and oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.”
We have come a long way, but the dream of Dr. King has not yet fully materialized. That day is still to come, so many still live in poverty in this country. Even today, for many, the persistence of racial conflicts, low wages, and force labor that I experienced in Mississippi as a child, teenager and young adult still exist in many states, countries and nations and are still plagued by racial problems of greed.

In 1962, our educational system finally enforced the compulsory law that required all children under the age of 16 to attend school and not work in the fields. The law enacted in 1878 by the federal government, forced the South to create public school systems to help educate freed slaves, as well as the many poor white children who had little more than a passing acquaintance with formal education. I guess that was one of the happiest days of my life. I could go to school each day and not work in those damn cotton fields. At least I thought we had won the battle.

So, now I was in a new surrounding without my older brothers and my mentor. Even though we had moved to Louise, we were still sharecroppers experiencing the rigid back-breaking work, low to no wages earned and the shortened school attendance continued. But mom seemed to be happy now. I thought that there was a possibility for another mentor since I had lost my brother and Boy Blue due to moves, my brother to Greenville, Mississippi and Boy Blue to college. My new mentor was Roy Jones, who had a basketball court in his front yard and played on the varsity basketball team for the Montgomery Wolverines. His yard was also where history was made in our community because of when the freedom riders encamped by their home on Mr. Hudy Montgomery’s Land.

What an opportunity for me to be able to play with Roy and his friends. Now my only problem was grade improvements and dealing with my new family of step-brothers and sisters, some of whom were around the same age as me and my sister Lueretha.
Mom’s new husband already had six children, three girls and three boys, and his father living with him. This, with the five of us made a family of eleven children and four adults living in a four bedroom house.

For the first couple of years, even with the overcrowding, things went well! Then, I could sense some discomfort centering on my sister and the rules of the house and chores. I just did as I was told to do and kept to myself when I was at the house. I tried to stay away from the house as much as possible by playing basketball at Roy’s house.

On a summer day in January, 1964, I was at Roy’s house after a week’s work for our usual Sunday afternoon, three on three or four on four games of basketball with the guys. When I saw my sister coming I knew that something was wrong; she would never come to Roy’s home unless something was wrong because of a rivalry between her and Roy’s sister. Contemplating what I had done wrong, I asked myself, did I not complete all my chores or would this end my basketball time for the day? As she came closer to us, I could see from the expression on her face that something serious was wrong or had gone wrong at home, other than me forgetting to do my chores. She walked up to me and looked me in the eyes and said that mom wanted me home because our grandmother, Rita Fountain, had taken sick in route to one of her cousin’s funerals and had to be rushed to the hospital in Yazoo City. We hurried home in order to go back to Anchor Curve to see what was wrong with Grandma Rita.

Later on that week, her health had turned for the worst and she had to be moved to a better hospital in Greenville, Mississippi.

We all were very concerned, sad and worrying about grandma because she wasn’t a sickly lady before, even after giving birth to twelve children. This was the first time that I had experienced a serious sickness in our family.
I was already afraid of dead people and grandma knew this because I had lived with her most of the time when we lived at Anchor Curve. So, grandma sent word to us to not be afraid of her because she would never do anything to harm us.

On Friday, January 24th, 1964, Grandma, Rita Smith-Fountain, went home to be with God! We said our final goodbyes at her funeral on February 8th, 1964. What a loss to our family, she was the family’s backbone.

During my freshmen year in high school (1963-1964), I was having a difficult time trying to adjusting to my surroundings by being the oldest student in class, being called gay by some of the guys, still holding on to the misery of my cornfield episode and the loss of grandma. I was still trying to find my place amongst such a young and immature group of freshmen. They were trying to find themselves by picking their social groups. Of course, I did not, for sure, fit into any of my now classmates’ social groups at that time, but later on I did. I had no idea of the kind of difficulty I would have to face once in high school.

I classified my freshmen year as my “Losing Season.” There was little or no encouragement from anyone, except for Roy, saying: “You can do this! Hang in there “Skeeter!” I concluded that there was no encouragement from anyone because no one could have known just how difficult this was for me.

Even though, at the time I could not understand why my scholastic and personal life was so different from others, I knew one thing for sure. I was not going to let anything or anyone stop me from finishing high school.
I wanted to go to college and mom wanted me to go to college. I would pray to God that when I grew up and had children that they would not be raised in a fractured environment. They would be raised by me and I would make sure that they had nice things and a chance to attend any college or university of their choice.

By no means am I saying that mom did not do an outstanding job in taking care of us with what she had to work with, because she did do an exceptional job. She was a mother and a saint in all of her children’s eyes and many others.

Even the game that I had grown to love so much over the years, and which had caused me to spend countless hours in the blazing hot sun working so hard to improve it, I now thought had started to fail me. Coach Woolfolk’s starting five were: Adam; Dee; Chatman; Roy; and Melvin. To break into that lineup I had to be just as good as or better than my mentors. I had to accept that these five were the best athletes on the team and gave the Montgomery Wolverines their best chance to win for now. I was satisfied with that because my mentors had taught me, as well as showed me, that team play is much better than individual play. And that’s why it was called the “A TEAM”– whether it was a basketball team, a baseball team or a football team. They all symbolize TEAM spirit and togetherness. I hated that it was so! But it was so, and I sat and cheered for them, even going so far as sharing my new Converse gym shoes (shoes that I had worked so hard for all summer to buy for the start of the new season). All of this to show TEAM spirit and togetherness!

After all that preparation, anticipation and watching every move my mentors and others would make to free themselves up for a shot, or draw another defensive player to themselves so a teammate would have an open shot, I would go outside on the court and try to duplicate all their moves.
I believed that even though I was a freshman I would be ready to step in and play. After all, I was the same age as some of them, just not in the same grade. But I still had to sit and watch them play. I wondered what other surprises life might have in store for me.

Maybe those teachers and other individuals were right, that I would never amount to anything other than being another sharecropper.

Even though I was not a starter for The Montgomery High School Wolverines, I was still on the team; and with Chatman and Dee being seniors, there was a chance that I could fill one of their spots. Just by being on the team, I could see that coach Woolfolk had some confidence in my basketball skills. I would use our warm-up drills before each game to showcase my jumping, shooting and ball control abilities. The dunking of the basketball we would do from the figure eight lay-up drills would really get the crowd going.

The girls would be singing and dancing, shouting out their cheers and slogans. The football players would be pounding and stomping their feet on the bleachers while coach Woolfolk would be walking the sideline with this look on his face of: “Boy you better not ---- this up.” Demon, the score clock operator, would be standing on top of the scorer table talking trash. I just sat there, waited for my turn and took in all I could to prepare for my chance that would come soon.

The starters and upper classmen all had girl friends; some were dating seriously and planned on getting married after graduation. I had some close friends who were girls. I would hangout with them at school during lunch or in study hall or during P.E. classes.

One of my best friends then was Elnora, the star player for the girls’ team, the Montgomery Wolverines. She could single handedly take a game over and lead her team to a victory.
During my sophomore year, fall of 1965, some local, small, segregated middle schools (Midnight, and Silver City) were rezoned so those students had to attend Montgomery High School. That made us one of the powerhouse schools in our conference, and I was the starting center in basketball, the starting wide receiver on the football team and the first baseman on the baseball team. It seemed at last that all the hard work had started to pay off. We were now winning games and competing for championships that no one but us thought we could do. School was now good both scholastically and personally. I had great friends and teammates. What more could I ask for, right?

I felt that each should be openly accepted, not just the athletes or jocks. I must have thought that I was living in some kind of mystical cocoon to think that could happen. I failed to realize, dating back further than my brothers’ and Boy Blue’s days to that present time, that when it came to rivalry, humans are creatures of habit. This fierce competition involved more than defending ones’ scholastics ability; it involved defending one’s integrity of manhood and womanhood. With the arrival of all the new boys and girls, it was like the California’s gold rush; everyone was staking their claim and was willing to go to any measure to protect it. After a couple of months, I thought that things had cooled down and the gold rush was over, and I began to befriend some of the transfer students, both guys and girls.

Later, I and my friend Robert, the starting fullback on the football team, were the first ones to openly cross the line and date girls who transferred in from Midnight or Silver City. This really caused a problem for me because several of my closest friends from the football team were not very happy with me as well as some of the girls. There had already been some encompassment of both trash talking and physical posturing between them and the guys from Montgomery High School and those who transferred in from Midnight and Silver City.
This led to a clash, in which I did not take sides. I only tried to stop it before it escalated. I had friends on both sides of that insidious incident. It came to blows between me and a very close friend from the football team that next morning. As I was getting off Big Yellow, he walked up to me and punched me in the chest. At the same time as I went after him, several of the teachers were coming out to supervise the arrival of students and defuse the situation. Cooler heads did prevail that day and continued to progress due to a stern lecture in regards to not playing sports by coach Woolfolk, and by our English and Math instructor in regards to not graduating if this subtle conflict did not cease.

The summer of 1966, I spent in Chicago, Illinois, with my mentor and brother, Sim, and his family. I was glad to be out of Mississippi and not working in those damn hot cotton and soybean fields. I was saddened to leave my mother, two brothers, new girlfriend (Wilma), my close platonic friend and others behind, even if it was only for a couple of months. Wilma was a very beautiful and lovely girl whom I had planned to have a serious relationship with once I returned from my trip to Chicago.

From the arrival of our Greyhound bus on that hot, sunny Saturday afternoon in mid June, 1966, I found Chicago to be frightening and full of surprising and overwhelming occurrences.

Within approximately a one hour span of time, between the Greyhound bus arrival at the Chicago station and the drive to my brother Sim’s apartment, I had seen the good, bad and ugly of Chicago’s humanity. Before the Greyhound bus had even entered the terminal, I saw what seemed like thousands of people going to and fro and buildings that appeared to touch the sky!
Once inside the Greyhound bus station, I saw the same kind of overwhelming crowd of people going to and from the bus terminals looking for or leaving loved ones or cabs to take them to their destinations.

In Sim’s effort to exit the Greyhound bus station parking lot, I saw firsthand the above stages of humanity in action – , with no considerations given to other drivers in their attempt to exit the parking lot. It was an overwhelming display of bad temper and selfness as each driver tried to carve their way into traffic. Sim’s apartment was on the far West of the Chicago which seemed to take hours to reach.

As he maneuvered through traffic, we were listening to a song on the radio that I wasn’t familiar with. In Mississippi, during that time, the “Blues” or Rock and Roll were the music of choice. It was the melancholy style, of American Negro origin, that had hit the airways in Chicago starting in 1947, the year I was born. The small recording studio called “Chess Records,” on the South side of Chicago, recorded legendary blues artists like Muddy Waters, Little Walter, “Howlin” Wolf, and Miss Etta James.

It eventually gave birth to rock and roll in 1955 with Chuck Berry and Songwriter, Willie Dixon, who wrote of sex, violence, race, and rock and roll in 1950’s Chicago. However, on that hot, sunny Saturday afternoon in mid June, 1966, Young Rascal’s hits, "Good Loving" and "Groovin' On A Sunday Afternoon," were the number one songs being played on Chicago radio stations as we drove to my brother’s apartment.

The drive to my brother’s apartment from the greyhound bus station was filled with great adventure and intrigue. Seeing for the first time how Chicagoans reacted to current incidents or events was an education in itself.
For example, on Madison Avenue I saw an elderly gentleman slumped over the steering wheel of his car which had veered to the right and plowed into a department store showcase window.

His foot must have still been on the accelerator because the engine was roaring loud and the rear wheel was spinning with smoke coming from it. Only a few passers-by seemed to care or be concerned about what had caused this elderly gentleman to drive his car into that department window showcase. Other drivers on his side of the street were blowing their horns in an effort to maintain the continuous flowing of traffic with little concern for the safety of the elderly gentlemen or those who were trying to help him.

Within twenty six blocks of downtown Chicago’s miracle mile of Michigan Avenue, lined with all its’ magnificent department stores, we were in the heart of her ghetto. I saw an unbelievable ugliness, lack of concern for an infinite, transgression, and deceitful way of life within that segregated society.

Masquerading to be something different from what it really is, the ghetto is another form of enslavement tactics, like the ones experienced with the Deep South’s scheme, shame, and low to no wages of sharecropping. Their ghetto’s disguises represent a more contemporary style to enslavement of minorities, especially black males, even today. Her disguises have continued to conceal the importance of an education to her victims, starting at an early age. Through the means of misconception, they are still led to believe that their fame can still be achieved by craftiness. What a delusional state of mind she has placed them in to believe that that is enough to succeed in life without an education.
I had experienced poverty in the South and heard of the Chicago’s ghettos. The talk of them had not done them justice; they were the most appalling, polluted and repulsive ways of living I had ever seen. Initially, I could not understand why anyone would want to live in an environment or communities like these where “Mother ghetto” would frequency reach out and enslave her captive with drugs, sex, violence and street gang warfare regardless of race, color, creed, gender or age.

Drugs were being sold on every street corner. Young girls and ladies were prostituting themselves for the price of a heroin and or cocaine fix. Pimps were using sophisticated methods of false positive influences of love, drugs and being a father image to control their prostitute ring. These prostitutes were everywhere, flashing body parts, making lewd, salacious and suggestive innuendos to get your attention. Sim turned to me and said: “I just wanted to show you this and you are not to ever return to this part of Chicago except passing through without stopping as we are doing now.”

So, for the remainder of that summer, I did not go back into that part of Chicago. Most of my time was spent working in a hot steel mill and trying to save some money for the upcoming school year for clothes and school supplies. Occasionally, I went to movies, hung out with my platonic girl friend and visited some of my other relatives. Some would say that my initial visit to Chicago lacked excitement, but that is not so. Even with that hard, backbreaking work of the steel mill, I still had a great educational experience that summer.

My junior year, 1966–67, would turn out to be one of my best years in basketball. We won the Delta Conference Championship with Frank, Ore, Robert, Skip and me.
We were one game away from the state tournament and we lost it; a heart breaker by one point on the last shot. To this day, I blame myself for the loss. I made the turnover that gave them the ball, caused Ore to foul, and gave them the two free throws that won the game.

My junior year ended somewhat like the end of that basketball year. Mom finally got tired of the treatment she was receiving from her latest husband. He had already run his oldest son, my sister, and his daughter away. There was continuous fighting between him and his second oldest son. I stayed away from that house as much as possible and just did what needed to be done to keep problems away from mom.

One day, Mom came to me and said that she was making arrangements for me, my two younger brothers, Jessie and James, and herself to move to Chicago, Illinois. She asked if I wanted to go with her or move back to Anchor Curve to live with an aunt to finish my last year of school. I chose to move back to Anchor Curve. Mom had saved up some money and purchased three tickets to Chicago. One hot summer day, when the men were working the fields and her husband left for the day, she took my brothers, Jessie and James, with just the clothes on their backs and took the bus to Chicago.

That was the last of Mississippi and those damn cotton fields for them, and I never wanted to her come back to Mississippi, even to my graduation from high school. That’s just how bad I wanted her and my two brothers out of Mississippi.

Not knowing what life had in store for them, I was still happy to have them out of Mississippi. That happiness was destroyed with something called unemployment and welfare, due to my mother’s lack of education and work skills. They learned what I had learned that prior summer: what the words poor and ghetto meant; they were in the middle of it!
Living on the west side of Chicago was as different from living in Mississippi, as night and day. Chicago terrified Mom, James and Jessie. For instance, James and Jessie were chased to and from school each day by delinquents who wanted them to join their street gang. Mom had to endure the shame of being a welfare recipient and working in a somewhat dubious soul food restaurant’s sizzling, hot kitchen as a cook.

For them, this was more terrifying than working the cotton fields while fighting off snakes, which had sought the shelter underneath the cool cotton. They were now fighting for their lives just like all the others who had been enslaved to the iniquities method that mother Chicago had to offer in her insidious but somewhat subtle way of continued existence.

Now living back at Anchor Curve during my senior year, I didn’t have much time for anything except school and sports. If you recall, Montgomery High School is located in the town of Louise, four miles from Anchor Curve. After each game, my first priority was to grab the first ride going by my house.

As much as I wanted to hang out with the guys and my girlfriend, Wilma, after the games and enjoy sometime, I didn’t because Coach Woolfolk, who lived in Yazoo City, was that first ride. He would drop me off at my aunt’s home in Anchor Curve on his way home to Yazoo City. This was a time when safety came before anything else, and to hang around after the games without a sure ride home would have been very dangerous.

Like the danger previous young, black males faced who refused to work for low wages, or walk around with their heads hang low, buried in the ground like Ostriches, they wanted to be shown respect! I was at that age that most young, black males were sent to live with relatives to get them out of harm’s way.
Not working for low wages, looking a white man in the eyes and telling him what you thought, even if it was not offensive, was the kind of behavior could, and did, lead to serious repercussions. And God forbid it to be a white woman. Even if you contemplated such an idea there would be serious repercussions. The KKK has a reputation of inflicting dangerous and deadly harm upon those who bucked or questioned their diplomatic system of power and control.

Finally high school graduation. That night was filled with mixed emotions of joy, dismal and surprise. I was happy to be “done” with high school, saddened to be leaving my friends and girlfriend, and in shock that I was being recognized for something other than my athletic abilities by being honored with a Citizenship Award. After the conclusion of the ceremony and once the graduates had marched outside and began intermingling within our social groups, I let out a roar of relief and astonishment that could be heard all over the school grounds, saying, “Yes, I am done. Thank God I am done.” But the joy was short lived because I had not received any offers to attend a local college or university. What was I to do?

I was waiting to hear from coach Woolfolk to see if some local junior colleges or a university was interested in me because there were no letters of intent, as there were for some, mostly the guys and girls from the affluent families whose grades were probably better than mine. Trying to figure all this out by myself really began to make me doubt that I would ever be able to attend a college or university. How could I earn enough money for college if I did not receive some kind of scholarship or aide? There were no school counselors to help me with these dilemmas. What was I to do? Stay and work in the damn cotton and bean fields of Anchor Curve and be just another sharecropper, or try and return to Chicago to be with mom and my two brothers? I couldn’t even purchase a ticket.
So, as I was sitting outside on the front porch of my aunt’s home, trying to keep cool on one of those hot steamy summers days in mid June, I was approached by the plantation owner, Mr. Lawrence Macklin. He asked me if I would work for him, driving one of his tractors to do some cultivation. I told him “yes” because I needed the money. So, he asked me when I could start. I said, “Tomorrow,” and asked about the hourly rate. He said, Thirty ($.30) cents per hour,” and I asked him if he thought that I was a damn fool! He immediately got in his truck and drove off. That evening, when my uncle came home from driving tractor, he asked me what I said to Mr. Lawrence, because Lawrence had asked my uncle what was wrong with me! So I explained to my uncle and aunt just what he transpired between us. They must have called mom and coach because, after a couple of days I was ushered out of Anchor Curve in route to Oakland, California for the summer. This was done for my safety.

After spending over a year in California, Coach arranged for Frank and me to attend Natchez Junior College in Natchez, Mississippi. As we approached campus by taxicab, we could see the college off in the distance, on a steep hill. It looked more like an old, run-down army post than a junior college. Once at Natchez Junior college, some of the strangest things started to occur.

Our first night, I got very little sleep because I thought someone or thing was watching me. The next morning during orientation and enrollment, there were two professors. One was discussing the dose of medication that he had received from the other one. In his attempt to sign the enrollment application, his hand was trembling so bad that he could not sign them.
For the next couple of days, we tried to adjust to our new surroundings and way of life, but something just wasn’t right with that place. Nothing seemed to say: “Stay!” from the other students and professors. The food and sleeping arrangements of this army post atmosphere didn’t help any either. It was like there was something saying to us, “This is not the place for you. Leave now before it’s too late!” It was as if our sixth sense wanted us to move on. After only one week, and without making a friend or seeing the coach, we decided to end our relationship with Natchez Junior College!

I was very blessed that when I arrived back at Anchor Curve that coach was able to get a scholarship to Coahoma Junior College in Clarksdale, Mississippi. I could not afford the tuition nor could my mother or any family members. After graduating from Coahoma Junior College in 1971, I returned back to Chicago to be with my mom. Her health had started to fall. She was unable to work due to the many years she had slaved in those dubious soul food restaurants, sizzling hot kitchens, and cotton fields, cooking and caring for us and others. From all of that, she had only the shame of being a welfare recipient. For the next four years, I worked odd jobs, from factories to a liquor store, to help take care of her with help from my sister.

Also, during this time I was able to continue to work on improving my basketball skills. I worked night and weekend to leave time for the basketball summer leagues. They were sponsored by: Boys and Girls Clubs; the Chicago Catholic Youth Organizations; and local businesses.
Some of Chicago’s greatest professionals, university, college, and playground legends would all emerge to play in the leagues, including:

- NBA’s Chicago Bulls–Bob Butterbean Love, Howard Porter, and Norm Van Lier
- NBA Official – Danny Crawford
- DePaul University & NBA– Mark Aguirre and Terry Cummings
- Aurora College & NBA – Mickey Johnson
- Aurora College – Edward Bonner and Joe Johnson
- Playground legends: Kalub Glover, Fuzzy O’Neal, Tom Harris, Robert Scott, Paul, Steve, Blue, Money

For me, this was an education in its self. I also learned why so many people had chosen to live in this infinite, immoral society that was filled transgression and deceitful ways of life. Most were tried, beaten down by life and had lost all hope of ever being able to achieve anything other than a day to day living and not much more than that. These fallen soles had been deprived of an early educational opportunity, which has perpetuated this kind of lifestyle for more than four generations, to obtain a better quality of life.

They were victimized of a better quality of life by their employer who thirst of greed and pride, as did the enslavement tactics scheme of low too no wages with sharecropping. These ghetto disguises represent a more fashionable style of enslavement that the uneducated, especially black minority males, need to comprehend.

The ghetto’s disguises continue to conceal the imperativeness of an education, through attempting to camouflage just how important an education is to one’s success. If this was not so, then the ironic questions are: why did slave owners only incarcerate the uneducated and prohibit them from being educated?
Why our government says that they want to educate more minorities but aren’t building better schools and libraries in our inner cities or their ghettos? Do they know that education means power? Or that education can develop dangerous minds of competitiveness vs. that craftiness can develop cunning and shrewd minds which our justice system is full off? They wanted their captives to remain powerless and easy to control.

In September 1975, I left behind the odd jobs of a factory and liquor store retail worker and enrolled in Aurora College in Aurora, Illinois. With the credits at Coahoma Junior College, I entered as a second term sophomore.

I fell in love with the small, quiet, pleasant surroundings of this impeccable cosmetic campus. There, I met instructors who did not care if you were good at sports. At first, I did not apply myself academically.

I found myself caught up in the fun times of college life with alcohol and drugs. With the aid of a couple, the veteran players used them as a tactic to rid themselves of competition, and I fell for it “hook line and sinker” that first semester. Even though I still went to class, I wasn’t prepared and that eventually lead to me being placed on academic probation. To top that off, coach had a problem with the only pants I owned because they were dungarees (blue denim or blue jeans) and they didn’t fit his dress code. He did not like my street style of aggressive run and shoot basketball. His players could only wear dress pants or khakis and play a slow style of basketball. That first year, I was not able to travel with the team for those reasons.
I truly believed I was on the way to a career in professional basketball. Then, a knee injury changed my whole life plan. Now knowing what the educational standards were, I was in another society which had rules and regulations which I had to adapt to. Now there was no other opportunity available but to quit and get some factory job or to try to get my degree. I chose the latter option. Lack of study in my early college years made it extremely difficult to catch up. But by really applying myself, and with the help of tutors and mentors, I was finally able to graduate from that institution in 1978 with a degree in Criminal Justice.

At Aurora College, I learned how to channel my energy levels, to enjoy life, to accept what life had to offer, to learn to be a team player in all areas of life and not just in sports, and to not let physical injuries or a poor early academic foundations stop me from pursuing an education.

In 1979, this degree led to a counseling job at Illinois Youth Center (IYC) in Saint Charles, where I spent the next ten and a half years. During my employment at I.Y.C. in St. Charles, Illinois, I severed as the Chairperson of Youths Grievance and Adjustment Committee as well as a crisis prevention and intervention counselor. As the Chairperson of the Youths Grievance, which I also enjoyed, I could make recommendations for youths to receive the proper counseling and medication when needed, as well as reimbursement for lost or stolen property. And as the Chairperson of the Adjustment Committee, I adjusted an inmate’s stay in Corrections according to his behavior. There were numerous times I had to extend an inmate’s stay in the Department due to negative behavior displayed because they were not properly supervised.
Even though that supervisor(s) was disciplined by the administration, we still held the youth accountable for his actions.

After working at the Department Of Corrections for 11 years, I needed a change and resigned. During this time, I had the opportunity to reevaluate my goals and opted for a career change to another type of counseling. That led me to a part-time position at Open Door Clinic, where I counseled individuals who either had or were suspected of having a sexually transmitted disease, including HIV and AIDS, for a couple of years.

Eventually, a beautiful woman, “Jean,” agreed to marry me, after a two year, long distance relationship involving shuttling back and forth between Aurora, Illinois and Madison, Wisconsin, where Mom was now living in the great of our sister, Lueretha. The medical care at the University of Wisconsin’s Cardiovascular Department was better for mom.

Jean and I were married on October 21st, 1989. Mom died on October 23rd, 1989.

Shortly thereafter, we moved to Madison, WI. And since then, God has blessed us with two wonderful children, Nicci and Marshall.

During our time in Madison, I first worked as a Drug Counselor for a Detoxification Center called “Tellurian.” After about a year, I was recruited to become the Program Director of an after school youth program called: “Project Bootstrap.”

In July of 1996, a traditional, youth residential program located in a rural area of north central Wisconsin, needed a Multicultural Director, and I applied for the position. Jean and I visited the program and thought it offered a good opportunity for me to utilize my skills and experience in counseling and mentoring delinquent and at-risk youth. I accepted the job, despite some misgivings as to what might lie ahead.
While living in this small town would have been more convenient, we decided that Wausau would be a better place to live. Among many other positive attributes, we chose Wausau because of the good schools, the size, beauty and vibrancy of the city.

But there were a few other underlying factors as well. I’ve had some unpleasant experiences in small, rural communities. My observations are that some individuals who choose that lifestyle aren’t exactly the type of people you’d see in a Norman Rockwell painting. If these individuals had their way, they’d replace the town’s “Welcome” signs with “Keep Out!” signs! And if you’re an interracial couple, you’d better not even ask for directions out of town. It is ridiculous to think that the majority of small town folks fit into this stereotype. It’s probably very few. But I’ve learned to be wary.

Unfortunately, this type of belligerent: “You don’t belong here!” attitude eventually began to surface at my new workplace. The administration did their best to control the situation, but it nonetheless continued. It seemed as though some people just weren’t ready to accept minorities in a Supervisory role, let alone make any changes.

After about three years of commuting back and forth from Wausau, and facing what seemed to be an ongoing undercurrent of workplace harassment, it was time to make a decision: Should I stay, or go?

One day, after praying with one of the therapists and talking with one of the teachers, they assured me that God could use my talents anywhere as long as I was working to better His Kingdom. Therefore, I resigned and relied on my Christian faith (“We live by faith, not by sight” 2 Corinthians 5:7) to find other work where I could help young people.

While taking on a variety of temporary jobs, I began to work on developing a new, at-risk youth educational and mentoring program which I eventually called Family Advocacy Mentoring, Inc. (“FAM”).
FAM was a small, *after-school*, private, non-profit 501(c) 3. FAM served as a bilingual, child advocacy organization, working within the Wausau School District.

After starting with just two students, I am happy to report that FAM was a proven success! The viability of the concept could be seen in the eyes, enthusiasm and improved grades of more than 175 participants.

FAM provided struggling students with a safe, friendly, encouraging environment where they received the help needed to grow academically and socially. FAM’s scope also included programs designed to help strengthen family beliefs, standards and values. FAM continued to grow and help young people of all races, faiths and circumstances to become healthy, productive adults for eight years. Though the program is currently in hiatus due to funding issues, my goal is to reactivate at some point.

In my zigzag journey, from life as a dirt poor southern black child – to life on the tough streets of Chicago – to college life – to life in Wausau (the city my family and I have come to think of as home), I have experienced both the evils of poverty and prejudice; and the unconditional love and kindness of my family and others who have unselfishly helped me grow and succeed.

For the latter, I remain eternally grateful. Most importantly, I have experienced God’s blessing and strength. And I truly believe that without my faith in Him, none of this would have been possible.
Chapter IV
Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to reveal the perseverance, the personal attitude and feeling of former sharecroppers’ perceptions of sharecropping in the Deep South of Mississippi. Dialogue of older siblings, an uncle, and lifetime and community friends helped to establish a profile of the formative years of a sharecropper’s progeny. Qualitative data was collected during indebt dialoguing with respondent ranging in age from 65 to 78. Questions were asked of each respondent relating to early learning, working conditions, living single in a parent household, self-esteem, and working condition. All dialoguing were transcribed exactly as expressed by the respondents. Key words were identified revealing several common themes.

Results of the dialoguing were categorized and reviewed for comparison of similarities and differences. Findings of the demographic study will be first followed by the findings of the dialogues.

Demographic Interviewers

The demographic interviews make information available that is related to my ancestors’ captures, enslavement, passage, forbidden education, alleged freedom and condition of marital status, as well as birth place. This data was used to create a generational profile for each.

The ages of the respondents ranged from 60 to 78. Black was the race of the seven respondents. Educational back ground of the respondents varied from no school, to grade school, to high school, to college graduate, and to a master’s degree.
Four respondents are retried; one operates a daycare center and is a foster parent, one works for Archives and Records Services Division Jackson, Mississippi and one works for the Mississippi State Department of Health. All the respondents are divorced and have two or more children, and five to more grand children. Of the eight respondents, three resided in Madison, Wisconsin; one in Greenville, Mississippi; two in Jackson, Mississippi; and one in Chicago, Illinois. Of the eight respondents, five grew up in blighted cotton fields of an unincorporated community, Anchor Curve, four miles southeast of the small town Louise, Mississippi, population of 500. One lives in Greenville, Mississippi, population 35,764; one in Jackson, Mississippi, population 173,861; and one in Chicago, Illinois, population 2,853,114.

**Themes**

The themes provided information related to the following era in time of sharecropping 1) Faces of Child Labor and shortened formative school years 2) Modern child slavery in America 3) Single parent and 4) Speaking a different vernacular.

**Sharecropping**

These sharecroppers all describe themselves to be God fearing people. To live that way we must be disciplined to God’s rules as a man or woman is disciplined to being in the military. If not so, would they have made it through the hard times they endured in the blighted cotton fields of Mississippi?

These main imagery themes for this study include child labor, that encompass shortened formative school years, single parent homes, socioeconomic status and speaking a different vernacular. Researchers have revealed that the schemes of traditional slavery and sharecropping are similar to those held by present day slavery owners.
Perseverance

**Themes:**

**Child Labor and Shortened formative school years**

According to Schlesinger (1933), “in 1878 the South was forced by the federal government to create public school systems to help educate freed slaves as well as the many poor white children who had little more than a passing acquaintance with formal education. In rural areas, where children still worked in the family fields, the school year was considerably shorter than that of students pouring into America's growing big cities (p. 160)

I believe that, in every child who is born, no matter what their circumstances, and no matter who are their parent or parents, the potential of the human race is born again: And in him or her, too, once more, and of each of us, our terrific responsibility toward human life; toward the utmost idea of goodness can be achieved!

As I research this subtle epidemic of child labor in the context of our American Labor Day Holiday, or the International Day of Labor, otherwise known as May Day, my mind drifts back to images of the Industrial revolution of the 18th Century to children toiling in factories and mines in the UK and US. However, the roots of child labor go much deeper and its reach spreads far and wide across the globe. However, despite its outrage, laws and social advancements of child labor continue to plague our global society. The face of child labor often looks sickeningly similar to the haunting images of the past slavery and sharecropping. Children
as young as six could be widely employed and were subjected to merciless exploitation under working conditions that amounted to virtual slavery in its most oppressive forms. They were not only worked to exhaustion, they were beaten, poorly fed and cared for, and paid meager wages. Many were driven to early alcoholism, cancer and other degradations, and in not insignificant numbers even driven to early death, as listed below.

Hundreds of thousands of children work as hired labor in America’s fields and orchards. These children are among the least protected of all working children. The Children in the Fields campaign has shown that the myth of the agrarian idyll does not extend to the children of America’s migrant and seasonal farm workers.

Mines (1993) stated that child labor has long been a feature of American agriculture. It is estimated that from 200,000 to 800,000 children and adolescents continue to work in agriculture today. This process describes the economic factors contributing to the presence of children in fields alongside their parents and the impact of this labor on their health and educational progress.

**Musculoskeletal Injuries**

As stated by Vela Acosta and Lee (2001), “Farm workers are often bent over in the fields 8 to 12 hours a day, work often involves constant bending over, carrying heavy items and repetitive motions during long work hours, which contribute to musculoskeletal injuries. Since
children are still developing physically, their exertion often places a greater stress on their bodies, with serious long-term consequences.

Adolescents also undergo growth spurts, which may decrease flexibility and increase their susceptibility to a variety of musculoskeletal injuries, such as bursitis, tendonitis, sprains, and carpal tunnel syndrome (p.11).”

**Environmental Conditions and Sanitation**

According to Brophy (2007) “farm labor is often carried out in excruciating weather conditions that add an extra burden to the grueling tasks that farm workers perform. Farm workers regularly work for 10 to 12 hours a day in 100-degree temperatures under a blistering sun. These circumstances can lead to sunstroke, skin cancer, heat exhaustion, dehydration, and other sun and heat-related illnesses. No national statistics on the number of heat-related farm worker fatalities are available, but during the summer of 2005, six farm workers died in heat-related incidents in California and three others died in North Carolina. And the major cancer studies going on in North America are focusing specifically on farms in the rural states, because there has been this seemingly large increase in cancer in this normally healthy population (p.10).”

**Modern Child Slavery in America**

According to Sacerdote (2005): “On certain basic outcome measures, (namely literacy, schooling, and occupation), the descendants of slaves caught up with the descendants of free blacks within two generations.” This statement is particularly true when identifying the effects of slave status by comparing descendants of free blacks and slaves who reside outside of the South. If you instead measure the progress of free blacks and slaves (and their descendants) relative to whites born in the same regions, then you find partial but not complete convergence.
Because income and wealth are not observed directly, and years of schooling are not observed until 1940, the results must be interpreted as suggesting a general pattern rather than as the definitive answer on all relevant economic outcomes. By 1920, the grandchildren of slaves had roughly the same literacy rate as the grandchildren of free blacks. The grandchildren of slaves also had a similar probability of being in school and attended school for a similar number of months.

The 1940 Census showed that former slaves received approximately 3.2 fewer years of education than free blacks. However, blacks born immediately after the Civil War saw a smaller gap of 2.6 years. Controlling for current region reduces the gap to 1.6 years.

As a whole, the results suggest that the direct effects of slavery, per se, on education and income, may have been greatly diminished or even eliminated within two generations. Following the Civil War, blacks faced a heavy burden from at least three sources: (1) the lasting direct effects of slavery, which had prevented the majority of blacks in the United States from accumulating human or physical capital, (2) the direct effects of race, meaning that blacks lived in a society built around racist institutions which were particularly racist in the South, and (3) the effects of living in the South, which was a poor region that became more poor in relative and absolute terms after the war. Sacerdote has attempted to isolate the magnitude of the first effect from the second two, which have already been studied extensively by historians and economists.

Sacerdote also conclude that by 1920, an individual person's family history of slavery was not so much the key handicap as was the more general racism directed at all blacks and the concentration of blacks in the poorest region. The past history of slavery undoubtedly shaped institutions and attitudes in the United States.
But these broad effects of slavery appear to have affected all blacks equally, not just the actual descendants of slaves.

This convergence is consistent with the high degree of social mobility implied by modern estimates of parent-child income and education correlations. When you regress a son's socioeconomic status (SES) on father's and grandfather's SES, Sacerdote found that father's SES has a coefficient, but grandfather's SES only matters a small amount on controlling for the father's outcome. This is evidence of strong father son correlations which decay rapidly with each successive generation.

If there is convergence, what is the cause? For literacy, one natural explanation would be the rise of public schools and the passage of mandatory schooling laws. Today's high mobility of income and wealth may also be driven in part by public schools and the availability of high-quality public universities, and in part by other great equalizers like the Internet. High social mobility in postbellum America, or in the modern OECD, need not be an inevitable outcome that is independent of government institutions. Social activism could be just as important, or more important, than other market forces in creating convergence.

A critical topic for future research is whether or not convergence within two generations is a common phenomenon observed after social barriers between groups are removed. For example, Irish immigrants who arrived in the U.S. during the nineteenth century arrived with low financial and human capital. How many generations passed before the Irish achieved the socioeconomic status of earlier groups? And how much of the convergence took place before versus after the overt discrimination in the labor market against the Irish abated? This same question can be asked about virtually any immigrant group: Eastern European Jews, Mexicans, Cubans, and so on.
This convergence question has particular relevance for the U.S. in view of the twentieth century's dismantling of racial barriers in access to schooling and jobs. A natural extension of this paper would be to attempt to tie these results to the modern literature on black-white wage and education differentials. If political changes in the 1960s and 1970s freed black workers from institutionalized discrimination, then perhaps black-white convergence might occur within one or two generations from today. If we do not see this convergence, we must ask how far behind schedule we are, and examine the size of the remaining barriers that separate black Americans and all other Americans (p217-234, 18p).”

Alex-Assensoh and Yvette M (2009) state, “that over the last four decades, more African immigrants (or continental Africans) have voluntarily immigrated to America than were reportedly shipped to America through the slave trade. As continental Africans are making their homes in American cities, towns and rural communities, they are slowly changing the dynamics of American residential (Massey, Mooney, Torres, 2007; Schmidt, Alex-Assensoh, Aoki and Hero, 2010), cultural and economic life (Stoller 2002), and calling into question the very meaning of the terms "Black" and "African-American". Yet, when it comes to American politics, the presence of voluntary African immigrants is largely overlooked, and it is assumed that Black political behavior in America reflects unified, homogenous and distinctive racialized perspectives based on old common ancestry, despite the large waves of African immigrants with diverse ethnic, national, cultural, and ideological differences.

The analysis demonstrates the emergence of multiple black ethnic identities, growing socioeconomic advantage of African immigrants over African-Americans as well as Latinos, and varied forms of political socialization as a result of vastly different associational and religious networks. Together, these trends signal the possible emergence of a new Black Politics that is more transnational and much less distinctive than in previous decades, with profound implications for traditional views, black political beliefs, and behavior within the context of American racial politics (pp. 89-124, 35p.).”

According to Lendman (2009), “The International Labor Organization (ILO) defines forced child labor as… “All forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom and forced or compulsory labor, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict:

- the use, procuring or offering of a child for prostitution, for the production of pornography or for pornographic performances…
- the use, procuring or offering of a child for illicit activities, in particular for the production and trafficking of drugs as defined in the relevant international treaties and work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children…
- the Free the Slaves. Net’s definition is being “forced to work without pay under threat of violence and unable to walk away.” It reports…
- an estimated 27 million people are enslaved globally, more than at any other time previously

Thousands annually trafficked in America in over 90 cities; around 17,000 by some estimates and up to 50,000 according to the CIA, either from abroad or affecting US citizens or residents as forced labor or sexual servitude.
The global market value is over $9.5 billion annually, according to Mark Taylor, senior coordinator for the State Department’s Office to Monitor:

- Victims are often women and children…
- The majority are in India and African countries…
- Slavery is illegal but happens “everywhere…”
- Slaves work in agriculture, homes, mines, restaurants, brothels, or wherever traffickers can employ them; they’re cheap, plentiful, disposable, and replaceable…
- $90 is the average cost of a human slave around the world” compared to the 1850 $40,000 equivalent in today’s dollars…
- common terminology includes debt bondage, bonded labor, attached labor, restavec (or de facto bondage for Haitian children sent to households of strangers), forced labor, indentured servitude, and human trafficking…
- explosive population growth, mostly to urban centers without safety net or job security protections, facilitates the practice and
- government corruption, lack of monitoring, and indifference does as well (pp. 1-5).”

“THE BURDEN OF FARM WORK OFTEN HAS NEGATIVE…

According to Hess (2007), “Hundreds of thousands of children work as hired labor in America’s fields and orchards. These children are among the least protected of all working children. The Children in the Fields campaign has shown that the myth of the agrarian idyll does not extend to the children of America’s migrant and seasonal farm workers (p.4).”

Doricela and Hess (2006) “started at the age of 12 girl work in orchards to provide extra income for her family. When that was not enough, she dropped out of school and took two jobs to help support her single mom and five siblings (p. 13).”
According to Farm workers, “child farm workers may not attend school regularly and often fall behind in their studies due to long work hours. These children have lower school enrollment rates than any other group in the United States. Of those who do enroll… at least 45 percent of them never complete high school. Student Action with Farm workers (SAF) argues that closer to 60 percent of migrant students drop out of school. In some farm worker communities, four out of five migrant children do not graduate.

In 2000, Human Rights Watch interviewed dozens of child farm workers, and all of them reported having dropped out of school or not passing a grade at least once. Seventh child farm workers reported that they may attend three to five different schools per year as they migrate within the United States, with their families. Many farm worker families migrate from the Rio Grande Valley to the Midwest and West, while others leave Florida for states throughout the Southeast, Northeast, and Midwest. This mobility disrupts schoolwork, inhibits social integration, and causes migrant children to miss class and experience shortened formative school years (pp. 11 & 48).”

While the images of children picking cotton in the Deep South seem to have faded from American fields, children in Uzbekistan (Central Asia) have taken over in mirror images in the cotton fields across that country.
Children, who are forced from school to provide cheap or free labor, may have very well worked to ensure that your new T-shirt came at the cost you couldn’t resist, as you stroll through the racks of endless options on your last shopping trips.

According to Belli (2007), “Conventional Cotton is taking a Heavy Toll on the Planet, but the Organic Market is growing (pp 32-33).”

“When a seven–year–old Uzbek girl gets up in the morning, she heads not to school but to the cotton fields. She carries a plastic water bottle filled with pesticides. The June days in Uzbekistan are muggy and hot, as she douses the plants, the chemicals burn her skin (pp 32-33).”

Many mornings, in the 1960’s, in the Deep South of Mississippi, as I headed to the cotton fields instead of school, I was spread with a pesticide, Dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane by (DDT), by crop dusters while working the cotton, which contained an odor that burned my eyes and face.

“In September, she will return to these fields, missing school for up to three months while moving between the rows of cotton, stooped over and picking furiously to try to meet her daily quota between 20 and 100 pounds per day (pp 32-33).” Also, like the children of Uzbekistan today, I too had to endure the furious ritual of picking cotton from September to late November and fill a quota. As I grew older my daily quota grew; by age seventeen it had risen to 200–250 pounds per day.
If I didn’t meet the owner’s standards for filling my daily quota, I would most surely receive a consequence of being spanked. At night, after working under such inhumane conditions, at the end of those enduring ten hours days I did have a family to go home to and food to eat.

“In Uzbekistan at night, the children recruited to pick cotton near where they live are able to return home to their families in the evenings. But older children, and those conscripted to work in the more remote cotton farms, are forced to sleep in makeshift dormitories on farms with up to 20 sharing a room, or ironically, in classrooms, often with poor living conditions, at times drinking irrigation water and with insufficient or poor quality food. Some children recount living in barracks with no electricity, windows or doors. After weeks of difficult work and poor accommodation, children can be left exhausted and in poor health.

One human rights organization confirmed eight deaths of children working in the Samarkand region over a two year period. Many more suffer with chronic diseases including intestinal infections, respiratory infections, meningitis and hepatitis.

An estimated 22.6% of Uzbek children, aged between 5 and 14, worked at least part-time, primarily in cotton harvesting. This statistic equates to an upper limit of around 1.4 million children.

Uzbekistan is the world's second largest exporter of cotton (after the U.S.), selling around one million tons per year to Europe, China and elsewhere, according to the London-based Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF). Uzbekistan's authoritarian ruling regime profits handsomely off its “cotton” earnings, some $1 billion annually, in exchange for its suffering citizens and hardened, barren land.
The EJF stresses the link between protecting the environment and protecting human rights and has made the issue of cotton industry abuse the centerpiece of its campaign (UNICEF 2000) (pp 32-33).”

Therefore, the compelling question is: Should I consider myself lucky to have been born a sharecropper’s son in Anchor Curve, Mississippi, instead of being born a part of the regime in Central Asia?

Single Parent Homes & Broken Ties

The proportion of children residing in single-father families in the United States has increased dramatically over the past 30 years. Between 1970 and 2003, the number of single-father families quintupled.

Myths behind single parenthood homes

Gender and Education

For centuries, numerous historians and researchers has argued and debated over the fundamental reasons, motivation, and grounds for the breakdown in the African American family structure. They say that slavery, welfare, and divorces are the main factors; that in approximately 80% of the African American families’ structure, means of survival is left in the hands of single mothers as being the bread winner for the family; and being the single bread winner for the family unit has placed her in countless educational career opportunities that breathed mediocrity for the family. Also, these same barriers that breathe mediocrity are the same subtle yet insidious reason for the breakdown in many African American family structures into a repetitious, dysfunctional status.
That type of repetitiveness can also be equated to how child play requires repeating words or slogans within games or songs, e.g. the alphabet song that parents have passed down for generations to generations. So is the stigma of single parenthood passed down. Which are the contributing factors to propagating poor academic achievement, school dropout, drug use, teen pregnancy and increasing unemployment skills.

Historians and researchers (1800-2009) have made a good argument about how single parenthood within the African American culture has hindered education. While infused with poor academic achievement, school dropout, drug use as measured by four dependent variables such as (reading test score, mathematics test score, English teachers' evaluation, and mathematics teachers' evaluation), violence, broken homes, mothers exhausted after work and whom lack the strength to set stricter guidelines for their children, incumbent the growth of out-of-wedlock children and the list goes on and on…

However, if you take an unbiased, in-depth study into how the African American race came into existent in this county, you can see how this has had a tremendous effect on their success and failures. It was much different from any other races that came to mother America of their own freewill, as the ships docked at Ellis Island in the 1800, seeking the land of opportunities that offered them the freedom of speech, religion, the opportunity to retain their family heritage, traditions, and receive an education.

Although, when the ships from Africa arrived and docked at the ports of Mississippi and Louisiana, they were not carrying free immigrants seeking the land of opportunity. They were carrying captive Africans of various tribes with different traditionalism and religions to a land without familiarity, with the main purpose being free and cheap labor by these enslaved Africans.
In order to accomplish this task, their captives had to remain uneducated, debarked of any family heritage and traditions, remain powerless people and take on their masters’ persona.

This controlling life style of slavery that led to the scheme of sharecropping, prohibited the continuing habitual course of the Africans family heritage, customs and practices as they once knew it. Not only did slavery and sharecropping disrupt and impede their family’s original heritage and traditions, it also gave birth to a new way of life for the African males, one as propagators for the soul purpose of reproducing more free and cheap field laborers and not building functional families. Therefore, these male African slaves and sharecroppers were not seen necessarily as a fatherly image, just propagates by the master and owners.

Therefore, if these African males were seen only as propagators, with the soul purposes to reproduce free and cheap field laborers for their masters and merely become labors themselves, one could then argue that the welfare system gave birth to a new way of life for the African females.

With it synonymous to child birth, style of life, within its paradox for the soul, purposes to enlarge their benefits. This type of propagation has also removed the African fatherly images out of the home as it did during the slavery and the sharecropping era.

Then, is it safe to say that the welfare system’s guidelines and policies gave aid to the removal of the fatherly images from the home, increasing the mother’s benefits by the number of children she birthed? That allowed the entitled welfare system to become the main authority figure in the home. Children could resist discipline by their single mothers with the absence of the father and the presence of the welfare system by means of their social workers, who set the standard in the home for the child discipline.
Therefore, if a single parent, usually the mother, attempted to discipline their child, and the child resisted or did not like the consequences of the discipline, they would use the system against their mother to get what they wanted by threats of abuse to the family’s social worker. These fears then relinquished the controlling factors to a source outside of the home.

*So the question to ponder is: How can sources outside of a home be the controlling factors for a child’s discipline within the home?*

Throughout history there has not been another race that had to endure the obliteration of its family tradition as the African race has, with the exception of Jewish race with Adolf Hitler’s insidious treatment of them during the holocaust.

**Growing Up In A Single Parent Household**

**Aided by A Grandma...**

As the fifth oldest child living in a single parent home of eight, Mom was the only provider for seven children, and this was not with an undemanding effort on her part. She was our strength, hope, role model, and spiritual leader all rolled up into her.

There was some sibling rivalry but it was keep to a minimum of course because mom insisted that it be that way. As well as respecting each other, adults, especially our elders and practices clearness because in her eyes represented Godly images.

We did not eat at restaurants and bought only the necessities from the Wilson’s grocery store. Sometime’s on weekends when we earned extra money, we would have snacks or treats on weekends.
We ate mostly what meat we raised (poultry, beef and pork) and occasionally we had some cold cuts for sandwiches (Salami, luncheon meats, bologna and head cheese). We ate what we caught fishing (Alligator gar, bass, bluegill, buffalo, catfish and white perch) and what we grew in our gardens (cabbage, beet, collards green, cucumbers, okra, potatoes, squash, sweet corn, sweet potato or often called a yam, tomatoes, watermelon, rutabaga and turnip greens). Most of our breads came from the corn and wheat that was grown and ground at the local gristmill on the half. Mom would make all our biscuits, cornbread, cakes and pies from scratch. What a great cook! And she taught all her children how to cook and clean for ourselves.

I believe so strongly to this day that Mom knew how slavery and sharecropping had turned many males into nothing but breeding machines, propagating for the sole purpose of free and cheap labors. This is why she remained a single parent for so many years. She wanted to avoid that kind of husband/father for us. She wanted a husband who projected a fatherly image for her children to emulate, because she was a God fearing strong willed woman who loved her children and all others dearly.

I applaud her for staying a single parent and being that strong motherly image we so desperately needed, rather than live in a dysfunctional home environment. As a single parent, she gave us the love and kindness that many other children in our community wanted. That is why they all called her “MaDear”, referring to her as their mother too; they knew they could count on her.

Growing up in a single parent house, I learned at an early age from Mom and Grandmamma how important it is to have God and Christ in my life. These were the lessons of two extraordinary women: “Mom and grandmamma!” And they still ring true to this day.
Your reputation is your signature for life! Do not give up on your dreams and aspirations. Trust in God and Christ with all your heart and soul, be a good child, good man and good father to your children. Teach the children the way of the lord, as you were taught. “He might not come when we want Him to but He is always on time (Mom).” Even though I never knew my biological father, I had the great privilege of being the son and grandson of two caring and God fearing sharecroppers, who made sure that we all had opportunities to become successful in life.

The only thing I believe I truly missed by not having a father around, was a fatherly image to guide me. My brothers, uncles, basketball mentors and coaches were my male role models. They helped mold me. The only problem with that was that they were not always around.

Also, not having a fatherly figure in the home eliminated that sharing experience between a father and son, and the loving and sharing interaction between a mother and father or husband and wife like some of the affluent two parent families had within some of the affluent, so-called functioning, intact family with a mother and father. There were noticeable signs of provocative accuracy that eventually led to alcohol, verbal and physical abuse, as well as infidelity. Therefore, one could say that my life wasn’t so bad considering the above events of provocation and of the abuse and infidelity being raised in those homes.

In order to really appreciate how strikingly and uniquely important the responsibility Mom and other women took on, one needs only to consider that, for centuries, family homes had been decidedly male dominated, if for no other reason than for propagation. So, what accounted for the extraordinary achievements by these spirited single-parents? God!
If you listen to children playing, they are likely repeating the same words within games, songs or an expression you have grown up with as child yourself. Singing the alphabet song and playing hide and seek, can you image an entire generation of children growing up without this? Or the worse scenario of all growing up without believing in God, this kind of reality and fundamental alteration can happen within a single generation; that is the terrifying part.

Also, take for instance, if you are talking to a friend on your cell phone and you drop that call, and God forbid it to be one of importance (e.g. what Jane Doe was wearing at work today, who was on American Idol last night, what happened on Desperate House Wives, or of least importance a business call); we all know how that feels. First comes that intermittent screeching sound of silence and the line goes dead. Is losing that cell phone connection small potatoes compared with losing a connection in values between succeeding generations when it comes to sharing the word of God.

Ritual, custom and tradition are cultural values that are shared through generations of transmitting, which are why slaves and sharecroppers were put through a “debarking” process to stop ritual and tradition transitions. That is why it is so important for each generation to continue to tell their stories to the next generations, to keep cultural values from coming to a screeching begins. Criticize as we might the evils of the younger generation, the story of culture, morals and values are theirs to hear, not to tell. When there is a generation growing without knowing what God did for Israel then parents have failed to tell their children about God.

The crucial question for Parents is: “Do your children know more about The Cat in the Hat®, than the three persons of God, the Trinity?
Speaking A different Vernacular

Dialect of spoken English characteristic of segments of the African American population with roots in African and African American history and culture... That gave birth to a different language for my ancestors to learn during the slavery era that was passed on to four generations of sharecroppers. From that enslavement, and through the next three generations of my ancestors, they were not allowed to read and write that era’s standardized English. Only allowed to speak, hear and respond to it well enough to accomplish the master tasks. There were those who wanted to learn how to read and write this language and adapt their own style of it, which later would be labeled as slang or jargon.

For me, and many others of my era, take this comma out who grew up in an uneducated home environment, we learned to speak the language of the uneducated parent or parents. And those who grew up in an educated home environment learned to speak the language of the educated parent or parents; your standardized English.

According to the Zuckerman (2003) in the Thernstroms’ book, Closing the Racial Gap in Learning, “the issue is family culture and upbringing, usually reinforced by the expectations of friends from similar homes.

The predominant influence of family on educational results was the conclusion of James Coleman's 1966 landmark study, "Equality of Educational Opportunity." In a different way, Coleman's findings are supported by a recent book by Betty Hart and Todd R. Risley the Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experiences of Young American Children. Their research revealed that differences in the quantity of language interactions between children and their parents, up to the age of 3, have an enormous impact on learning trajectories (pp.83-88).”
African American Vernacular English, or Black English, is fundamentally a spoken language. In fact, it is several distinct dialects, encompassing the vernacular speech of blacks in the United States, the Caribbean, Britain, and elsewhere. Each of these black vernacular languages emerged within a particular racial and cultural context. Most significantly, the roots of African American Vernacular English lie in the experience of slavery and in the cultural collision between a multitude of African languages and an English-speaking dominant culture. Spoken English of blacks in the United States has been the subject of increased attention and occasional controversy since the 1960s.

The rules of usage that are shared by West African languages and African American Vernacular English, include

- repetition of noun subject with pronoun: my father, he work there…
- same form of noun for singular and plural: one boy; five boy…and
- same verb form for all subjects: I know; you know; he know; we know; they know.

The best known characteristic of African American Vernacular English is its treatment of the verb to be, especially the lack of verb conjugation in the present tense I be, you be, he be, we be, they be. It explores the history and scope of cultural expression of people of African descent, as articulated by individuals and organizations, events, political movements, art forms, ethnic groups, and religion.

According to Dr. Jones, my mentor and tutor, (2010) in his book, Decoding and Encoding English Words: A BOOK FOR LANGUAGE TUTORS, he says:

“Whether one believe Black English Vernacular (recently dubbed Ebonics) to be a dialect of Standard English or a separate language entity, it remains true that B.E.V. has a very special
and individual grammar most often associated with many African languages. Since the majority of American blacks grow up speaking B.E.V. and come to American schools speaking B.E.V., it would seem prudent for teachers to readily accept this and communicate their student a warm and genuine appreciation for this special language presentation. After all, the language of home and parents for any world citizen gives him or her the earliest and deepest appreciation of self and self-worth. Teacher: ‘Let’s not give up our Black English Vernacular, but let’s also learn the useful language of business, education, and government, most often called Standard English”. A profitable class exercise would be the occasional and contrasting of these two expressional modes (AP.xiv-1).”

**Molding Inclusive School Cultures**

**According to Carter (2006):**

The results of an investigation of the following questions: How do low-income African American and Latino youths negotiate the boundaries between schools and peer group contexts? Do variable forms of negotiation exist?

If so, what are they, and how do they manifest? In addressing these questions, the author posits two arguments that directly challenge the "acting white" thesis.

The first is that black and Latino students' academic, cultural, psychological, and social experiences are heterogeneous.

This article examines three groups of low-income African American and Latino students who differ in how they believe group members should behave culturally the cultural mainstreamers, the cultural straddlers, and the noncompliant believers. Second, this article returns to the sociological signification of four dimensions of the phenomenon of (resistance to) acting white and highlights the varied responses of the three groups to the
social boundaries that collective identities engender and that status hierarchies in schools produce. Straddles appear to traverse the boundaries between their ethnic peer groups and school environments best. The analyses are based on a combination of survey and qualitative data that were collected from a series of in-depth individual and group interviews with an interethnic, mixed-gender sample of 68 low-income, African American and Latino youths, aged 13-20.

Race, ethnicity, culture, and identity: We can almost guarantee that these four social factors play a role in the academic well-being of all students—complexly so. Yet verifiable explanations for why and how they matter continue to elude social science researchers and educators. For most, if not all of us, our socialization as racial and ethnic beings begins early in life, and much of this socialization occurs during the compulsory years of schooling, from preschool to high school, and even further during the collegiate years and beyond.

Racial and ethnic identities emerge in the contexts of macrostructural, cultural, and individual-level forces; they are neither static nor one dimensional; and their meanings, as expressed in schools, neighborhoods, peer groups, and families, vary across time, space, and region (Dolby 2001; McCarthy 1993; Yon (2000).

But perhaps, more critically, what is relevant in the field of educational research is how ethnic and racial identity and the concomitant cultural behaviors matter to educational outcomes. This question has been most pressing when researchers have examined the significantly lower levels of educational achievement of racial and ethnic minority students, such as African Americans and various ethnic groups that are categorized under the pan ethnic label (Kao and Thompson 2003) “Latino” (pp. 304-328).
Examining Relationships Among Dialect Variation, Literacy Skills, and School

According to Patton, McDonald, Shurita and Michael (2008):

This study examined relationships between the use of nonmainstream American English dialects, literacy skills, and school environment among typically developing first graders (n = 617), of whom 48% were African American and 52% were White, in order to describe and better understand the difficulties many children from linguistically diverse backgrounds experience while learning to read. Method: Using hierarchical linear modeling, the authors examined the linear and quadratic relationships between students' dialect variation (DVAR) and their vocabulary, phonological awareness, and word reading skills, taking into account school environment, specifically schoolwide socioeconomic status (SES).

Results: The relationships between DVAR and literacy outcomes depended on the outcome of interest and school SES. However, children's race did not generally affect the trajectory or strength of the relationships between outcomes and dialect variation. For vocabulary and word reading, the association was nonlinear, that is, U-shaped, but this depended on school SES.

For phonological awareness, a negative linear relationship was observed that did not depend on school SES. Conclusions: The results inform theories on the relationship between DVAR and literacy achievement and suggest a more complex explanation of how nonmainstream American English dialect use might influence how young children learn to read (pp.126-145, 20p).
Beyond the improvement of instruction, we must find another approach to creating schools that can serve the needs of diverse students more effectively. By focuses on creating school cultures that are inclusive of multiple forms of diversity.

**Baptiste (1999) to provides a helpful definition for creatingschools inclusive of "Multiculturalism, he writes:**

Is a comprehensive philosophical reform of the school environment essentially focused on the principles of equity, success, and social justice for all students. Equity is the result of changing the school environment, especially the curriculum and instruction component, through restructuring and reorganizing so that students from diverse racial, ethnic, and social classes experience educational equality and cultural empowerment. Success is demonstrated through parity representation of achievement of the school or district's students across racial, ethnic, cultural and social classes.”

Social justice in schools is accomplished by the process of judicious pedagogy as its cornerstone, and focuses on unabridged knowledge, reflection, and social action as the foundation for social change. (p. 107).

**According to Proctor, Duff, Yair and Zhang (2008):**

The purpose of this study was to determine the prevalence of “stuttering in African American (AA) 2- to 5-year-olds as compared with same-age European Americans (EAs). Method: A total number of 3,164 children participated in the study: 2,223 AAs and 941 EAs.

The data was collected using a 3 pronged approach that included investigators' individual interactions with each child, teacher identification, and parent identification of stuttering. The results were that there was no statistically significant difference for stuttering found.
between AA and EA children. Using the investigator and teacher method of identification, the prevalence of stuttering was 2.52% for the entire sample. For both racial groups, boys exhibited a higher prevalence of stuttering than girls. Of the 3 predictors (age, race, sex) of stuttering, only sex was a significant predictor. Their conclusions were that: AA 2- to 5-year-olds are not overrepresented in the stuttering population for this age group. When data is combined for both racial groups, the prevalence of stuttering is 2.52%. More boys than girls stuttered in this sample of preschoolers (pp. 1465-1479).”

**Code-Switching Pedagogies and African American Student Voices.**

**Acceptance and Resistance**

Teachers should provide nonthreatening spaces for negotiating and applying nonstandard and Standard English and recognize that home language is linked to student identity.

*Resistance is embedded in sensing their identity and home language have been compromised, as a result of code switching to standard word choices that do not accurately depict how they speak.*

**According to Hill and the Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy (2009):**

Code-switching pedagogies call for employing students’ home language to facilitate appropriate nonstandard and standard contexts for writing and speaking (Adger et al., 1999; Bakhtin, 1986; Delpit & Dowdy, 2002; Wheeler & Swords, 2006). Traditionally, teachers have regarded Standard English as correct, while nonstandard features are deemed as errors that warrant correction. Carrie Secret, a noted teacher in Oakland, California, maintained a corrective approach until recognizing that students were more responsive upon being encouraged to translate the structure of AAVE in a first
Draft to Standard English for the final draft (Miner, 1997). Rather than regard AAVE features as incorrect, code-switching pedagogies require that teachers make a transition from the paradigm of correction to helping students use language patterns for appropriate settings (Baker, 2002; Wheeler & Swords, 2006).

Teachers must be knowledgeable of AAVE features (Delpit, 1997) to model corresponding rule-governed aspects of AAVE and Standard English (Baker, 2002; Wheeler & Swords, 2006). To illustrate, Wheeler and Swords (2006) pointed out the rule, owner + owned = possession, a rule governed aspect of AAVE.

In Standard English, the corresponding rule is owner’s + owned = possession. The AAVE feature friend house, for instance, corresponds with the Standard English feature friend’s house. Rather than assume that students do not understand possession, teachers must juxtapose grammatical differences side by side and help students determine the appropriate context for use (Wheeler & Swords, 2006). When writing a nonstandard narrative, for example, friend house would be acceptable. Friend’s house would be appropriate for a formal essay or standardized test (pp. 120–131).

Lee and Jason (2008), from a national survey:

The present study investigated whether adolescents living with parents of their same gender fare better on academic achievement than their peers living with opposite-gender parents. Multiple analyses of covariance (MANCOVA) procedures were employed to examine the effects of the children's gender in single- father and single-mother families on students' academic achievement, as measured by four dependent variables (reading test score, mathematics test score, English teachers' evaluation, and mathematics teachers' evaluation) while controlling the covariate, socioeconomic status. The results indicated
that there were no benefits in same-gender single-parent households. Furthermore, daughters in single-father homes performed better than other parent and child combinations on academic achievement (P76).

According to Bodenhorn (2007):

About 16 percent of white children and 48 percent of black children live with a single mother, and the economic costs to children raised in single-mother households are substantial. More than one-half of single-mother households fall under the official poverty line and three-fifths receive some form of public assistance. Moreover, children raised in mother-only households are more likely to underachieve academically, to drop out of school, to become single parents themselves, to have lower labor-market attachment, and to engage in criminal activity as young adults than children raised in two-parent households. Thus, racial differences in family structure have potentially large implications for racial differences in child welfare and individual economic mobility in later life.

Data from the urban South reveals two notable consequences of single parenthood during the mid-nineteenth century. First, white children residing with single mothers left school earlier than children residing with two parents, and black children in single mother homes started school later and left school earlier. Second, white youths in single-mother homes faced an increased incidence of labor-force participation, but black youths in the same situation did not. Single parenthood imposed costs, in terms of foregone human-capital formation, on children in the mid-nineteenth century, but the consequences of single motherhood were mitigated by social norms regarding childhood education (pp. 33-64).
As I look back at my ancestors it explains how slavery has damaged the family united and gave birth to its modern dysfunctions, including single motherhood. Various studies have documents the incidence of single parenthood in the urban South in the mid–nineteenth century.

Consistent with the endings of other studies of early black households, African American children were about twice as likely as white children to reside in mother–only households, as I did. The second, and modern, aspect of this study is that it documents the consequences for children residing in a household with one or neither parent. Previous studies, including those by Gutman, Morgan and Ruggles (1991) document differences in household structure between influenced several childhood outcomes, including school attendance and labor-market participation, free blacks and whites in the period before general emancipation.

**Hampden, Thompson and Gillian (2003) stated in their investigation that:**

The gap in math and science achievement of third- and fourth-graders who live with a single parent versus those who live with two parents in eleven countries, the United States and New Zealand rank last among the countries. We compare in terms of the equality of achievement between children from single-parent families and those from two-parent homes. Following a multilevel analysis, we find single parenthood to be less detrimental when family policies equalize resources between single- and two-parent families. In addition, the single– and two–parent achievement gap is greater in countries where single–parent families are more prevalent. We conclude that national family policies can offset the negative academic outcomes of single parenthood (p. 81).
According to Ryan (2006), his study investigated:

The associations between family structure and early child cognitive and socio-emotional outcomes, by means of asking whether associations typically found in studies on family structure and child development are consistent across family contexts.

Put it simply, his questions were “if two parent families are always better for children than single parent ones and if married parent families are always better for children than those of unwed parents. If these family structures are always better than the alternatives, then are they always better or worse to the same degree?

To address this question, he compared absolute and relative advantages of paternal co-residence and marriage for children whose parents were at-risk to the advantages for children whose parents were not at-risk.

Risk groups included children whose parents had low educational levels, were young, were unemployed, exhibited risky behaviors such as substance use and criminal activity, and reported depressive symptoms. Data was drawn from the baseline, one-year and three-year follow-ups of the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study (FFCWS).

The child cognitive and behavioral outcomes were examined at age 3 and paternal risks were examined at baseline. Paternal co-residence emerged as a benefit to children's behavioral development among children of non-substance abusing fathers and children of depressed mothers; living with an unemployed father had a slight negative effect on children's cognitive outcomes. Marriage emerged as a protective factor for children's behavioral development in socioeconomically at-risk homes when compared to cohabitation, but was not associated with benefits to behavioral development in more
advantaged homes; by contrast, only in more socioeconomically advantaged families did marriage seem to benefit cognitive outcomes.

The overarching hypothesis that paternal risk factors would moderate associations between family structure and early child outcomes was supported, although interactive effects were often quite modest (p.10)

Lamborn, Nguyen and Dang-Giao’s (2004) study “examined perceived kinship support and parenting practices for 158 African American adolescents in the 9th and 10th grades. Kinship support showed direct associations with teen outcomes that, for work orientation and school orientation, were partially mediated by parenting practices. With a few exceptions, kinship support was positively associated with youth adjustment for teens from single-parent and 2-parent homes, teens with college educated and less educated parents, and for girls and boys.

Both kinship support and maternal warmth predicted self-reliance, work orientation, and school orientation. Kinship support was the primary predictor of ethnic identity (p. 12).”

Without a doubt everyone says that African Americans race have a very high rates of single-parent families, but they disagree about why this has take place. Because so much appears to hang on the answer “why” has this occurred is where the trouble of defending it has begins, not simply because the issue is a difficult mystery. For most historians believe that if they consider that African Americans have "always" had a lot of out– of– wedlock children, they risk being called a racist. Unless they immediately add that families are not important to children, in which case you may be called either a progressive or a fool. If you think slavery caused the problem, you will be reminded that post-bellum American society put endless roadblocks in the path of black family unity.
If you think welfare caused the problem, you must deal with the charge that illegitimate births appear to have risen much faster than welfare payments, and, in any event, you are insensitive to the economic problems African Americans must face. Answering this question is a quick way to earn an ideological label.

**According to Wilson and James Q. Public Interest (2002):**

A study conducted by Thomas and Ariel (2000), using data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS), revealed that:

Teenagers who live in non married families are less likely to graduate from high school or to attend college, more likely to smoke or drink, and more likely to initiate sexual activity. Not all non-married families are alike, however.

In particular, teenagers living within single mother’s homes and with at least one grandparent in multigenerational households have developmental outcomes that are at least as good as and often better than the outcomes of teenagers in married families. These findings obtain when a wide array of economic resources, parenting behavior, and home and school characteristics are controlled (pp. 393-413).

**Poverty on Academics!**

I will discuss the effect that poverty can have on children’s academic achievement. How this impoverishment has entrapped children into their adulthood and their next generations into a hardship of poverty imprisonment. Mainly the inconclusive evidence base surrounding these life courses and intergenerational poverty transmission is nutrition, childcare and guidance, education, child labor, aspirations and attitudes – are explored within the context of UNICEF’s basic framework of survival, protection, development and participation. This section will
conclude with an examination of elements of the wider environment, critical to enabling action in childhood to break poverty cycles.

Next I will look at how poverty is defined and measured in the United States, which has significant implications for the identification of children in need. I will evaluate the current measure of child poverty in the United States in order to gauge its appropriateness for assessing children’s well-being with a brief discussion of the meaning of poverty and evaluates the history, structure, and strengths of the official measure of child’s poverty. This will address, in addition, critical shortcomings that potentially mask the known deprivation of poverty and introduce a tool for capturing this deficiency.

The overall premise of this section is that the discussion on poverty might benefit by reanalyzing approaches to measuring and defining poverty.

**According to Lee (2009):**

Using data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, the analyses showed that the bidirectional effects of the duration of early poverty on children's reading and home environment scores. The focuses were on three specific questions: (1) Does the duration of early childhood poverty affect children's reading scores from ages 5 and 6 to ages 11 and 12 after controlling for individual, family, and contextual characteristics? (2) Does the duration of early poverty affect the trajectories for reading and home environment scores from ages 5 and 6 to ages 11 and 12? And (3) Are there any differences associated with ethnicity in the trajectories for reading and home scores, and do these differences depend on the duration of early poverty? Findings suggest that a longer duration of early poverty had significant adverse effects on children and these adverse effects became more pronounced as children grew. Early poverty also negatively affected home scores.
at ages 5 and 6, which, in turn, affected reading scores at ages 5 and 6 and continuously
did so as the children grew older. However, these associations between home and
reading scores were different across ethnicities with regard to the duration of poverty.

The poverty rate among families with children differs across ethnicities and family
structures (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). In 2006, the poverty rate among young, white
children was lower (17.5%) than poverty rates for black (39.4%) and Hispanic (29.9%)
children. In contrast, the percentage of white children who live in affluent families,
above 600% of the poverty threshold, was significantly higher (13.5%) than that of black
(5.3%) and Hispanic (4.2%) children.

The poverty rate for female-headed households with children, no husband present
(26.5%), was significantly bigger than that for two parent families (5.3%). More black
families with children lived in poverty (38.2%) than white families with children
(24.1%). Twelve million children live in poverty, and disparities in the distribution of
household income exist among ethnic subgroups of the population (pp. 79-94, 16p).

**Zaman (2006) found:**

That the nature and extent of Primary Learning Skill (PLS) that the Hispanic young
children acquire who do not attend any early educational institutions. Literature
reviewed for this paper indicated that Hispanic children were the poorest and the fastest
growing group who often did not receive formal educational exposure due to varied
socioeconomic and ethno-contextual factors. Using Primary Level Assessment Systems
(pre-reading, pre-writing, pre-mathematical, and socio-emotional domains) administered
among 48 parents with 3-to 4-year-old children, this work provides a glimpse on aspects
of pre-academic socialization. While most parents indicated their goals for their children
are to instill love for learning, an overall picture emerged pertaining to academic socialization suggest that parents themselves needed to reorient their behavior that would help their children acquiring primary level skills. It also appears that some form of educational as well as enrichment programs for the children at home would help in altering the perception of education.

Lower socio-economic status, the relative isolation of the families from their country of origin, the impersonal nature of the urban milieu, and the limited time that many ethnic parents can invest in their young children's acquisition of primary developmental skill have become a subject of major concern among early childhood educators.

Indeed, not too long ago, Garcia (1997) painted an alarming picture indicating his own plight as an immigrant growing up in this country within the clutches of institutional racism. Not much has changed during the last decade or two and there is a subtle suggestion that a large percentage of Hispanic children are "at risk" (see Garcia, 1997 for a review).

The question read: “Which is most important to you?” “That my child gains academic skills;” “That my child learns to love learning;” “That my child achieve at a high level.” The statement ranked as the number one priority by about 71 % of the parents, was: “That my child learns to love learning.”

Interestingly, this disputes the common notion that most low socioeconomic parents only want their children to acquire academic skills. Here we see that these parents highly value the idea of instilling in their children a love for learning that will carry them throughout their life. There was 20% that did rank as their highest priority the acquisition of academic skills, and the remaining wanted higher achievement for their children.
The above discussion seems to suggest that one way to help these parents is to help them alter their perception of education. It should be presented to them as a broader, yet specific, socialization agenda that would prepare their children to fit into a lateral social and academic structure ready to compete with their non-Hispanic peers. Indeed, a large percentage (71%) of the parents indicated that the priority for them was to see that their children learn to love learning, which is somewhat general and even vague. Only 20% of the parents thought that the acquisition of skills was a priority.

One can see such an orientation as a cultural trait where Hispanic parents are not competitive as their Western counterpart. This may as well be a reflection of their naiveté regarding the extent of preparedness required for their children to compete with their peers. From policy point of view, one way to address the issue of lower participation of low-income and poor Hispanic children in formal early childhood centers is to expand the availability of childcare subsidies (p73-82, 10p).

The specific contributing agent aspect of childhood poverty history, structure, environmental inequities, encompasses their low socioeconomic status, shortcoming and disadvantages. Poor children confront widespread environmental inequities. Compared with their economically advantaged counterparts, they are exposed to more family turmoil, violence, separation from their families, instability, and chaotic households.

**Evans (2004) writes that:**

Poor children experience less social support, and their parents are less responsive and more authoritarian. Low-income children are read to relatively infrequently, watch more TV, and have less access to books and computers. Low-income parents are less involved in their children's school activities. The air and water poor children consume are more
polluted. Their homes are more crowded, noisier, and of lower quality. Low-income neighborhoods are more dangerous, offer poorer municipal services, and suffer greater physical deterioration. Predominantly low-income schools and day care are inferior. The accumulation of multiple environmental risks rather than singular risk exposure may be an especially pathogenic aspect of childhood poverty.

Researchers in public health, medicine, and more recently, psychology have come to appreciate the value of studying poverty in its own right. Initially this meant descriptive analyses demonstrating physical and psychological sequelae of poverty or low socioeconomic status (SES; Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Chen, Matthew, & Boyce, 2002). But psychologists have begun to move beyond a social address perspective, turning their attention to underlying explanations for poverty’s harmful impacts on children and their families.

A limitation of psychological research on poverty is the absence of an ecological perspective that is, recognizing that the answer to why poverty is harmful probably does not lie with any one underlying agent or process (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Psychologists are aware of the multiple disadvantages accompanying low income in America. Yet the search for explanatory processes of poverty’s impacts on children has focused almost exclusively on psychosocial characteristics within the family, particularly negative parenting (Bornstein & Bradley, 2003). This focus on psychosocial processes is limited in two respects. First, psychological research on poverty has largely ignored the physical settings that low income children and families inhabit.

Families reside in both a social and a physical world (Wachs, 2000) and each has well-documented impacts on human development. Second, poor children face a daunting
array of suboptimal psychosocial and physical conditions. Many adverse physical and psychosocial conditions vary and do not occur in isolation.

The quality of physical and social living conditions is not randomly distributed in the population (Schell, 1997). Cumulative rather than singular exposure to a confluence of psychosocial and physical environmental risk factors is a potentially critical aspect of the environment of childhood poverty (pp. 77-92).

The deteriorating economy that led to recessions, coupled with unemployment, meant that a disproportionate share of today's poor children will become tomorrow's poor adults. Children's current economic well-being must be evaluated in comparative perspective both international, historical, and demographically. The etiology of changes in children's absolute and relative economic well-being must focus especially on the role of the changing family, parental employment, and levels of social provision for poor families.

These “causes” should then be evaluated in the context of public policy debates, including the devolution or decentralization of federal welfare programs in each state.

We were taught to employ a view of culture as a communicative occurrence involving a discursive engagement, which is deeply influenced by social and economic inequalities, and must argue that the struggle to break free of poverty is as much a cultural process as it is political. This is why Mom worked two jobs and insisted that we never give up on our personal dreams and ambitions. She instilled in us that it is up to each individual not to past on the importunateness of cultural prosperity and to break down that strong hold of poverty for the next generations.
Recommendations

In conclusion, by our current standards, children suffer disproportionately a higher rate of measured poverty, and they are often the innocent victims of rapid changes in our most fundamental institution...starting with the family structure, school environments, and our government institutions.

With the breakdown of the traditional family, inhabitation has meant that increasing shares of children are living within unmarried, typically, poor, single parent households.

Or, if they live with two parents, they receive their primary child care from non-family members or formal providers because both parents must work, often at low wages, to ensure a livable family income.

When does this chaotic breakdown in family tradition, school environments and our governing bodies end for those innocent victims? Children, forced to live in poverty without the proper support of our fundamental institutions. Have we forgotten or even remember what our history has taught us about Israelites without a Moral King, not just a king? Then let me refresh your memory or enlighten you of their chaotic display of idolatry, debauchery, and atrocities record of anything goes mentality when a society is without absence of a Moral Authority.

A vacuum is created in which nothing but disorder and confusion can reign. Just look at our disproportionately higher rate of measured poverty and the negative consequences it has caused our children for generations past and the ones to come.

For either we place our children in the hands of a higher Moral Authority, or we are alone in charge of them. There is no middle ground to operate in. This will be, or probably is, extremely disturbing for those who are anti-authoritarian cultures. Even a godless, totalitarian
society with strict rules is better than a free society so liberated from authority that anything goes when it comes to the children’s education and well being. Is this all religious theory? Therefore, then, is a society no more than the sum of its parts. If you want to predict where any society is going without its children, simply look at how parental authority is honored in one family after another.

The confrontive question is: Whenever I am tempted to go a bit off keel, have I taken my eyes off the true prize that educating children, not the poor or the affluent, just

Chapter V

Discussion and Recommendations

Introduction

In this section, I will describe my life lessons of twenty-five plus years in working with at-risk, nontraditional and latch key students as a counselor, mentor, multicultural director and a teacher’s aide. These experiences lead me to develop a culturally specific after school mentoring and educational tutoring program named: Family Advocacy Mentoring, Inc., (FAM). FAM was an independent 501 ©3 nonprofit organization which operated in conjunction with the Wausau Area School District (WASD) for eight years. Programming was held in the following schools:

- John Marshall and Thomas Jefferson Elementary schools
- Horace Mann and John Muir Middle Schools

The Research, Project Design, Implementation

As a teacher’s aide within the WASD, I saw continuing changes in its demographics, caused in part by an influx of families migrating to Wausau, looking for a better life. To escape the socioeconomic problems they were experiencing in places like Central America, Asia and
American inner cities (primarily, Chicago, Milwaukee and Detroit). These children were becoming an increasing burden on Wausau’s educational, social and judicial institutions.

To confirm what I had seen over two years, I researched and studied this transformation, using a feasibility study designed by Mobilizing Assessment Partnership and Planning (MAPP).

That assessment revealed what I had expected: the WASD was going through a transition and was in need of a culturally specific after school program to address this rapid change in demographics.

Troubled elementary and middle school students and their Parents or Guardians could rely only on overworked teachers and administrators, social workers and (unfortunately) the juvenile justice system for services. The public elementary schools in particular were experiencing difficulty contending with the increasing numbers and complexities involved in assisting children and their families who had problems making a positive transition from their previous educational systems. I believed that a culturally specific program of after school mentoring, educational tutoring and bilingual support could routinely provide a higher level of these services in a more user friendly non-institutional environment.

**Researching the history of mentoring...**

**What is a Mentor?**

The first recorded modern usage of the term can be traced to a book entitled "Les Adventures de Telemaque", by the French writer, François Fénelon. In the book, the lead character is that of Mentor. This book was published in 1699 and was very popular during the 18th century, and the modern applications of the term can be traced to this publication.
This is the source of the modern use of the word: “Mentor:” A trusted friend, counselor or teacher, usually a more experienced person.

Some professions have "mentoring programs" in which newcomers are paired with more experienced people in order to learn by example and advice as they advance. Some schools also offer mentoring programs for new students or students who are having difficulties.

Today, mentors provide their expertise to less experienced individuals in order to help them advance their career opportunities, enhance their educational skills, and build their networks.

**The Design of FAM’s Infrastructure**

**Mission Statement**

Through Daily Mentoring, Fellowship, Education and Tutoring, FAM will create a Moral Compass to provide many opportunities for positive development in our schools, community and society.

**FAM’s Philosophy**

Successful adults have often cited a childhood mentor, aside from parents... as the one person who most profoundly influenced their lives and instilled HOPE!

At FAM, our program was designed and dedicated to the principal that it is never too late... or too early to provide children and adults with the positive, life shaping, education, combined with the influence of a moral compass upon which to base their decisions and choices.

FAM was also designed around the “Asset Development Approach” of giving Kids what they need to succeed, by attempting to answer their ‘Why’ questions:
• Why – do some youth grow up with ease, while others struggle?

• Why – do some youth get involved in dangerous activities, while others spend their time contributing to society?

• Why – do some youth “beat the odds” in difficult situations, while others get trapped?

**FAM’s Timeline and Implementation**

**2000-2001 School Year**

FAM’s core after school programming concepts implement and encompass its:

• Mentoring component…

• Educational and tutoring component…

• Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse (AODA) Prevention Component…

• MAGIC (Mentoring and Gang Intervention Club) Component…

• Apprentice Mentor Training Component

Additional focus was placed on Five Interrelated Dynamics!

We believed these had the greatest impact on the future of each Primary and Middle School child we serve:

1. Spiritual Component (optional)…
2. Family values…
3. Culture of Success learning…
4. Developing a commitment to lifetime education…
5. Development of Social Skills

My research also established that another primary principal to defining a child’s successes and failures can be found in the following four correlating factors:
- Starting with the child’s socioeconomic status
- Then the child’s school environment…
- The child’s home environment…
- The child’s community.

Our Programs and Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Times</th>
<th>Typical Activity</th>
<th>Main Objective</th>
<th>Typical Methods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3:00 PM</td>
<td>Sign-in and snack time</td>
<td>Improve socialization skills and mentoring</td>
<td>Demonstration and role-playing lead by staff and students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:15 PM</td>
<td>Homework completion, tutoring &amp; guest speakers</td>
<td>Improved homework, reading habits &amp; computer skills</td>
<td>Group students by subject – Staff work with the group or individual as needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:15 P.M.</td>
<td>Supervised personal time</td>
<td>Socialize, play various mind stimulating games &amp; chat</td>
<td>Provide reinforcement and praise for all assignments completed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:30 PM</td>
<td>Program ends for the day and participants depart</td>
<td>Ensure all participants get home safely</td>
<td>Metro rides are provided for middle school. Pick up for elementary schools</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This concept provides At-Risk and Latch Key children with an inclusive blend of: 

**educational tutoring; mentoring; nurturing; coaching; motivation; and structural support.**

Like a *functioning family*, FAM provided care, guidance, encouragement, structure and a sense of belonging, many of whom have never experienced these things. We are all about spending quality time with under-achieving children who really do need someone to help - and to care.

**Overall goals and objectives**

**FAM’s Goal and Objectives were to:**

- Enrich the lives of present and future generations of each participant and their family members we serve!
We offered an open door policy for parents/guardians to meet and keep them informed and involved in their child’s progress. During these meetings we encouraged them to continue to play a major role in the success of their children and their family. Their child is a BIG part of our future generation, by:

- Improving their decision-making skills with family, friends, teachers, and others
- Discovering the joys of learning and the potential offered by a good education
- Creating better alternatives to gangs, AODA issues/better ways to handle conflict resolutions

The goals and objectives of FAM also included encouraging and assisting all participants to remain in school through high school graduation, while preparing them with the desire and skills needed to enter into a post secondary education, by improving attitudes toward school and understanding the relationship between education and goal attainment.

**Project Assessment**

**Program Evaluation-Outcome**

**Goal 1:**

To reduce the truancy rate in elementary school participants enrolled in FAM and the Wausau Area School District.

In FAM, one of our main efforts was to minimize or alleviate the stressful situations in each participant’s home, caused by truancy and its symptom’s’ sedentary behavior and non-productive recreational screen time.
SMART Objectives

The Process Objective will encourage all participants to improve attendance by 90% or better within the first months of being enrolled in the Program, with FAM staff connecting with assigned school attendances personnel to record daily attendance.

The Outcome Objective: Through our program’s initiation techniques, to combat truancy, within the first months of enrollment in the Program to reduce the truancy rate in FAM’s elementary school students.

Goal 2:

Once the participant’s attendance issues have been addressed, we then work to improve their academic performance.

SMART Objective

Process Objective 1: Improve homework completion to 90% or better within the first academic semester of enrollment in the Program, with FAM staff tutoring and mentoring the students.

Outcome Objective 1: Through program initiation techniques, improve academic grades, by at least one grade level, by the end of the student's first full academic semester of involvement in the Program through **Focus on FAM’s five basic Dynamics:**

- Support…
- Encouragement…
- Study…
- Progress…
- Retention!
All operational phases of the program consisted of an ongoing Formative and Summative Evaluation Methods.

**Program Activities:**
- Create screening checklist for selecting participants
- Create a curriculum training manual
- Hire management team and staff
- Develop an evaluation component
- Formalize tracking system to monitor all referrals
- Incorporate a program monitoring survey to be completed during and at the end of program
- Develop a daily behavior attendance record form
- Create an incentive accountability point sheet for rewarding participants’ achievements

**Measurable Objectives, Charts**

Quarterly outcome objectives are measured by the improvement of each participant’s organizational, social, communication and comprehension skills that will improve their academic performance, classroom participation, attendance, and homework completion, as well as missing assignments.

**This chart is designed to record each participant’s (Baseline) grades/track changes at target date.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Names</th>
<th>Entrance Date</th>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Semester</th>
<th>Baseline Grade</th>
<th>Goal Grade</th>
<th>Target Date</th>
<th>Actual Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sue Doe</td>
<td>9/10/06</td>
<td>6th</td>
<td>Semester I</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>C+ or B</td>
<td>1/25/07</td>
<td>C+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Michael</td>
<td>9/12/06</td>
<td>4th</td>
<td>Semester I</td>
<td>Min</td>
<td>Bas or Pro</td>
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**Elementary School Grading Cores:** Min=Minimal Performance Bas= Basic Pro= Proficient
**Why your community needed this concept**

Troubled elementary and middle school students often rely only on overworked teachers, administrators, social workers and (unfortunately) the juvenile justice system. If concepts like FAM are not funded, there will be as many as 15 million kids having no place to go after school, according to the After School Alliance Program. “After school programs keep kids safe in an adult supervised environment, help working families and improve academic achievement. Sixty percent said they missed less work than before because of after school programs.”

**Benefits to participants, their families and the community**

**Skills development:**

- A safe, supportive environment conducive to learning, and daily individual tutoring sessions
- If no homework is assigned, we work on reading fluency and comprehension, math, etc.
- Educational field trips and development of organizational skills

**Personal development and growth:**

- We place great emphasis on the critical need to remain in school through graduation.
- Development of socialization skills in class and the community
- Group interaction sessions, self-esteem building activities/ One-on-one mentoring & tutoring

**What makes FAM’s concept special and unique is that we target the whole family, not just the participant!**

Our main goal and objective is to enrich the lives of each participant and their family we serve, both present and future generations with – open door policies for parents and/or guardians to keep them involved with the program and encourage them to continue to work toward the success of their children and their family unit.
They are a BIG part of our future generations. We also offer special individual meetings and/or home visits as needed, with each Friday of regular and summer school reserved for staff meetings.

**Not in competition with traditional youth groups**

FAM is not designed to overlap, emerge or replace other excellent youth programs (i.e.: Head Start®; Boys & Girls Clubs®; Big Brothers/Sisters®; youth sports; church groups; etc.) Head Start, for example, works with younger children. Others are structured around specific themes, such as: sports; outdoors; surrogacy; religious affiliation; etc. **FAM focuses on individual and family prevention and intervention directly correlated with specific educational dynamics outcomes.**

**Implementation Date**

December 2000, FAM’s philosophy and concepts were implemented. Participants with the greatest need factors were identified and orientated on the rules, rewards and consequences of the program. It is FAM’s staff’s job to mentor, coach and counsels these children; assist them in sorting out their lives, improving their decision making skills to solidifying relationships with family, friends, teachers and others. Once a participant became active in the program, the goal was not to take sides, but to help each child find a positive path to lifetime fulfillment. Increased emphasis is then placed on improving school attendance and academics. Based on a professional analysis of the information gathered, environmental, social, health, learning disabilities and other factors are then addressed.
Then FAM’s staff establishes a meaningful plan of action to combat the following characteristics that may be exhibited by a participant and their family, this including but is not limited to:

- Ongoing problems with academics/behavior modification,
- Limited English Proficiency (LEP)
- Poor school attendance/attitude/organization skills,
- Adverse socioeconomic problems/residing in high crime neighborhoods
- Latch key conditions

The majority of the above characteristics had to be undone, or at least minimized, before FAM’s specific goals of creating an environment that is conducive to learning for each child in need of mentoring could be implemented.

This was accomplished by:

- Working toward improving academic performance of each participant.
- Providing increased opportunities for positive development in our schools and community.
- Working to reduce the level of aggressive behavior and/or stressful situations.
- Guidance on how to be safe when home alone/how to call 911 for an emergency.
- Improving early career development preparation.
- Teaching better ways to handle conflict resolution.
- Creating better alternatives to gangs, and AODA issues.
- Teaching improving peer relationships.
- Teaching organizational and social skills.
- Teaching improved communication and comprehension skills.
- Reducing tardiness and absenteeism.
Causes

Most people, including but not limited to, professional, paraprofessional, practitioners, and our legal community believe the word mentoring or “at-risk” means simply…“under achievement”. Yes, children who need mentoring or at-risk children can be underachievers, but that’s only the symptom.

For most, the problem is survival itself. Many of them live in poverty. They must cope with fractured families and high crime neighborhoods where violence and drug abuse may extend right into their own homes. These are other factors, if not addressed at an early age, that will lead children who are in need of mentoring to believe that they can only succeed at one thing…failure. The complex social and psychological issue, and a lack of basic academic and social skills, has continued to fuel their failures.

In most cases, children in need of mentoring believe to survive they must turn to other children in need of mentoring; as well as their fractured family, dependency on drugs and crimes, and the already overcrowded or poor organized group and or treatment homes.

Orientation

Once a prospective student is identified and accepted and given written permission to attend FAM by a parent or guardian, an orientation session is held to familiarize all parties with the expectations, rules and potential rewards of the Program.

Following orientation, an analysis of available information about the student, her/his family dynamics at home (including the general environment, social and health issues, etc.) is conducted. This is followed by a review of the child’s educational and/or social issues at school.
Plan of Action

Based on the above background information, FAM structures a personalized mentoring/tutoring plan of action for each child. The Program may include such things as mentoring on improving school attendance and academics, developing more productive study habits, improving decision making skills, refining social skills; encouragement and praise for accomplishments.

Efforts are also directed toward solidifying relationships with family, friends, teachers and others. The ultimate goal is to help each youth find a positive path to a quality education and a fulfilling life.

Once the majority of the previous issues are resolved, or at least minimized, FAM’s mentors/tutors begin addressing more specific learning issues that may include:

- How to find positive role models…
- Improving specific, as well as overall academic performance…
- Organizational and study skills…
- Tardiness and absenteeism…
- English proficiency, communication and comprehension skills…
- Early career development preparation…
- Improving social skills and peer relationships
- Decreasing aggressive behavior and other behavioral problems
- Safety issues often associated with Latch Key conditions at home and/or living in high crime neighborhoods
- Creating better alternatives to street gangs and AODA issues
Collaboration

We work closely with WASD’s Pupil Services, Curriculum Planning, Bilingual Multicultural Inequity Departments and more. Our staff, tutors, mentors and Board of Directors are committed to work diligently to maintain the success of the Program.

Recognition

The FAM program has received official recognition from the Wausau Area Community Foundation, United Way, and various WASD personal. FAM parents/guardians can feel confident that they have placed their child in a professional, multilingual mentoring and educational environment.

FAM staff and participants deeply appreciate the generous and positive news coverage provided over the years by Wausau area Radio and TV stations, the Wausau Daily Herald newspaper, service organization and company newsletters and more.

FAM’s Annual Awards Recognitions Banquet

Enrollment

FAM serves children from ages 8 through 14 (fourth through eighth grades). Depending on its physical size, each classroom will support a maximum of 10–15 participants. Typically, their ages will range across three grade levels, i.e. elementary schools ages eight to nine year olds, and middle schools ages ten to thirteen) but which may span two to five grade levels. Because of the individualized learning program, classrooms will be configured with a variety of ages to accommodate actual enrollment.
Staffing

FAM’s paid staff consists of experienced and caring Mentors/Tutors, most of whom are bilingual in English/Hmong or English/Spanish. Staff is trained to recognize each participant's unique learning patterns, talents, and needs. They also nurture the development of the whole child—academically, cognitively, emotionally, physically, socially, and ethically. Each classroom is managed by a head mentor/tutor.

Mentors/Tutors must be at least 18 (preferably older) and possess a minimum of a high school degree. For staffing purposes, hours are the same for each school day and may be split between classroom service and administrative duties at the FAM Office and Training Center. Because of the complexity of scheduling, staff hours shouldn’t change infrequently, if at all.

Parents may request additional staff time on an occasional basis, for which there is no charge. The maximum ratio of students per staff member seldom exceeds 10:1 and will not exceed 15. FAM maintains a staffing level of at least two adults per classroom.

Staff positions include but are not limited to:

Mathematics Specialist – helps participants gain a further understanding of the use of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division, fractions, geometry, weights and measures, etc. When possible, further understanding of mathematical concepts is taught through the use of appropriate interactive software and other learning technologies.

Science Specialist: – assists participants in discovering the basic elements of both the scientific method and the natural and physical sciences. Students are encouraged to engage in the "doing" of science, by conducting hands-on activities designed to lead to concept
understanding, curiosity and even development. Field trips help integrate real experiences into the science program.

**Social Studies Specialist:** – assists participants in understanding history, geography and anthropology, etc. Participants are encouraged to become familiar with the heritage of the world, learn of significant leaders, cultures, epochal events, and places where history was (and is) being made.

Middle school participants are encouraged to move to more advanced study through project-based explorations in the areas of economics, politics, and business – disciplines which help increase the students' appreciation for various cultures, ethnicities, and traditions.

**General Policy**

FAM has created a comprehensive program and assembled a well-qualified staff to provide the finest tutoring and mentoring services possible. It is essential to conduct operations in a businesslike fashion in which both the FAM’s staff and parents keep each other fully informed of their respective needs. Exceptions to the policies stated herein cannot be made.

Enrollments are accepted with the understanding that it is the intention of parents to keep their children enrolled for the full academic year. FAM makes no guarantee regarding student progress.

**Enrollment**

FAM does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, ethnic origin, or religion. Applications are accepted according to the following priorities:

1. In need of academic assistance
2. In need of an environment conducive to learning
3. In need of assistance with organizational skills
4. Live in a Latch Key home
5. Live in a high crime or low socioeconomic area

**Applications**

Applications for enrollment are available at the FAM office and training center or by writing, calling or emailing FAM. Qualified applicants are generally accepted on a first come-first served basis. If there is insufficient space to accommodate all qualified applicants, the remainder will be placed on a waiting list.

To ensure consideration for each academic year, applications must be submitted by the dates indicated on the application form. Additional applications will be accepted throughout the year for any openings which may occur during the year.

**Assessment**

An initial assessment of each child’s situation will be conducted prior to enrollment. The results are shared with parents and may serve as the basis of further assessments and evaluations involving both parents and staff. Assessments are regularly conducted in November and May of each year. All documents in a child's file are considered confidential.

**Disclaimer**

NOTE: As a private program, FAM reserves the right to deny acceptance to any applicant for any reason, however, typical reasons include:

- Applicants whose needs appear to exceed those that we believe can be realistically served by our existing resources;
• Applicants from any family whose goals or intentions may run counter to the goals and philosophy of the Program.

(Examples include but are not limited to: inability or unwillingness of the parent/guardian to support the rules and recommendations of the Program; the intervention of outside counselors and/or other specialists without conferring with FAM; rudeness and/or disrespect for teachers and staff by the participant and/or those in charge of her/his welfare; and failure to honor a contract with FAM).

**Termination**

Should the decision be made to terminate a participant’s relationship with FAM, the Director will provide a written notice of such, which will be sent to the parent or guardian 24 hours of the last day of attendance.

**Required Forms**

Before a child's first day at FAM and periodically thereafter, the following forms must be completed and submitted:

1. Health History
2. Social History
3. Media, Wire and Photo Releases
4. Emergency Release Information Form
5. Consent for Medical Treatment
6. Immunization Record
7. Physician's Statement
8. Release of Information
9. Field Trip Permission slips (on a trip by trip basis)
Notification

Once a participant is accepted into the Program, an applicant’s parent or guardian will be notified and must complete and submit an Enrollment Application form within one week of notification of acceptance.

De-enrollment, Re-enrollment

Parents and/or guardians wishing to withdraw their children from the FAM program may do so by notifying the Director in writing, preferably at least two weeks prior to the date of withdrawal. Re-enrollment following withdrawal requires a new application.

Orientation

Depending upon the needs of each entering participant, an orientation may be required as part of the enrollment process. This familiarization program may be several weeks to a month in length, may require extra staff and would focus on building self-management skills required in the classroom as well as pre-academic skills such as an introduction to phonics or numeric. Parents of incoming children will be informed of any orientation requirement at the time they are notified of their child's acceptance into the school. The requirement will become a part of the Enrollment Agreement.

Communications with Parents/Guardians

Various forms of communications with parents or guardians are an essential component of the FAM system. Some also come from the teacher and/or the participant. On average, parents receive a communication from FAM weekly.
Parent/guardian meetings to discuss the child's progress are scheduled once a month. Additional meetings with FAM personnel can be scheduled each Friday of the academic year. Because of their primary responsibilities (especially at the beginning and end of each class), it is difficult for FAM tutors to engage in extended conversations at these times. Parents are invited to meet with tutors, program or executive directors at other times by appointment.

**Parent Education Program**

FAM offers and strongly encourages the participation of parents in parent education programs. Free childcare is typically available to allow parents to attend. A schedule of these events is provided to parents on a periodic basis.

**To apply, please contact:**

**Family Advocacy Mentoring, Inc.**  
127 Kent Street  
Wausau, WI  54403  
Telephone (715) 572.7922  
Email: famkids@charter.net
Conclusion

Even though I came from a sharecropper’s family, I was still able to persevere and go through high school and college, and develop and implement an after school program for needy children and their families. Now, I am still progressing in that I have a desire to continue learning and developing myself toward being a valuable contributor to society.

I believe that regardless of what kind of background you may have come from, what environment you came out of or if trying to make sense of the unfairness, it is still possible to become successful person in life. Before continuing to blame God, others or situations for our lack of success or failures in life, consider some words of wisdom related to unfairness.

Unfairness and blame can be explained or defined in many ways, but to fully understand them as with anything one wishes to learn or understand is to go to the main sources. In 1 Chronicles 13: (vs.) 9-10 Ezra writes about Making Sense of Unfairness “And when they came to Chidon’s threshing floor, Uzza put out his hand to hold the ark, for the oxen stumbled. Then the anger of the Lord was aroused against Uzza, and He struck him because he put his hand to the ark; and he died there before God.”

We often say that a person, or persons, “was in the wrong place at the wrong time” when unfortunate catastrophic incidents occur. We always look for that dynamic labeling behind them, for example an airplane crash, one of our heroes gone bad, or disastrous explosion in a coal mine in West Virginia. Was it pilot error, the weather condition or the air traffic controller; or a dangerous buildup of methane gas and carbon monoxide or safety issues that caused the explosion? We always look for blame of the unfairness. Or what drove him or her to do such a thing when they had everything going for them. Perchance those analogies help to explain what seems to be so unfair of the death of Uzza when he was just trying to steady or save the ark.
Like any of us who attempt to do the right thing, it seems that he acted instinctively with good motives to save the ark from possible damage or destruction. Or is it possible that Uzza could have feared God’s wrath if he did do something to save the ark?

To attempt to clarify what the above verses are trying to explain to us, let’s look at God’s instruction to David, who had angrily asked how he could move the ark to Jerusalem. God has instructed David to use the Levites to carry the ark on their shoulders and he used an oxen. And could this be precisely why God struck down Uzza? Like David, we too have done something we should not have done and then turn around and complain to God about being treated unfairly.

Then, if we do things different from God’s instruction, how hard is it to blame Him for our failures? Remember earlier writing about the children and how they respond to certain ways when being disciplined and how we as adults sometimes forget our childhood mistakes. Children often make some truly innocent mistake while being outright disobedient and then scream bloody murder at the redirection of parents.

_The warning issue is... in life, what disobedience is waiting there for the opportunity through disaster to appear?_

My life certainly has been and continues to be a challenge. I have gone from poverty to relative comfort, from disengaged in society to a child advocate, from uneducated to a Masters level, from extreme prejudices to complicated prejudices. Perseverance, love, education and my faith in God has taken my “from…to…life” to a positive life where challenges are welcomed and contentment is achievable.
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