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Coming to Voices: Black Feminist Thought Advancing the Ideal of Civic Journalism
(Under the Direction of NATHANIEL KOHN)

People use media to inform their lives. It is no wonder then that journalists find it necessary to champion the objective and balanced nature of their work. Their work serves as the base of public knowledge. Increasingly, however, scholars are examining the forces that affect news production in an attempt to redefine a new kind of civic journalism. Scholars like, Rosen (1996) are recognizing that journalists are people, whose age, gender, race, religion and life experiences determine the way news is created. If news media were reconceptualized and journalists were encouraged to approach and practice their craft differently, news media could be revolutionized and could help fuel democratic change. This thesis is a look at a young journalist grappling with social forces and their impact on her professional life. It is a look at how civic journalism can work when the personal is explored as a site of knowledge.

INDEX WORDS: Civic journalism, Black feminism, subjectivity, autobiography, social movement

COMING TO VOICES:
BLACK FEMINIST THOUGHT ADVANCING IDEAL OF CIVIC JOURNALISM

by

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DEDICATION

To my mother, and her mother, and her mother onto the beginning of time

I laugh at flags that fly high. I have no use for them – not even as a blanket on a cold night, edged with ice sickles. No storm could compel me to close the reckless, blood-thirsty colors around me. It cannot provide warmth. I smile inside because I come home to richer colors hanging in the bay window. I have never spoken openly of my intense love for beautiful, daring, and demanding women. Women who learn to take their own advice. I find them most beautiful because they don't mind calling for help, caring for their young, or making insurmountable odds appear easy. Their breasts are always sexy; their ass is always round; their scent is always telling. There is nothing more splendidly beautiful than a cocoa-brown woman running to the bus with a piece of fresh cornbread. There is nothing more graceful than a two-step dance done by arched charcoal feet, jigging to a rhythmic beat in a cramped living room. There is absolutely nothing richer than a slender chocolate arm, holding open a cold glass door for a random sister on the street. Surely, there is something magical about this woven basket that neatly holds our love for one another. We carry it covered with thick quilts, and meet in the afternoon shade. Under the strongest oak tree, we throw back our heads and laugh. We smile so deep because the charred limbs didn't always hold our sons, inside we have the power to fertilize our own seeds, and old negro spirituals are true - trouble don't last always. Otherwise, our grandmothers - proud and strong as they were – would've never sung them. Quiet as its kept, we weren't raised to live lies just real lives.

- RQW

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

ME¹DIA

The power of media intrigues me and has since my years in grade school. In the seventh grade, my social studies teacher, Mr. Miller, mentioned the arrival of closed-circuit television to our school. I brushed the announcement off, only vaguely interested each classroom would get a TV set. While doodling on a sheet of paper, I heard him say our principal would be able to make a morning address during home room. Mrs. Hudson or Mrs. Barbie Doll, as the students liked to call her, already made announcements every single morning on the intercom. The thought of seeing her too slightly annoyed me. She was a petite lady with shiny blond hair. It was always curled and sprayed in place. In fact, everything about her was always in place. She never wore pants. Each day she was

¹ In this text, I visit past and present instances in my life to illustrate how various theoretical concepts, such as Black feminism and civic journalism manifest in my life. And, to explore how I cross the bridge between theory and practice. In my mind's eye, media production is a mixture of these personal experiences, various expressions and the performance of everyday life. Journalism and reporting - become a hall mark of who a person is. In Walt Harrington's *Intimate Journalism: The Art and Craft of Reporting Everyday Life* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1997), the author said he has no quarrels with the journalism tradition, but it seems it is time for it to grow and change (xii). He writes, "what's so baffling to me after 20 years as a newspaper and magazine journalist is why we can't include in our reports more of the everyday worlds in which we and all our readers live, " (xiii). Likewise, in Gary Smith's " The Man Who Couldn't Read," *Intimate Journalism: The Art and Craft of Reporting Everyday Life* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1997, pp 3-17), the author argues it is in revealing select details and accumulating various examples of the "movement of life " that eventually compels the reader to understand the "context and feelings behind an individual's action.

complete with a pastel-colored skirt suit with matching shoes, blouse and makeup. You could hear her designer pumps tap up and down the halls during class time.

My feelings about the TV changed just a bit, when I learned students would make up the broadcasting team. Maybe the televisions weren't such a bad idea. The prospect of being seen all over the school definitely had some appeal. Trying not to appear overly excited, I asked Mr. Miller how the broadcast team would be selected. Would it be kids from advanced classes, the hall monitors, or based on teacher's recommendations? I could tell by my classmates' immediate attentiveness that I wasn't the only one interested. As usual, he would have to get back to us with a definite answer. He never seemed quite sure about anything except misspelled words, sloppy chapter outlines, and incomplete answers on a quiz. All of which quickly earned a deduction of valuable points, and a big minus sign in the grade book. I discarded my scrap sheet of paper, which had my autograph scribbled all over the margins and glanced up at the clock. As the lunch bell rang I couldn't help but think, "I 'd really like to be on TV."

Of course, I was one of several dozens who felt the same way. But, if it came down to it, I knew I at least had a shot. I'd been at the school more than two years. I was well known and pretty much liked. Plus, my older sister, Retina, had gone to the same school. Mrs. Barbie Doll and all Retina's teachers still raved about her stellar academic performance and her pleasant personality. They always seemed to sing these praises as if to say I'd somehow fallen desperately short of their expectations. Even still, I managed to stay on people's good side.

After two weeks and much anticipation, Ms. Hudson announced Jane Macon Middle School's Morning Show would be staffed by student council members. Elections

were right around the corner, and she encouraged all those interested to run for an office. As a bonus, candidates' final speeches would be made on the first morning show. The winners would be announced that afternoon. "Okay," I thought. "I could easily run for an office." Deciding what position to run for was a bit more difficult. The competition was stiff. President was out of the question. It was reserved for an eighth- grader. Vice president was open for a seventh-grader, but still out of the question. The cutest seventh-grader alive had thrown his name into the hat. Even secretary looked to be blocked off, two students from the gifted class were running against each other. Slowly, each position shaped up to be a contest of the cutest, smartest, or best dressed. Finally, however, I settled on the Sergeant -at- Arms post.

For the next couple of weeks, I campaigned hard. I convinced my Dad to buy me blank buttons and poster board. On them, I wrote my slogan, "Renita Ward for Sergeant-at-Arms - Second to None!" I also had an enormous amount of energy throughout the campaign. I endlessly talked to people about my bid during class, gym, and on the bus. I relished the attention. Mr. Miller even let each candidate make a speech to all seven periods of his social studies class. We were supposed to talk about our platform. Too afraid to let on I had no idea what a platform was, I let my competitor, Paul Scott, speak to the classes first. By fourth period, I finally realized a platform was what you thought and what you planned to do in office.

Unfortunately, my bid for Sergeant-at -Arms was unsuccessful. Paul Scott won instead. But, my final speech was a great hit! Compliments like, "Great speech, Renita," or "You really should have won - your speech was so good," showered me from schoolmates and teachers. When Rory Davis, an eighth-grader whom I could only sneak

peaks at during lunchtime, complimented my efforts too, I was sold on media forever. Before that day, I swear he'd never even noticed me.

Developing A Negative

The power of mass exposure stayed with me and eventually led me to write for Redan High School's *Raider Review*, the high school newspaper. My position as Opinions Editor afforded me quite a bit of authority and creative freedom. I was closely involved in shaping the content of the paper. I loved it. Staff writers and I focused on various issues we felt were important, ranging from school pride to high school friendships to mores among Black youth. On several occasions, concerns in my own life would be the impetus for my stories. For instance, once, my best friend, Trena, and me had a terrible argument and hadn't been speaking for weeks. I was very sore about the whole situation, especially since we couldn't even talk through the problem. So, right before press time, I typed up an article titled "What About Your Friends,"². I secretly dedicated the article to Trena by including a line from our favorite rap artist, MJG. Of the people who knew us best, they recognized immediately the article was about me and Trena. The story actually served as an icebreaker and helped to repair our friendship.

In 1995, when I graduated from high school, I really valued the time I'd spent writing, taking photographs, and informing my fellow classmates. Unlike some freshmen, my major at the University of Georgia was a clear choice. I desperately wanted to be a journalist. I knew the newspaper was an ideal way to get me out in front of the student population and have an impact. I'd learned articles, in particularly Op-Ed pieces, could inspire or anger people into changing their actions. Sure, writing in college would be

² See Ward, R. (1995, Jan/Feb). What About Your Friends. *Raider Review*.

different. It was more technical and deadlines were emphasized more. I was ready though. I could handle it.

My biggest challenges, however, did not seem to come from the work necessarily, but the change in environment³. The University of Georgia was drastically different from Redan High School. My sense of community⁴, reflections of faces like mine, people who valued my opinion and encouraged me to spout them out, were gone. I nearly suffocated within the predominantly white campus at UGA. In looking back on my first

Vol.XIX, No. 4.

³ In *an Artist's Colony*, " *Life Notes: Personal Writings By Contemporary Black Women* (New York : Norton & Company.1994, pp.79-91), Toi Derricotte writes about the "feelings of depression, shame, anxiety, self-hatred, fear, isolation, as well as [a] desire for love and intimacy," when her family moved into a predominantly white neighborhood in 1974. Similarly, in *A Taste of Power: A Black Woman's Story* (New York: DoubleDay Publishing.1992, pp.17-62), author Elaine Brown describes how she adopted "white things," like classical piano and ballet into her repertoire to be more like her white classmates in her predominantly white grade school. She said, "eventually, I discovered that my ultimate disguise could be manipulated through words, their words in their voices. I listened to them, paid attention to grammar, their syntax, their cadence. I learned to speak exactly like white people, learned to enunciate their language, to say "these" and not "dese" and "he'll be going" and not "he be goin' ," (31).

⁴ Patricia Hill Collins speaks of similar feelings in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge. 1991, pp. xi- xv). In the preface she writes of a glorious experience in grade school after participating in a pageant. She said the grown-ups told her "how vital my part was and congratulated me on how well I had done. Their words and hugs made me feel that I was important and that what I thought, and felt, and accomplished mattered." However, Collins noted that later her experiences changed drastically. She adds, " as my world expanded, I learned that not everyone agreed with them. Beginning in adolescence, I was increasingly the "first," or "one of the few," or the "only" African-American and/or woman and or working-class person in my schools, communities, and work settings. I saw nothing wrong with being who I was, but apparently many others did. My world grew larger, but I felt I was growing smaller. I tried to disappear into myself in order to deflect the painful, daily assaults designed to teach me that being an African American, working-class woman made me lesser than those who were not. And as I felt smaller, I became quieter and eventually was virtually silent."

years at Georgia, I was extremely depressed. I became ultra self-conscious of my speech, my appearance, and even, my upbringing. It was very difficult for me to connect, to find an entry point in class, the dining halls, or just walking on campus.

Class time was one of the most defeating experiences during my freshman year at Georgia. Up until that point, I had constantly been encouraged to express myself, even in my most troubled years. The matriarchs in my father's church said I had "ole' folk sense". They often said only one gifted with "sight" and "wisdom" from yesterday could recite poems and tell tall tales the way I did. At Miller Grove Junior High and Redan High School, both predominantly middle-class, Black schools, I was one of the better known students because of my oratorical and writing skills. My teachers frequently suggested I enter contests and participate on programs. This wealth of encouragement and care all but stopped at UGA. By the end of my freshman year, I had only written two poems. One was about suicide, the other domestic violence. Luckily, I was assigned a dorm room with Sabrina Ellison, a Black freshman from Columbus, GA. She was a comfort zone, and she had a car. I went home to Atlanta every single weekend, and hung out with my old friends. When they asked about school, I changed the subject. Back in Stone Mountain, I was not just freer, I was free.

My writing career at UGA did not mimic my high school days. In the past, I'd drawn my story ideas from my everyday life, conversations with friends and family. Senior year I'd written a story to encourage seniors to stop skipping school, only because I'd skipped almost 25 days. Once I realized my grades were suffering terribly, I tried to break the trend through my writing⁵. Using my life as a breeding ground for stories

⁵ See Ward, R. (1995, Jan/Feb). Senioritis. *Raider Review*. Vol XIX. No. 4.

turned out not to be such a good idea at UGA. Story ideas about African American students' ill treatment in downtown Athens, feeling uncomfortable at the Ramsey Center, the student gym, or simply wanting more musical variety on the UGA buses were frequently rebutted. Student editors at the *Red & Black*, the campus newspaper, said such stories would not cater to the larger student body.

Each afternoon when I got off the bus in front of my apartment in Family Housing, the children's musical laughter from the playground greeted me. Sunbeams would light their smiles as they played games I'd almost forgotten. I thought it amazing to see so many different races and ages playing kiddy games. They amused themselves with ring-around-the roses, hop-scotch, hide-and-seek and each others' company. I decided to pitch a story about student mothers to the *Red & Black* for Mother's Day. They seemed hesitant and thought perhaps I should write a story about what students were getting their mothers for Mother's Day. The news editor said it was a good idea, but UGA didn't really have any students who were mothers. I pointed out that our students had a variety of different lifestyles and not all UGA's student population was 19, single, and living in a Greek house. I ended my rebuttal by asking, "Who do you think lives in UGA's Family Housing?" Reluctantly, they agreed to run the story⁶. But, somehow the front-page story didn't feel like the grand achievements I'd experienced at the *Raider Review*. Pitching story ideas and writing articles had never been about being uncomfortable. It had never been about discussions that made my hands sweat, or creating newsroom silences where ringing phones went unanswered.

⁶ See Ward, R. (1998, May 8). Students' Mother's Day has whole new meaning. *The Red & Black*. Vol. 105, Issue 129.

In 1999, I graduated with a ABJ in journalism and felt my writing would not contribute anything different to the world. Was my professional writing destined to be the same cookie-cutter stories I' d been inclined to do for the past four years? Where would I go? No way could I afford to loaf around a year. On a whim, I applied to Georgia' s graduate program in Journalism. There, my course work introduced me to theory, and I was excited. I could actually make out how these abstract concepts played out in my everyday life. A vibrant feeling pulsed in my chest as I participated in class discussions. I found it to be such valuable information. Thoughts of media systems, dominant ideologies, hegemony and the like constantly floated around in my head. And, although it seemed to teach me more about my life and the world around me, I didn' t feel like I was being equipped with the tools to share it with the average person. The average person did not go to graduate school or use difficult words to illustrate a simple point. As I strove to adopt academic jargon as my second language, I slowly saw the cookie cutter emerge again. I searched for an outlet.

I had long been frustrated and isolated in and outside of the classroom on the University of Georgia' s campus. Consequently, I participated in few extracurricular activities. In Fall of 2000, however, the University announced it would be celebrating the 40th Anniversary of Desegregation January 8 & 9, 2001. The administration developed a student commemoration committee to help encourage community involvement. This looked like a chance to pay tribute to UGA' s first African American students, Hamilton Holmes Jr. and Charlayne Hunter, and get involved. It took only two weeks work before I started to question the University' s true desire to make the event a success. There did not seem to be a large effort to get the community nor past Black alumni involved in the

event. And, students didn't really know too much about the desegregation celebration either. I wanted to ask a few questions of people around me: UGA was experiencing backlash regarding diversity, was this an attempt to simply overshadow the negative comments in the media? Was the University of Georgia truly committed to increasing diversity in the student body and faculty and staff? Did financial resources speak to that commitment?

While asking other people these questions, I began to think of my personal answers as well. I thought about my experiences at UGA from 1995 to 2000. It seemed that others shared some of my sentiments. There were comments acknowledging feelings of isolation, alienation, and mistreatment. During this period, I took care to speak with my fellow black sisters at UGA. The Black student population at UGA was only 6 percent, and Black females comprised more than half of that number. After countless conversations with fellow classmates, I wanted to do something. I had the urge to draw as much attention as I could to UGA's issues. In some respects I was powerless, but there was the pen⁷. Could writing articles about the event possibly effect the perceptions of people about race relations at UGA? Could I provide reporters with edgy quotes and write articles too? If I began to speak out about race issues, how would I be perceived? By the close of the 2000 -01 school year, my articles and public sentiments had thrust me into the forefront of student activism and campus politics. In the end, I wondered how

⁷ In the foreword of *flat-footed truths: Telling Black Women's Lives*, Marcia Ann Gillespie states, "that acknowledging our longing to know and share women's stories and to tell our own pushes us to break silence," (New York: Holt Company) pp. xv. I had participated in several gripe sessions about UGA and the way Black students were treated. However, I began to realize I had to do more to speak for change. I knew it was okay to tell other people's story, but it was also very important to share my own.

much my understanding of the media impacted my actions and how much those actions impacted reality⁸.

This research examines several aspects of an African American woman's experience in a country, educational system and professional industry dominated by white people operating with a largely Eurocentric value system. By exploring my personal history, family, professional development, education, and experiences with media, I examine what instances enabled me to find my voice. I employ the techniques that have traditionally given Black women voice: autobiography⁹ journal writing¹⁰ and

⁸ In John Fiske's *Media Matters: Race and Gender in U.S. Politics*, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press) 1996, the author argues "class, race, gender, then are not so much stable social categories as axes of power along which strategies are deployed and tactics practiced: they are terrains of struggle," (69). Later, he states "...although the body of the individual is comparatively powerless in determining the way he or she is to be figured, it is extremely powerful in giving the histories and alliances a material presence, in making them live, in making them visible and audible, and in making them matter in, and become the matter of everyday life. If not figured into a living body, the clash of social alliances and of different histories can seem abstracted and distant, difficult to visualize, hear, and engage with," (71). Likewise, George Lipsitz's "The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: Radicalized Social Democracy In America" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Association, Boston, November) 1993, also includes discussions on how persons and certain topics dealing with race are framed in mainstream media. This concept became more valuable and valid to me every time I appeared in the newspaper, made a public speech or appeared in a television news story. I often felt like the walking poster child for diversity issues at UGA, and I would constantly get phone calls, E - mails and letters that thanked me or scorned me for the stance I took.

⁹ See bell hooks "Writing Autobiography", *flat-footed Truths: Telling Black Women's Lives*. (New York: Holt Company.1998, pp.8-14), for a discussion on the role of autobiography in healing and validation of experience in Black women's lives. In it she writes, "claiming the freedom to grow as an imaginative writer was connected for me with having the courage to open, to be able to tell the truth of one's life as I had experienced it in writing. To talk about one's life as, I had experienced it in writing," (9). hooks goes on to say that autobiography for the Black woman is a, "...longing to tell one's story and the process of telling is symbolically a gesture of longing to recover the past in such a way that one experiences both a sense of reunion and a sense of release. It is was the longing for release that compelled the writing but concurrently it was the joy of

poetry¹¹, by inserting some of my own journal writings and poetry where relevant to the text. On a larger scale, this research explores: What are the implications of subjectivity on the fourth estate? How can journalists approach their jobs differently? What role can journalists truly play in social change?

reunion that enabled me to see that the act of writing one's autobiography is a way to find again that aspect of self and experience that may no longer be an actual of one's life but is a living memory shaping and informing the present," (11).

¹⁰ In the foreword of *Life Notes: Personal Writings by Contemporary Black Women*, Marcia Ann Gillespie suggests Black women's journal writing is for, "...peeling back the layers and exposing our secret pleasures and pains, our uncertainties and doubts, our angers and despair have come transformation, empowerment, community, activism. We learn we are not crazy, or that we are the best kind of crazy. We bear witness, we affirm, we find our true voices, our true power. We heal. We are healed. We speak truth to power," (13-14). Furthermore, according to Gillespie, "...these truths are often voiced silently. We write them out in diaries and journals, in letters and notebooks, and on scraps of paper. With pencil or pen, typewriters and keyboards, we give our thoughts and feelings room to breathe. And we give ourselves permission to believe that our thoughts, feelings, issues, and words are valuable. We affirm that our stories, our experiences, our impressions and opinions are important enough to be saved," (14).

¹¹ See Sapphire "The Artist as Witness," *flat-footed Truths: Telling Black Women's Stories*. (New York: Holt Company.1998. p.16). She writes, "Some people call my poems confessional. for me it has been about erasing a certain invisibility, about saying someone like me exists."

CHAPTER 2

FOLK LIKE US DON' T HAVE ERASERS:

BLACK WOMEN'S JOURNEY TO EXPRESS CREATIVITY

Black women attempting to pursue careers as writers, poets, actors, photographers and artists, encounter a great many difficulties. Often faced with multiple axes of oppression as a result of race, class and gender, these women must overcome internal and external obstacles to pursue careers that champion self expression. In reviewing the work of several contemporary Black women, I found their decision to pursue an artistic career fraught with emotional recounts of a painstaking process. These African American women ultimately found truth, freedom, and creative expression by embracing concepts of knowledge and truth rooted in the lives of other Black women and in themselves. This chapter explores how Black women have managed to continually confront and overcome obstacles to their creativity by developing a myriad of tactical strategies grounded in an Afrocentric feminist epistemology.

Video Mama Part I (Poem)

Sometimes I have wished to be blessed with a magic wand that instantly changes my body. I have wished that my hair was not so stubby and textured. I want to be able to run my fingers through it. I want to be able to turn my head and have my long, beautiful hair shape my face. I have tired desperately to make it grow. I visit the stylist regularly. She perms, washes, conditions, and cuts my hair. My ends are always even and manicured. My hair will not budge past my neck! It just sits there thick and stiff. I dye it

curl it, pin it up, there is little hope. Finally, I succumb and agree to add weave to my own hair. The texture of the fake hair is nothing like my own. It is sleek, flowing, and yes, long. I feel like a new woman. I run my fingers through my hair. As for the wand, my hips, my thighs, my stomach, and two pouches on my back need to go. I am not complaining, but I need to lose a little weight. I know going to all-you-can-eat restaurants are not the direction to go in, but they are everywhere. Chinese, Southern Cooking, Seafood - honestly, what's a girl to do? But you know, I would like this fat to go away. Even if a few pounds would shift to my breast, I would be satisfied. I won't take this too far and most times I don't want these things anymore. I wish I could be lighter. I mean just a touch, only a little bit. I wish my skin was milky like black coffee with way too much cream. I like my coffee that way and two lumps of sugar. I know, I know, too much sugar is bad for you. I mean I would only need the wand once. I would only make the changes I need. I feel beautiful. Please don't get me wrong. I just want to be able to glide into a place and meet gazes that welcome me into a space. I don't want to be a point of suspicion until I open my mouth. I do not want you to pat me on the back for being smart, as if to imply that everyone else who is like me is dumb. I get tired of pep talking myself and convincing myself that I am indeed beautiful.

Obstacles

In many cases, Black women have had difficulty cultivating a creative spirit and were less inclined to be journalists, academics, or authors because of a 1) limited knowledge of Black women's intellectual legacy, 2) lack of visible role models in place of stereotypical images, and 3) deep-seated feelings of inadequacy. These roadblocks to

Black women's expression are part of the driving themes in Patricia Hill Collins' *Black Feminist Thought : Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*.

Collins' begins her focus on Black women's history by asking, "Why are African-American women and our ideas not known and not believed in?" (5) . In answering this simple, yet thought-provoking question, the author illustrates how the absence of Black women's stories and work is a debilitating problem for encouraging creative expression in African-American women. Collins argues that the "intellectual prowess" of those like Maria Stewart, one of the first African-American women political lecturers, "come to us only in scattered fragments" (4). These disjointed 'fragments', according to the author, obscure Black women's intellectual tradition and work to suppress the lived experiences of this group, thereby limiting the presence of an "independent consciousness" available to Black women to build upon. Like Stewart, the speeches, essays, articles, autobiographies, and poems of Ida B. Wells, Zora Neale Hurston, Fannie Lou Hamer and others have laid in obscurity for decades. They receive widespread attention and exposure only after academics, most often Black women, work to uncover their buried gifts of knowledge.

Fradin and Fradin (2000) begin their book, *Ida B. Wells: Mother of the Civil Rights Movement*, with the solemn acknowledgment, "of all the great civil rights leaders, Ida B. Wells is one of the least known - yet one of the most important," (ix). They continue this opening tribute by listing the many contributions Wells made to the early Civil Rights Movement. She spearheaded the Alpha Suffrage Club, one of the country's first organizations to work for the right of black women to vote; she was co-editor of the *Memphis Star*, a Black newspaper which was burned to the ground for its anti-lynching

platform; she was a founding member of National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), which still fights for the civil rights of colored people today; and, she was author of countless pamphlets, including the *Red Papers*, which opposed the brutality of lynching and mob-rule and was circulated internationally (x). The authors also point out that Wells refused to give up her seat in an all-white train car in the 1880's and sued the railroad for discrimination. This act of bravery was some 75 years before Rosa Parks sparked off the Alabama boycott by refusing to give up her seat to a white man. According to the authors, these all still remain little known facts. Similarly, Lee (2000) chronicles the life of Fannie Lou Hamer, political lecturer, social protester and Mississippi sharecropper in *for freedom's sake: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer*. The author suggests this biography of "a poor, black, southern woman," is an attempt to gain reward for oppressed individuals' "historic battles against devaluation and exclusion" (ix). In both instances, the authors attempt to show Black women's political lives and self-expression were fueled by their self-knowledge and lived experiences. Lee, in particular, writes that her work is an attempt to preserve Hamer's historical and intellectual legacy, and to inform present generations of Hamer's sacrifice and struggle (181).

As in the case of Stewart, Wells, and Hamer, Black women's stories of leadership, ingenuity, idealism, and creativity, are often overlooked in mainstream history books. Collins argues this absence is not by accident, but by design. It is the suppression of Black women's personal history, literary and political works that frequently prevent generations of Black women from drawing on a "vital analytical foundation for a distinctive standpoint on self, community, and society" (5). Collins asserts,

“maintaining the invisibility of Black women and our ideas is critical in structuring patterned relations of race, gender, and class inequality that pervade the entire social structure ” (5). It is this “invisibility” of Black women’s intellectual tradition that results in “clear discontinuities” and a lack of “thematic consistency” in an Afrocentric feminist epistemology (6), thus, robbing modern-day women of opportunities to utilize the achievements of their foremothers as guideposts for their careers.

hooks (1998) also believes the lack of intellectual legacy and visible role models is a roadblock to Black women’s creativity and development as expressive individuals. She writes, “Sometimes, I do not see any women doing things differently in a way that works, that satisfies, and I need to see this for it to be real. I know in my heart that it is important for women to see other women doing many things. It gives one a sense of infinite possibilities ” (154). However, these “infinite possibilities” are not always visible to Black women aspiring to be writers, artists, poets or academics. Thus, the opportunity for a woman to nurture her artistic talents is reduced. Even with the recent increase of accessibility to these professions, Black women still are not nearly as visible as some.

Men’s work, especially white men’s work, is displayed or published in considerable volume. Hence, it is more widely available and consumed by the public. The work of white men is also used to instruct and educate people more often than not. Thereby, even the learning process is effected by barriers created by institutionalized white supremacy. In “Harriet Ann Buckley: An Artist Storyteller,” author Juanita Johnson-Bailey describes an incident where the young artist questioned the course material:

When I went to art school, it was the first time I'd ever gone to school with White kids. This was quite an eye-opener because I was the only person of color in my classes. All of the instructors were White. I'd ask, "Don't you know any Black artists to talk about in the lessons?" They didn't. I'd find examples and tell my teachers about them. I wanted to know someone like me. Only one Black artist came as a visiting lecturer the entire time I was in college. Teachers were constantly trying to mold me in the images of all the other students. At every turn they were telling me, "Your images are not right." The low grades on my notebooks reflected their opinions of my work, which was totally different from everybody else's. In big letters written back to me were, "Where did this come from? These do not fit!" I would get Cs and someone else who turned in a late assignment with far less work in it than mine would get an A. That hit me. I knew something was wrong (27).

The above passage highlights several core themes when examining the internal barriers to Black women's creativity. Clearly, it raises issues regarding exposure to diverse history, limited role models, and discriminatory treatment of Black students in predominantly white environments. The implications, however, become more pronounced when we explore their interrelatedness to Black women's self-concept and their ability to achieve.

African American women's self-concept and achievement, in some respects, is closely connected to their image in larger society. Their images have been continually

distorted, manipulated, and regulated to that of “Other” in Western culture. Frequently shown as “stereotypical mammies, matriarchs, welfare recipients, and hot mommas...the status of African American women as outsiders or strangers becomes the point from which other groups define their normality” (Collins, 68). Artist H. A. Buckley would probably agree; she said “my work centers on women because it centers on me and because there are not enough good visual images of Black women” (Johnson Bailey, 28). And, although Buckley described her work as “universal,” her instructors described it as “not right.” Thus, this notion of Black women as “Other” or abnormal sheds light on the artist’s description of her college instructors. By inadvertently or purposefully seeking to control Buckley’s artistic work, the instructors were inhibiting her ability to recreate images of Black women and self. In fact, some would suggest that the instructors’ actions reinforce a larger matrix of oppression for Black women. Collins states that:

as part of a generalized ideology of domination, these controlling images of Black womanhood take on special meaning because the authority to define these symbols is a major instrument of power. In order to exercise power, elite white men and their representatives must be in a position to manipulate appropriate symbols concerning Black women (68).

Similarly, in Omi and Winant’s *Racial Formations*, the authors argue that defining people as “Other” is designed to justify “expropriation of property, the denial of political rights, the introduction of slavery and other forms of coercive labor, as well as outright extermination,” (14) within larger society.

However, the goal of Black women writers, artists and the like goes beyond undoing negative images and exposing their oppressive nature. These women also seek to reconceptualize Black womanhood and present a more accurate representation of who and what they really are. Lee suggests this concept was central in writing the Hamer biography. In Lee's eyes, it was important to usurp the "strong black woman" depiction and provide a complete understanding of a historical figure who "coexisted with pain and challenge" (182). This "pain and challenge" Hamer and others endured is partially attributed to how Black women internalize their oppression.

Video Mama Part II (poem)

For once, I would like to know that majority of the people around me can agree on my beauty. I am not trying to be something that I am not. I am simply trying to be. I rub my skin sometimes to see if it is just a dust that has settled and can be wiped away. It is not. It is a permanent fixture. I will be marked for life. I have a silent seal burned unto my chest. I will walk in the path of qualified, convinced beauty. The source of my glow and beauty will always be a mystery ignored. After the end of time, the next species will discover the key to civilization and unlock the magic. My fury is now so intense, I will surely have burned inside a long time ago. I will perish without knowing my self-worth. It has always been a cloak, carefully placed to make me look big and strong. Inside of myself, I would like the chance to cry. My feelings are so hurt. I live through such pain. Please tell why I am never enough. Why are my kinks, jiggles, wiggles, and skin that embraces the rays of the sun are not enough? I watch images of beauty dance before my eyes. I can see that is not me. I can SEE that is not me. How is it that what is supposed to be me is not? I close my eyes and grab my magic wand. If I change anything, it will

be forever. I just don't care. My arm cuts through the air and as I prepare to alternate my existence, I see a shadow in the corner. I quickly hide my source of new beginnings behind my back, but it is only myself that I see. She steps into the open completely nude. The rays of light from my mind fall on her. I gasp. She is beautiful. Her thick hair coils her head. Her skin picks up little speckles of color and her spirit absorbs the raw light. She glows. Her eyes are dark and filled with life and wonderment and her body stands erect while her feet embrace the earth. Full of power and life, her hips span at least twelve inches across. Her breast slightly brush the top of her belly. She has provided the liquid of life through her nipples. Her stomach has obviously stretched far out of shape to carry another being from the other side. The skin sits there loosely, ready to do it again. The firm, full lips that frame her mouth part to say something, but nothing comes out. In an instance, she is gone. I throw my wand down. I do not have the strength in me to tell her she is not beautiful today. I suppose I can suffer the hatred another day. But, I pick the wand up and hide it. I also do not have the strength today to convince myself that I am beautiful enough to break it.

Yamato (1998) characterizes internalized oppression as members of the target group being "emotionally, physically, and spiritually battered to the point that they actually believe that their oppression is deserved, is their lot in life, is natural and right, and that it doesn't even exist," (150). Self-hatred is also a form of this internalized oppression. These negative internal feelings often serve to eat away at ones' self-concept and hinder achievement.

Roes Tattoo (Poem)

It is constant. You will always see race. Each time you look at me, my color will be there. Sometimes it will beat me to the door and be the first thing you see. I will not be anything before I am Black. On those occasions, I trot behind my shadowy existence and follow my curse with a smile. For some reason, it loves attention. Each time I open my mouth on those days, my statements are dipped in chocolate and sprinkled with diversity. I am undeniable an African American woman who is educated. I shudder. My education is even qualified by my tattoo of honor. I dare not speak against it. I will be labeled a traitor. So, I must learn to envelop it and allow it to envelop me. Often times, I embrace my blackness so tightly, it seeps into me and is barely visible. It does not cover my person. I can stand in a place and simply be who I am. I can be judged on simply what I offer and nothing else. Of course, you must know these times are few and fleeting. Each time the gelatin existence dissipates, I am left with what remains ... the color of soot. It is constant. It is not something that can be changed or removed. I must love it to survive. Even at the end of a long day, when we have worked diligently together, my shield will return to me to protect me.

In Bell-Scott's "Sapphire: The Artist as Witness," Sapphire, a poet, performance artist, and novelist, did not identify herself as a writer until she was 40 years old. After having been an adventurous and expressive spirit for years, Sapphire said, "I went through an intense midlife-turning-forty crisis. I felt that I had not really done much with my life, when I compared myself to my mentors...Then I looked at some of the reasons I hadn't tried. A lack of confidence - a belief that maybe I couldn't do it or that I wasn't good or smart enough. I also realized that I had never committed myself," (1998, 17).

Sapphire was not alone in having these feelings of inadequacy. Cleage (1998) discussed how she felt “intimidated” by the historical research required for one of her writing projects. She wrote, “I felt confined by the need to be accurate to the truth ...or risk the wrath of family members and scholars who would write me letters to point out this inaccuracy or that one, ” (157). In both instances, Sapphire and Cleage initially questioned their capability in completing their task well or having much success.

(Journal Entry)

So now I am just writing. I am writing as much as I can to take it to the next level you know. I always have this fear that I can' t take it to the next level and that I am not qualified to go to the next level. For some reason, I feel like I won' t make it, can' t make it to the next level.

This feeling of not quite being “talented” or “gifted” enough is also addressed by bell hooks in “Black Women Artist Becoming.” hooks said, “one awareness that comes from my own life experience is that I seem to have a much harder time validating my creative work than males I know - that is, to self-validate,” (157). hooks traced her thoughts of being inadequate and “not original” to years of academic teaching which instructed her that she was not unique. This same academic teaching taught hooks that “great artists” were white men. These white men, according to hooks, moved with great freedom in their lives. In a sea of successful white men, she questioned where her place was among the “great” artists. There were really no visible role models to show the way. Therefore, hooks, like Sapphire, Cleage, and Dove (1994) were forced to combat inner feelings of inferiority, on some level, alone.

These inner woes forced artists, like hooks and Sapphire, to focus large amounts of energy on being visible and creating the space to express themselves. Sapphire terms her early works "confessional," because it was her first stab at "erasing a certain kind of invisibility " (Bell-Scott,18). Sapphire and hooks were Black women with a lifetime of different experiences, very different from the typical white male. These Black women artists - writers, poets, actors - who never learned of women artists, much less Black women artists, both discussed the tedious process of just learning how to tell their story. Sapphire's story of once being a prostitute, go-go dancer, and a bisexual had to slowly leak out into her work. Her process of discovering her creative-self can be likened to slowly inching across a tight rope. Likewise, hooks characterizes the road to fulfillment as a female artist as hard. It is "harder for women to walk this path and find fulfillment," (153), harder for women to believe in themselves in an assertive way. This inability to believe in one's work is particularly interesting with regards to Black women artists, because often times they have overcome such great obstacles in life already. In Rita Dove's, "A House that Jill Built," the author describes how long it took to actually believe her work was of great value. Even though the author worked as a professor, was a wife and mother, she doubted her capabilities and product worth. She was only able to begin to really appreciate her accomplishments when a colleague pointed out that her work was priceless (173).

Overcoming the obstacles addressed thus far are not the only challenges for Black women seeking to pursue a career centered on self expression. Getting an education, balancing family ties, and combating the in-your-face challenges of sexism and racism, in several of the artists' eyes, meant enormous amounts of extra work. The feeling of being

over-worked is a constant theme in the writings of Black women. Dove describes herself as a “maniac” as she collaborated on a book with a colleague (166). She lists the daily duties of her life and ponders her attempt at having it all. hooks concurs, she writes “I feel strongly that one cannot have a family, even a nontraditional one, and be a committed artist without tremendous struggle,” (1998, 152). Likewise, Smith (1982) discusses how she felt herself doing the work of many. Although she remembers being told frequently how her actions helped many, all of the work was done from a very lonely place. In many cases, Black women are forced to work a “double shift” from a very isolated place.

Pat Me on My Head (Poem)

I don't cry no more. I just sit inside my head and ease fears away by saying I'm already crazy. I have reflected myself into a mirror room where my thoughts bounce off one another. Too often I am on the basketball court fighting to get a rebound. I am sick sick and sick and sick. I want to be somebody and I am still looking for that person. There is so much old food, too tight clothes, worn shoes, fake dreams, forgotten dreams and nightmares inside my head - cause I know 25 men; 2 known dead, 1 shot, 2 in jail, a dozen jailed, 1 bastard, a know it-it- all professional looking for that special one that doesn't talk, just listens and makes the world a better place in one breathe. I know one asshole who doesn't feel like watching babies and would rather hear them cry, one jerk who doesn't like 30 extra pounds, loves the streets and can't see the best thing that ever dawned in his life. I know one who is weak and has retreated inside, peeking out when help comes. A little too worn down and lost to see, they gonna whip our ass anyway. I know one who looks good from a distance, where he sits and passes judgment. And then,

I know one who wanted me on the desk, but he supposed to be a Christian. I know one who visits my mind and activates my body to orgasm while I sleep. He plays games with me and tries to introduce me to the one who lives on 5th street. The girl is crazy. Stark raving naked and gets tired of talking to people too quick. It seems too simple to her, and she is not sure if she's ready. She probably doesn't mind paying dues. My best talent is straight talking plain to the point. Oh - I remember one girl - who died last night . She pimped herself into sucking three dicks and fucking five niggas who knew each other. Her friends convinced her to do it. This other bitch I know suck this white man dick for free. He call her his puppy dog. She say it feel like being a kept woman. They say they be raping her kind. They stick sticks up they ass. I know this little boy who married his mommy. She raised him well but he sit on the couch and talk like a grown man. She let him be grown and learn street smarts. If I have faith and pray -he'll make it. God said he would save him. Why the fuck the shit we have to live by is written in a long ass book? Why the hell we busy communicating through big words that some people don't understand. Why didn't somebody stop me and teach me how to try my best, do my best, live every moment to the fullest? Do I bother to teach my son? I know a Barbie doll who is a teenager mother. She's real pretty but she must cry sometimes. Or maybe, she's like me and she learn to stop crying.

Indeed, this discussion on the struggle to pursue a creative career also presents interrelated systems of oppression that most women face. Real life obstacles, such as, personal freedom, access to opportunities and education prevent many women, not just Black women in artistic careers, from defining themselves and expressing their creativity. As hooks suggests, there are not a lot of women artists because there are not a lot of

women “doing art.” When this is compounded with issues of race, the systems of oppression Black women face become more apparent. There are few Black women in creative fields because, unlike males, “it seems that so many female children, from the very onset of our lives, are being taught the subtle art of restraint, limits, how to exist comfortably in small spaces, how to accept confinement, so much so that it becomes a habit of living. Not at all conducive to creative exploration, (157). This apparent socialization of women to be more reserved and complacent often prevents many talented women from pursuing a life of art. Furthermore, the current family structure often pits the woman as the main caretaker and nurturer of the family. Early feminist theorists have postulated that this almost universal image of woman as wife and mother had delegated her to a sub-servant role in society. This seemingly second-class citizenship has translated into oppressive social mores and norms.

Tactics

In spite of the odds, Black women have developed a variety of methods to address and overcome their obstacles. These tactics are grounded in their experiences as Black women. By valuing their own ways of living, knowing and being, these women become informed about the world around them in a new and exciting way. Thus, their social position as both female and Black contribute to a distinct way of looking at the world and themselves. Collins suggests this intersection between Afrocentric and feminist consciousness is the bases for an Afrocentric feminist epistemology (206). According to Collins, this way of creating knowledge “enriches our understanding of how subordinate groups create knowledge that fosters resistance” (207). Three central ways Black

women develop resistant techniques is through, 1) self validation, 2) producing work, - literature, art, poems, photographs, speeches - focused or centered on Black women and the Black community, and 3) by building community .

Although often riddled with questions of self-doubt, Black women artists have been able to claim victory in expression by making a commitment to their self- worth.

(Journal Entry)

I met a writer today. I realize I always compare my experiences to other people, and I cannot do what other people do. I need to concentrate on what I do, and why I do it, and understand that, and then look to other people for guidance and direction. I am a thinker and a speaker more than I am a writer. And, I am a poet more than I am a writer in the sense of a writer, although I have the capability to write well. I use plain English or Ebonics, for lack of a better term, more than I use fancy words and illustrious metaphors. I like to keep it simple because we are simple people, with simple minds, and simple hearts. If people can see it, feel it, and understand it a little bit, that is more than enough; even the ugliest and coldest of people love. I have decided to be successful, I have to decide who I am, and what I am going to do, and why I am going to do it, and stick with just that...nothing more, nothing less. I have to see what I want and go get it: 1) I want to learn to write better. So , I need a job where I have to write, 2) I want to speak better. So, I need a job where I have to read and speak frequently, 3) I want to interact with people to see how people operate more than I want to develop countless relationships, 4) I want to travel to Africa frequently with my family, and I want to make a major impact on the African Diaspora, 5) I want to work for social change and community improvement, and I want to be an advocate, 6) I want to reach my fullest potential in all that I do, or I do

not want to do it, and 7) I want to move forward with confidence and self assurance. I want to shine.

Yamoto categorizes the ability to claim victory and make a commitment to self as an essential part of “working through internalized racism” (153). This process namely calls for a understanding that even as “people of color,” Black women are “completely worthy of respect, completely capable of achievement” (153). The artist Sapphire, was able to transform herself by totally committing herself to becoming a writer. Once her writing began to move forward she began to spiritually and internally cleanse herself. She now characterizes her work as “witnessing and testimony” (19). These terms present notions of authority and knowledge. Conversely, she called her earlier work “confessional”. A term which connotes shame and embarrassment for being who she was. Similarly, hooks said she wanted to be fulfilled in life and art (153). This ability to self-validate is a key factor in Black women being able to overcome road blocks to their path to creativity. The power of actually claiming themselves and the space around them, gives Black women artists an undeniable energy and access to creativity. This is illustrated in Bell-Scott’s “Barbara Smith: A Home Girl with a Mission. Smith proclaimed with force and strength, “I’m a kind of a natural activist. It’s a tendency or capacity that probably would have found an outlet eventually” (177). This fire of desire and belief in innate abilities propels Black women artists into the sphere of soul-stirring creative work. hooks wrote, “ I feel that I am this kind of artist, called to my work by higher powers” (153). This affirmation of being a spiritual vessel runs throughout the

writings of contemporary Black women artists. It is like a heavy, old quilt thrown down to smother internal fires of discontent.

Accepting herself and her inner ability, also allowed Cleage (1998) to release her apprehensions and insecurities. Cleage described her writing of *Flyin' West* as a surreal experience because it gave her "freedom" and gave her work a new focus. The "ancestors" were able to embrace her and she was finally able to tell the tales of Black lives (158).

(Journal Entry)

I am in a zone for real and seriously am looking to crack the code to my brain. The next level is putting me on pins and needles you know. This existence is meant for something and I am assigned a task - now I don't intend to make it up myself. I like "work while you're alive and rest when you're dead," and I like "I use to want to wake up before the rest of the world before I stop going to sleep." The secret lies in controlling what you think, what you eat, what you do, and when you do it. It is about constantly operating towards a specific goal and not being distracted. It is about controlling your actions and allowing them to influence others. It is about thinking ahead, and being ahead, and being on top of your game - truly. Now, what is my game? What cards have I been dealt? And, how am I going to play them? And, what am I going to achieve in throwing out my spades? It is a card game - still a distraction. It is truth, and real, and distance, or perceived distance, code switching, and fear, and no fear, and fear, and no fear, and self-control, and self-confidence, and power, and self-control. It is concepts of reinventing ones self or inventing ones self. Break it down. You can break it down. Try harder to break it down, and figure out what the fuck is going on or your will not make it. Time.

Time is of the essence because time has skipped. Dates have skipped. And, today is Saturday and Sunday. Please follow up and follow through, and follow up and follow through. Talk about what is at hand, and play your cards. Get along and then go along. This is a game that you are not going to play; you are going to master. You have to master this game to get to the center of the earth and receive energy from the core. What will you do? What do you have the power to do? And, who are your people? Think about it. Who are your people? Tell me - do you know? Do you? Because if you are asking 700 souls to live in you, you had better be sure of what you are asking for? If you are asking to be prepared, be sure what you asking for before you beg for more. You need to crack the code, and move to the next step. There' ll be plenty of time for rest in a bed with the channel on bad stories that warp the brain. Look at people and figure them out.

This remembering and celebrating the past serves an impetus for many renowned scholars and artists. Those such as Hurston (1937), Morrison (1982), Lorde (1984), Brown (1992), Roberts (1996), Smith (1998), and Bay (2000) all comment on a need to make Black peoples lives central to their creative expression. Cleages work, in particular, is driven by the need to show that slaves were “real people” who loved, laughed and cried. According to the play writer, Black people are remembered as “slaves” without a life (161). Her work was developed to show that Black people are and were more than slaves (161). In *Their Eyes Are Watching God*, Hurston too sought to usurp the prevalent notions of Black love as dysfunctional and abusive. African American scholar Mary Helen Washington said, what one 1937 reviewer calls a “rich and racy love story,” was a poetic text that was one of the first to present a Black female hero. According to

Washington, Hurston's book represented a total "immersion" in Black people's "communal life" and rich traditions. The bestseller also specifically spoke to the personal lives of Black women at a time when they were grossly overlooked (xi). Hurston, although criticized at the time of the book's publication, created a piece of literature that still takes readers "deeper and deeper into blackness" (xi).

Smith describes her essay "Toward a Black Feminist Literary Criticism," as a decision to focus on the lives of Black women, and begin to articulate an Afrocentric feminist perspective. She characterized herself as an educator, an advocate, and a voice against the injustices in this world (179). This desire to educate or re-educate is a salient theme in the personal and professional lives of many artistic Black women. In their personal lives, these women are most often afforded the opportunity to educate other people and children as mothers. Whether it be biological or, what Collins terms, "community othermothers," Black women are able to develop "extended family networks" (129). These networks serve to foster a community where Black children are cared for - mentally, physically, spiritually and emotionally. In fact, in spite of systems of oppression:

Community othermothers actions demonstrate a clear rejection of separateness and individual interest as the basis of either community organization or individual self-actualization. Instead, the connectedness with others and common interest expressed by community othermothers models a very different value system, one whereby Afrocentric feminist ethics of caring and personal accountability move communities forward (132) .

In the case of biological mothers, Lee illustrates the same notion in her discussion of Fannie Lou Hamer's life. Hamer's own mother, Lou Ella Townsend, was careful to teach children, her own 21 and others in their community, they should never be ashamed to be black even though they were poor, mistreated and uneducated (13). On one occasion, a young Hamer having made the "direct link between race and access to resources said she wanted to be white (12). Townsend quickly told her youngest daughter to respect herself as a Black child and later, as a Black woman. To insure her young daughter was able to see herself as beautiful, Townsend made Hamer her first and only doll. It was a little Black doll. Hamer later said it was acts such as these that taught her Black was beautiful, and self-sacrifice, self-effacement, self-respect, and self-love in racial terms (13).

(Journal Entry)

I had a beautifully pleasant day with myself. I worked with him next to my side and it was most rewarding. I realize that he is learning the whole time he is in my presence - so I try and teach him befitting who and what he is. It is an awesome task. Today my mentor gave me a hug that was warm and full of comfort, and I appreciated it very much.

Audre Lorde makes similar assertions about her mother in, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*. This book, which Lorde calls a "biomythography" introduces readers to a rich description of Lorde's childhood and adulthood. Central to Lorde's self-concept is the relationship she had with her mother. From the beginning of the book, Lorde paints her mother as a woman who had the whole world in the palms of her hands (18). As a young child, Lorde remembers her mother as a woman who had the power to "change

reality” or “change your perceptions of reality” . This was especially the case when she encountered instances of extreme bigotry in Lorde’ s presence:

In 1936-1938, 125th Street between Lenox and Eighth Avenues, later to become the shopping mecca of Black Harlem, was still a racially mixed area, with control and patronage largely in the hands of white shopkeepers...Tensions on the street were high, as they always are in racially mixed zones of transition. As a little girl, I remember shrinking from a particular sound, a hoarsely sharp, guttural rasp, because it often meant a nasty glob of gray spittle upon my coat or shoe an instant later. My mother wiped it off with little pieces of newspaper she always carried in her purse. Sometimes she fussed about low class people who had no better sense nor manners than to spit into the wind...impressing upon me that this humiliation was totally random. It never occurred to me to doubt her (18).

So, it seems the struggle for Black women artists is one that is being fought and won everyday. There is a serious attempt on the part of contemporary women to pay homage to their ancestors and pave the way for the coming generations. It is a noble endeavor for Black women to explore who and what they are. It is ever difficult in a culture where our story is rarely recorded. Those, like hooks, Dove and Cleage embark on a serious journey of self-discovery and liberation. The obstacles encountered by Black women artists are burdensome. They must first acknowledge that they have a talent, learn to believe in themselves and commit themselves to success. They are able to accomplish this in a variety of ways. Many discuss calling themselves, unequivocally, a talented individual . Some use spiritual and holistic beliefs in overcoming internal

obstacles. In several of the readings, the authors' felt they were a "vessel" for the work of a higher power. Outside forces that prevent Black women from expressing their creativity are also addressed in a number of ways. The blockades placed by racism and sexism are either torn down or gone around. They have reclaimed a history denied them, and documented their ancestors. Black women have done the extra work, sometimes losing family and support. And, Black women have continued to educate themselves and others. They achieve a freedom only one person can give. They have freed themselves .

I, too, have experienced several of the internal and external obstacles described in this chapter. As I searched for a way to express myself through my professional and academic work, I found success required me to believe in myself, to do work that gratified who I was as an individual and that strengthen the larger community.

CHAPTER 3

SUBJECT TO CHANGE:

QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGY AND THE VALUE OF SELF

This research looks at the subjectivity of a journalist and examines the influence of lived experience on news production. As an African American journalist, am I aware of the identifiable tools that secure the advancement of racism or sexism through the media? Does my being an African American woman effect the reproduction of racism present in media? How can I cultivate my voice in a bottom-line dominated industry? This research maximizes on the concept of self as site of inquiry, embraces the process of creative scholarship. It also highlights the validity and usefulness of qualitative approaches, such as autobiography in relationship to mass communications studies.

Contact Zones

Subjective exploration, defined as a “human lived experience and the physical, political, and historical context of that experience,” (Ellis and Flaherty , 1992, 1) presents several advantages to understanding the operation of news media. Subjective research “become vehicles for the reproduction of a series of humanistic sensibilities that valorize the feeling, knowing, self reflective individual” (Denzin, 1997, 202). The study of self, by way of experimental writings like fictional novels, autoethnographies, autobiographies, memoirs, reflexive fiction, narrative collages, and poems opens the door for a new dimension of knowledge (199). According to Denzin, this knowledge “privileges emotion and emotionality, arguing that a main goal is to evoke emotional

responses for the reader, thereby producing verisimilitude and a shared experience,” (209). Likewise, in “Compounding Fracture and Its Refractions,” author Nathaniel Kohn writes:

Experimental texts help explode standard scholarly writing, revealing the severe limitations of the reified form and opening up the research process to new voices - new ways of seeing, speaking, and seeking through writing that champion the personal, the biographical, the rhizomatic, the kaleidoscope, the unspoken, the unseen, the unrepresented, the everyday (unpublished paper, 8).

Thus, this research undoes the facade of complete objectivity in news media by allowing the reader to feel my personal experiences and understand my underlying motivations for writing certain stories and making certain public comments. By sharing my own story in the autobiographical sketch that follows, I can illuminate the obvious flaws in a system that acknowledges the media as problematic, but rarely exposes and addresses why this social constructor inherently perpetuates certain biases .

Studies, such as this, serve as a springboard for transforming the operation of news media in society by drawing the “connection between subjectivity and socicultural dynamics” (Ellis and Flaherty, 11). In visualizing the connecting point between the two, Mary Louise Pratt’s *Arts of the Contact Zone* is useful. Contact zones are :

...social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as, colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world...

Eventually, the term is used to reconsider the models of community that many of us rely on in teaching and theorizing and that are under challenge today (4).

News media can easily be considered a contact zone and ideal for critical analysis through subjective methods, like autoethnography. Pratt offers several reasons why: 1) it is a text where people attempt to address and respond to the constructed representations of themselves, 2) it is a text which selectively collaborates the idioms of the metropolis, and indigenous to intervene in metropolitan modes of understanding, 3) it is a text that usually constitutes a marginalized group's point of entry into the dominant circuits of print culture, and 4) it is a text that speak to the dominant and author's community, (6). For this journalist/researcher, this notion is particularly useful because I operate in several spaces where I am considered to be "marginalized" or "conquered" and attempt to cultivate a voice within those spaces.

Sharing Meaning

These autoethnographic texts that have the capability to speak to multiply audiences are, however, faced with certain challenges. The reception of these texts are, according to Pratt, "highly indeterminate" because they may involve more than one language, often attempt to rewrite established history, and develop "oppositional representations of the conqueror" (6). She examines such obstacles in the case of Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala, a 17th century indigenous Andean of Peru. His text, *The First New Chronicle*, was written to King Philip III of Spain 40 years after the Spanish conquered the Inca empire. Poma's letter was 1200 pages long. It was written in a mixture of his indigenous Quechua language and Spanish. The author asserts that

Poma's work "exemplified the sociocultural complexities produced by conquest and empire," and skillfully through creative writing attempted to re-present the Spanish to themselves (4). And, although Pratt characterizes the letter as an "extraordinary intercultural tour de force," she points out that the letter was discovered and read some 350 years after Poma wrote it.

In *The Lessons James Joyces Teaches Us*, Norman Denzin also outlines how representational and legitimation crises become problematic within qualitative research. Denzin writes that "representational crisis presumes that qualitative research no longer directly captures lived experience since such experience is created in a social text written" by the researcher (204), thereby corrupting the direct link between the lived experience and the text itself. On the other hand, Denzin suggests the legitimation crisis forces a rethinking of terms, such as validity, generalizability, and reliability (204). All of which rely on some measurable outcomes from research. These challenges are addressed in several ways throughout this text. By further examining cultural artifacts, such as articles I have written, public statements I have made, my poetry and journal writings, I illustrate how theoretical concepts manifest in my everyday life and ultimately effect the world around me. Likewise, through personal writings, such as poetry, journal writings and my autobiography, the reader is given the opportunity to see me and engage this text in a multitude of ways.

(Journal Entry)

Today I am calmer, more solemn than yesterday. I think of the fire I have for the Revolution. It in many ways is real and unreal. In some respects, I do and do not know where I come from, yet I know. My eyes are waterfalls to my soul. The images flow over

the edges and sink into deep rivers. It is a long, shifting ride. I seek the mouth of the river. I know the rainy season is fast approaching. I think of the future, and then, I find myself living the future and trying to recapture the past. These very words will seem distant when I close the cover. But, they are still images that have fallen over the rocks in my mind's eye. There are times when we should fast from smiles and resolve ourselves to solemnness. There are some people who cannot see or hear, yet they talk and look. I often wonder where their soul resides, in what time and space. Chances are, they have no place. It is impossible to change people. The best I can do is concentrate on myself and creating my son. I am blessed. I know that the time when he makes his way to my resting place and snuggles next to me will soon disappear. I regret some though. He is mine. I am glad Dear God sent words of wisdom to me through so many. There are those who caught my attention and still hold it. My attention is a funny and selfish thing that is short and cute. She dances before even my eyes, and excites those in her presence. She is a brilliant little character, who tricks and teases. Often times, I can catch her devising little skits to remain the star of the show. When the curtains close, she pouts like an infant. Once pacified, she runs outside to play. She makes friends everywhere she might go with ease. Her secret joy is she is her one and only friend. No one can hold her, even I am sometimes shunned. I have seen clouds move in around her and she will not even notice. The sun is her father - that is why she remains bright. I warn others of her flighty style, but few can resist the ride. When she sits and pulls her legs close, her head bent down, I kiss the back of her frail neck and whisper in her ear. Sometimes, she seems to listen. Just when I believe we are floating in a moment in time, in the shadows of the dusk, she peeks up her head. And, the rays crush the darkness. Her water falls and I swim in her

memories. Basking in the warmth and glow, I find myself reaching for her companionship as she skips away.

By examining concepts regarding Black feminism, civic journalism and subjective research, it becomes more apparent how experimental texts provide a space for “empirical omniscience,” and allows for the “use [of] synchronic narration, stopping the flow of time and presenting [of] multiple interpretations simultaneously” (210). It is the articles and statements published in the *Raider Review*, *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, *Athens Banner Herald*, and *Red & Black*, that form the base for the thick, rich, descriptive narrative present throughout this text. The actual real-life cultural artifacts promote the creation of this “believable emotional world in which the past, present, and future merge into a single but complex interpretive experience” (Denzin, 210).

This “believable emotional world” is what will provide an alternative to how journalists are visualized in the public sphere and how they operate professionally. This “believable emotional world” will meet a need which Carey (1995) argues is for journalists to have a “different story”. It frees the journalist from acting as a “scribe producing an objective tale,” (Denzin, 212) and begins to break down the wall between reader and writer (Atkinson, 1992, 82), thereby, providing a storyline that allows journalists to acknowledge and celebrate who they are, and use that knowledge to inform the public. This, of course, is what I have sought to do all along.

CHAPTER 4

MEDIA IS MADE FOR REVOLUTION:

THE ROLE OF THE PRESS IN A DEMOCRACY

Based within the critical cultural studies theoretical framework, this research further investigates subjectivity in journalism and explores journalists potential to stimulate social change. As early as 1948, Lazerfield and Merton suggest mass media had common effects on society. Kapler (1960) stated that although messages were mediated by various factors, including journalists, "media messages...reinforce existing attitudes," and act as a "...source of influence in the social and psychological environment." Later, Hall (1980) further articulates this argument by suggesting that mass media normalizes certain practices and values and makes dominant ideology appear as "common sense". News media, in particular, play an important role in shaping the public mind. By presenting the problems and opportunities around people, the news contributes greatly to the public's understanding of the world (Kaniss 1991, 2). According to Kaniss, news media also helps foster a sense of collective identity. In recognizing the ways news media influence people's cognitive processes, mass communication scholars must initiate a variety of inquiries. This requires further expanding our investigations to intimately explore media producers, like journalists, and their influential role in society.

Constraints on the Media

Although some studies look at the professional norms of journalism, few have journalists involved in self inquiry, investigating subjectivity as it relates to both themselves and their profession. Research does indicate that gatekeeping, "a process by which billions of messages that are available in the world get cut down and transformed into the hundreds of messages that reach a given person on a given day," (Shoemaker 1997, 57) is performed by individuals. However, mass communications research lacks journalists providing in-depth analysis of their motivations for selecting or not selecting certain information. Gatekeeping "involves every aspect of message selection...communicated through mass media, " and includes the thought processes which go into constructing the framework of a news event (57). Selection of messages is informed by characteristics, such as personal "values, attitudes, ethics, cognitive heuristics, role conceptions, models of thinking, organizational socialization and type of job" (61). It is vital then that journalists' lived experiences be explored with increased vigor. The larger implication being that news media, which to some extent shapes society's perception of reality, is effected by individual journalists' lived experiences.

It may be argued, of course, that the impact of journalists' personal lives on news making is increasingly limited. There is often great emphasis on journalists' "ability to exercise professional news judgment," or "the focus is not on journalists' decisions but rather the social forces that shape and constrain those decisions" (Berkowitz, 1997, 53,107). However, a better understanding of individual motivations and larger social constraints go hand and hand. Rosen (1996) suggests that there is great importance in further understanding the distinction between the media business in which journalists

work and the valuable product they produce, journalism. According to Rosen, “reporters presumably have professional and personal goals (the truth, getting a good story, exposing fraud and abuse, writing well and so forth) that are not identical with those of shareholders in communications companies” (vi). This presents two interesting issues: 1) it is implicit in this statement that there is marked difference between the agenda of communication companies and journalists, and 2) the product of journalism may be quite different if it were not constrained by attempts to maximize profits. If indeed “...strong financial incentives underpin the production and dissemination of vast amounts of business and economic information, but when it comes to public policy there is considerable debate about whether or not the media market provides enough good, solid information” (v), we must learn how journalists perceive this imbalance. It is equally important to examine how journalists view other social forces, such as race and gender in the media. In particular with regards to race, Hall (1980) points out that “the media constructs for us a definition of what race is, what meaning the imagery of race carries, and what the problem of race is understood to be. “This presents an interesting scenario considering media outlets are dominated by white males. Therefore, the dominant ideology in media most often”...is a discourse of racism that advances the interests of whites and that has an identifiable repertoire of words, images, and practices through which racial power is applied.” (Fiske, 1996, 5).

Role of Civic Journalism

The effect of such social forces that shape and reshape media, perhaps, becomes more enthralling when we begin to consider the media’s role in a democracy and the media’s ability to fuel social change. Since the American Revolution, print media has

provided a “highly flexible” means to spread information and address political concerns (Tarrow, 1998). According to Tarrow, print allows groups to build connective structures and spread movements to new groups (52). It also provides and sustains a forum for discussion and debate of issues. In *Mightier than the Sword: How the News Media Have Shaped American History*, Rodger Streitmatter chronicles periods where the press heavily influenced American democracy. From Abolition to Women’s Rights to the Spanish - American War, Streitmatter describes how “the news media have played a critical role in shaping landmark events” (1). For example, during the 19th century Abolition Movement the media coverage profoundly affected America’s collective conscience against slavery. The conviction of journalists like Maria Stewart, William Lloyd Garrison and Rev. Elijah P. Lovejoy, who wrote against the horrors of slavery, helped push the Abolitionist Movement to the public agenda (23). These journalists employed “strident rhetoric” and endured severe violence to continually combat pro-slavery constituents (24). In fact, the death of journalists like Lovejoy further illustrated the brutality associated with slavery and stimulated public discussions.

However, the “in-depth reporting and analysis that the public needs to make informed decisions,” and to have productive public debates (Rosen 1996, vi) is constrained with the increasing influence of social forces like economics and racism. Rosen, like MacNeil (1995), and Krutz (1993) argues this is a time with “grave doubts about the future of the press,” and the press must be creative and identify possible changes media needs and can encourage in society (1). Public journalism calls the press to action and encourages journalists to revive civic life and improve public dialogue - and to fashion a coherent response to the deepening troubles in our civic climate (1). This

concept works under the notion that “the press can do more - much more than it has been doing - to engage people as citizens, to improve public discussion, to help communities solve problems, and to aid in the country’s search for a workable public life,” (2). With the press doing much more, it is quite possible that the public will think more, ask more questions and begin to change the way society currently operates. It may even, perhaps, be as instrumental as the press was during other times of transition, like the Civil Rights Movement and Peace Movement.

Like radio and television in the mid 20th century and, more recently, the Internet, new mediums often get a good bit of praise before their impact on society is fully explored or comprehended. It is important, however, to look beyond the influence of individual mediums and probe the relationships media, as a whole, have with other institutions. Turow (1997) discusses how media outlets have evolved into great industrialized resources where the “production, reproduction and the distribution of messages through technological devices” has created the potential to distribute the same message to billions of people. More than focusing solely on the distribution of messages, he examines with great detail the intricacy of media systems and the power structures these systems have embedded in today’s society. Particularly, since media “shape people’s conceptions of their society by directing their attention toward certain concerns and away from others, leading people to consider, what if anything, they ought to do,” Turow argues it is essential to inform and create a more aware and media literate public (18). He suggests this increased awareness will enable people to see the connectedness of media systems across media boundaries to areas ranging from finance to government

regulations to various subcultures to public advocacy groups, right down to the day-to-day work of media personnel (20).

Similarly, Berkowitz (1997) and Page (1996) focus on the necessity to discard the myth of a “free press” and any notions of absolute objectivity. Berkowitz writes that these ideals are “not particularly productive for understanding the nature of news” (xi), especially when addressing the social implications of news. He calls for a consideration of the larger professional practices and procedures that systematize the production of news. According to Berkowitz, “news exists because journalists apply mutually agreed on work procedures to observe, interpret, and represent occurrences in society” (xi). Moreover, journalists’ personal belief systems, economics, and politics affect how journalistic practices are developed and implemented. These journalistic practices do not necessarily cover the most newsworthy events, present multiple sides of the story, or accurately represent public opinion on current events. For example, in *Who Deliberates: Mass Media in Modern Democracy*, Page suggests the way *The New York Times* presented the debate surrounding the Desert Storm conflict with Iraq was not representative of public opinion. In fact, the *Times* appeared to push at center a pro-war agenda (17). Page argues:

They covered a rather narrow band of opinion, ranging from a few that advocated negotiations with (and mild concessions to) Iraq, through many that upheld continued economic sanctions, to some that advocated the early use of military force. Nearly all accepted the goal of forcing Iraq entirely out of Kuwait. None at all took Iraq’s side; none argued that the United States and United

Nations had no business to intervene. Contrary to widespread preferences among American citizenry, very few pieces proposed serious negotiations (36).

As a result, the viewpoints presented in the *Times* generally mimicked official partisan political debates, rather than views of the average citizen (37). Race, like politics, factors into news production. As professional communicators, journalists must address the issue of race either consciously or subconsciously. Fiske (1996), Lipsitz (1993), Morrison (1993), Hall (1990) and others discuss the concept of whiteness, and how it is maintained through language coding and polarization of races in news stories and articles. In *Media Matters: Race and Gender in U.S. Politics*, Fiske begins his discussion of the impact of race on media by outlining how whiteness operates in mainstream media. He defines whiteness as, "the construction and occupation of a centralized space from which to view the world, and from which to operate in the world. This space of whiteness contains a limited but varied set of normalizing positions from which that which is not white can be made into abnormal," (42). This is manifested in news media by what is reported and how it is reported to the public. Mainstream media, which is dominated by white people, fails to show poverty, unemployment and lack of education in certain ways because the implications would threaten the power base of white people (51). Thus, media operates in a fashion that sustains and supports notions of whiteness - inclusive of images of beauty, belief systems, language, lifestyle, etc. - as normal and good. Likewise, according to Lipsitz, one of the main underlying objects of whiteness is to maintain white supremacy both materially and cognitively. Therefore, if the media helps to shape the public mind, it is utilized as a tool for white supremacy. The

notion of whiteness is key to this study because I am a Black person, and maintaining this social structure would have negative implications for me and those like me.

In reviewing social movement theory, it is evident that since the 18th century mass media have played a significant role in advancing social change and a movement. From the American Revolution to World War II to the Peace Movement, to the Civil Rights Movement, Tarrow (1998) argues mass media has been instrumental in changing the nature of modern contentious politics in several ways. Media has served to expand public discussion, frame various issues and reach mass audiences. Tarrow suggests media helps develop new models of associations among people who are centered around common goals and diffuses information. Once people are aware of issues in the public sphere, the media frames these issues for the larger public. It is through the media that the majority of grievances by groups of people are articulated and justified (107). This is instrumental in arousing public interest and support for claims by groups in society.

Such notions have strong implications for my work with student activism and efforts towards increasing diversity at the University of Georgia. My newspaper article, "UGA 's Racial Issues Still Racist, But Get Little Discussion," which appeared in the *Athens Banner Herald*, inserted the first voice of a Black, female student in the ongoing dialogue regarding diversity. Its wide circulation allowed many different groups to see the article and exposed them to my sentiments. Because it ran January 9th, the day of the Desegregation Commemoration, its content was in direct contention to the sentiments espoused by the University of Georgia administration. This is key because 1) the commemoration ceremonies were marked by nationwide media attention, 2) it made my claims visible to other students and persons in the minority community, and 3) the article

provided an alternative way of looking at the celebration of desegregation. In *Social Movements: An Introduction*, Della Porti and Diani argue that those pushing agendas counter to the norm must be capable of informing the mass and tapping into the power structure. This is done by being visible and insuring that the message is not corrupted by those in positions of power.

CHAPTER 5

WHAT TIME IS IT?

I leaned back in traffic court and tried to patiently wait my turn. I'd been sitting there for about an hour and half. I don't believe there is a such thing as true patience, at least not for those of us who happen to be honest. I honestly do prefer to have things my way all the time. On the flip side, this was my fourth speeding ticket in six months. I really couldn't afford the fine and definitely couldn't afford the points on my driving record. So, I sat tight, content at twiddlin' my thumbs.

"Hey, what are you doing here?"

I turned around to see a tall, slender young lady slide into the sit next to me. Her hair is slicked back and black rimmed glasses framed her eyes. A wicked little smile crept onto my face. It was Jocelyn. We went to Redan High School together, even though she was a few years behind me. Later on, at the University of Georgia, we pulled the same shifts in the Bookstore.

"Me - speeding," I said. "75 in a 45, but I'm going to fight it."

She managed a comical grin, "Renita, were you speeding?"

"Of course, I was," I laughed and got a silencing glare from the deputy scanning the courtroom. I glared back and returned my attentions to Jocelyn. I'd always liked her and our acquaintance always seemed to have the potential of turning into a friendship. But, we rarely saw each other on campus and we had different interests for the most part. My eyes ran over her. She always managed to look quite appealing in the simplest attire.

The ways of a true artist I supposed - her paintings were fabulous too. But, yeah, even in regular old blue jeans, a white button-down and leather coat, she looked pretty cute.

“Well, I am guilty,” she said. “I let me tag lapse and I am pretty sure there is no way around it. So, I’m stuck paying \$125,” she shrugged her long shoulders. “I really don’t have the time to deal with this right now anyway.”

“Me either really - but the way it looks right now, the best thing I can do is fight a losing battle,” I let out a sigh. “I ‘m way too busy to be sitting in here though. I have been busting my hump working on this Student Commemoration Committee for the 40th Anniversary of Desegregation for what it’s worth.”

“Really?” her ears seemed to perk up.

I went on to tell her that I really did not see the point in celebrating the anniversary of desegregation as Black enrollment decreased. To date, the University of Georgia’s most visible attempt to stop the numbers from slipping was fighting for affirmative action, which by most people’s account seemed to be a losing battle. I am not necessarily against affirmative action, but I am against the claims by UGA administration that they want diversity, and they really don’t. If they wanted “qualified” Black students at our school, they would be here. But the underlying desire to change, it is not coming from President Adams, UGA’s top gun. And from working on this committee, I can see that this is just for them. It is for the administration to make a good show, - to pat themselves on the back. It’s a big media show.

I swung my neck around to see if the guard was watching and continued talking. I said to truly commemorate the desegregation at the University, there be should an effort to involve the entire university community, the larger Athens community and alumni,

especially Black alumni. This should be used as a healing time, and a time to truly assess where this school is with only 11.5% minorities. So many times in the past three weeks, I've run into Black alumni right here in Athens who still have not received any information amount this anniversary. When I asked them if they'll come, they say probably not. I see the same looks of isolation and rejection in their eyes that often seep into mine. These people went to UGA decades ago. But it's not just the alumni that isn't involved. The larger student body barely knows about this event and even fewer people in the community. Outreach and advertisement has been poor to none in a lot of cases. I don't know why. In 1961 when Holmes and Hunter came here, people lined the streets. It almost ripped this community apart. A lot of those people are still here and still remember what happened - where are they? I, personally, have called so many businesses, churches and people who went here and nobody really wants to participate. One local businessmen said the University only calls on the Black community when they want something.

"When he said that, I just had to stop and think," I sled closer to her.

I shared how I had felt during my time here at the University and how I felt about being here, learning here. I thought about how I felt and then I looked at how this committee was set up. The student committee is responsible for informing the entire student body, soliciting student and community involvement. It's completely student run. There is no administrative, faculty or staff representation at all. We are responsible for contacting over 400 organizations and countless area businesses, organizations and churches and asking for their support in this effort. We are responsible for writing letters, making phone calls and setting-up appointments. This is all well and good, but there is no solid system of checks and balances in place to make sure any of this gets done. End result of

several dedicated students trying to make a contribution to the ceremonies, only 30 or so organizations will participate tomorrow and 20 of them are Black.

I went to my first meeting three weeks ago and was made the chair of the Community Outreach Committee the same night. It is so loosely organized to be a campus-wide celebration. Students don't even know about this thing! So, then I thought, what's the best way to make sure this celebration appears picture perfect to the press and all involved - don't let people know. So, this school and its commitment to diversity has completely worn me completely down. I shot a side glance to gage her response.

"But it won't be picture perfect; I've turned in an editorial to the *Athens Banner Herald*¹²" I said. "The editor said she would run it tomorrow. Plus, were able to get the master list of all major media outlets from UGA's communications office. We're sending out a press release about a protest."

Jocelyn bubbled over in the tight wooden chair. "What?" she said. "How in the world did you guys get the list? What does the press release say? I can't believe..."

I held a finger to my mouth and coolly said, "I'm a journalism major. I called on a friend, and they helped me out."

The energy between the two of us was unreal. Before I knew, an invitation rolled off my tongue. "A group of us are planning a silent protest tomorrow," I said and looked her in the eyes.

¹² See Ward, R. UGA's racial issues still exist, but get little discussion. *Athens, Banner Herald*. January 9, 2001. This article discusses my concerns regarding Desegregation Commemoration in a public forum and provided an alternative opinion of the days events. Throughout the day, people commented on the column to me, and received 40 e-mails from readers.

“Really, you and who else,” her elbows rested on her knees and she leaned forward. “What are yall planning to do... because I was actually planning a little something myself.”

I could only smile. I wouldn’t call that one of my most inspiring and articulate speeches. So, it was pretty funny to find it wasn’t even needed. I didn’t need to convince Jocelyn that as a Black student at the University of Georgia you encountered overt and covert racism on a daily basis. Sometimes, the pain you felt was so intense you wondered if it was normal or if you were imagining it. After scheduling a date for my arraignment hearing, we finalized our plans. The small group of students were scheduled to meet with our unofficial faculty advisor at 9 pm that night. Jocelyn assured me she wouldn’t miss it.

In the fall of 2000, I am not sure what came over me, but I likened it to an awakening. Most of the semester I talked to students, faculty, staff and members of the community. Everywhere I went, I found myself involved in the same conversation. I talked openly and candidly about the University of Georgia. No doubt, there was a general consensus among people of all different races that UGA suffered from race relation problems. The tension created by the strained relations effect on students varied. Many fellow minority students had developed similar coping mechanisms to deal with being out numbered and stigmatized. I guess my coping skills had deteriorated. The atmosphere on campus had finally started to get to me in a new way.

As an undergraduate, I had already sat through the classes where I was literally the only Black face in a sea of 200 or 300 hundred students¹³. Then, I pretended it didn’t

¹³ See McCarthy, R. UGA Blacks say the community is not ‘welcoming’. *Atlanta*

matter. Or rather, I fought to blend in as much as possible. I would sit very still, talk low and slow¹⁴, and make every attempt to represent my race well in class. From history to sociology to news writing, I sat. I sat through classes where the instructors described how slavery, for all its faults, was at least an economically viable institution. Dr. Karen Miller, in the Grady College of Journalism, once directed the classes' attention to historical documents that literally broke down the cost of maintaining a slave compared to the profit. Inside, I remember gagging.

I also sat in several courses where professors used the word "nigger" repeatedly to illustrate a point. On one such occasion in Introduction to Feminist Theories course, Dr. Bonnie Dow wanted to show the class how words changed over time and their meaning changes for the subjugated group. She started out by focusing on derogatory terms used for women. And, although there were many examples to draw from, she summed the point up by saying women were no longer offended by being called a "bitch". However, the elaborate example was saved for Black women who, according to Dow, were most often called offensive names. She pointed out that this was partially attributed to the Black race's categorical name constantly changing. In the example, Dow went from the term Negroid to Nigger to Colored to Negro to Black to Afro-American to African-American. She closed the example by saying not only would the

Journal Constitution. This is one of my first public statements. The article explores the racial environment at the University of Georgia. Also see Castenell, L., Introduction: Presenting the Context, (*The Multicultural Campus: Strategies for Transforming Higher Education*. California: Sage Publications, 1998. pp 13-18).

¹⁴See Evelyn B. Dandy, *Black Communications: Breaking Down the Barriers*. (Illinois: African American Images, 1991), pp 1-15, 72-101. In this text, the author discusses the difficulty of Black students mimicking the linguistics of white America. The author explores what techniques language Black students employ to fit in classroom settings.

race name probably change again, but that now Black folks called each other “nigga” as an affectionate term. When she was finished, she looked at the Black students for affirmation. I wanted to walk out of the class.

After class, I quickly packed my things and waited to speak with Dr. Dow. A fellow white student came up to me and said, “Why did she say that? I mean it has to be upsetting - infuriating even, for her to constantly use Black women in negative examples like that.” I looked at her face that seemed to be full of sympathy and pity and said, “Upsetting and infuriating for who?” She became flushed and looked at me with eyes of wonderment. Finally, she said, “You.” But, it was barely audible. I looked at her and said as gently as my spirit could muster, “Danielle, why isn’t it upsetting and infuriating for you too, if it sounds so wrong? Do such statements only offend the Black woman?” She didn’t not have a response. I looked at her one last time and walked away. My conversation with Dr. Dow was equally discouraging. After articulately defending her example, she said it was her responsibility to make various racial groups visible in the text and in class discussions. This, of course, did not mean we read any works by feminists of color. I wasn’t introduced to the volumes of literature that went outside the middle-class, white feminist critique until I took another women studies class with another instructor.

As a vice president of National Association of Black Journalists student chapter, I did have the opportunity to meet media professionals quite often. They would ask about my plans after UGA or ask about my previous journalism experience. Some would even offer me a business card and tell me to give them a call if needed assistance in any way. Few, if any, asked how I had been getting along at UGA. When I met Rebecca McCarthy,

a reporter for the *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, I didn't expect much different. She was participating in a program where professionals stayed on campus and took a few courses. Rebecca said she was there to "get a pulse of campus life." She seemed like a nice enough person, we exchanged greetings, and hoped to keep in touch. Later, I saw her at the Tate Student Center. She was asking Sydney Jones, President of National Association for the Advancement of Colored People student chapter, what he thought of the current issues at the University of Georgia. Born to be a politician, he danced around the questions, but ended up saying things could definitely be better in terms of diversity. He then directed Rebecca's attention to me. He said, "Ask Renita. She's been her longer than I have."

I smiled at Rebecca and said hello. When she asked me how I felt about the diversity issues at UGA, it crossed my mind, "this is definitely the chance I've been waiting for." Thirty minutes later, Rebecca thanked me for my "honesty and frankness." She said the story would run the next day¹⁵. I had given her a brief history of my experiences at UGA and took care to mention the experiences of other people as well. This was one of many occasions I would talk with Rebecca over the next year. My comments from this article, however, earned me a call from Matt Winston, Assistant to the President. He invited me and Sydney to join him for lunch and discuss our issues with UGA.

¹⁵ See McCarty, R. (2000, Nov 21). Campus NAACP raps UGA on minorities Sanctions on sorority advocated. *Atlanta Journal Constitution*. Retrieved from the World Wide Web March 26, 2002 : <http://stacks.ajc.com/cgi-bin/display.cgi...01fb923789Mpqaweb1P11010&doc+results.html>

On November 30, 2000, I sat down in the Georgia Center for Continuing Education's Mahler Auditorium for a viewing of Dr. Maurice Daniels' documentary *Foot Soldier for Equal Justice, Part II, Horace T. Ward and the Desegregation of The University of Georgia: The Aftermath*. The room was filled with various faculty, staff and administrators. I was one of very few students who were attending the event. However, comments to Rebecca McCarthy had given me quite a bit of visibility. Apparently, UGA circulated the *Georgia Morning*. It listed all the articles UGA appeared in during the week. Many of the people present had seen the feisty comments of Renita Ward, a graduate student in the Journalism College.

But, as I sat down to view the documentary, my tough exterior disappeared. There, I sat and I cried. I cried the tears of a little Black girl in a sea of white faces. My feelings of shame and hatred bubbled to the surface as I looked at white men and women take to the streets. As the scenes of riotous crowds, fire and police floated across the screen, I wondered why I had never seen anything about UGA's history before this. I was also struck by how powerful an effect it had on the people in the room. As tears rolled down my cheeks, I couldn't help but wish that every student at the University of Georgia could see the video. I wished that they could see the state-sponsored discrimination that had kept "qualified" students from matriculating at UGA. When the lights came up, Dwayne Wright, a doctoral student in Social Foundations, seemed to have taken away much of the same feeling I had. He wrote his number down on a spare program and suggested we keep in touch. In a whirling fit of emotions, I could simply nod and agree.

Dwayne and Kevin seemed pretty impressed with the new recruit Jocelyn the night we gathered for our meeting. I was more than glad to introduce Jocelyn to the guys.

Up until this point, I was the only female in our group of 'concerned minority students' and I was also pretty much the leader. The men, for the most part, were still awe struck by my uncanny ability to sway people in speeches and presentations and my beauty. We had just been working together for a few weeks, and I was the official spokesperson for our group. It seemed the natural choice because I talked the most, was a mass communications major and had already been in the newspaper several times. And, I had the ability of gauging every response that came out of my mouth - bad and good ones alike. Kevin often questioned if he was talking to me or me - pretty funny inside joke. So, in those initial stages, our working relationship was relatively swell. Eventually, the dynamics would change some and I would have to exert a little more power and tenacity to maintain my role as leader¹⁶. But right now, as I threw my book bag on the floor and settled in for a meeting that was sure to last two or three hours, I was in charge of the conversation. When I talked, pencils and pens moved across blank pages. I said the words that helped lay out the plans.

Dwayne, Jocelyn, Kevin Williams, Desmond Taylor, Miles Vertreese, Montu Miller, David Hawthorne and I chatted on the living room floor of Dr. Derrick Alridge's home. We were hammering out what we knew needed to happen in order for the University to change. It was an energetic exchange. A scene with Dwayne on the laptop

¹⁶ In *Taste of Power*, (New York:Pantheon, 1992), Elaine Brown provides a thought-provoking look at a woman's attempt to lead the Black Panthers. Although Brown encounters more overt attempts to undermine her position as leader, I was able to relate to some of the instances she spoke about. When several core NITT organizers attended the 13th Annual National Black Graduates Conference at Texas Tech University, I felt like I was in a power struggle with Kevin Williams. He took every available opportunity to tell me what I should or should not do during group meetings. At one point, I termed him "Daddy Kevin". Ironically, it was I who had encouraged Kevin to step up to more of a leadership role.

typing up notes, Kevin reading quotes from books like, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s *Why We Can't Wait*¹⁷, and the remaining six of us hashing out what would be the course of action for our January 9th's protest.

Dr. Alridge had kindly opened the doors of his home and gently nudged us in what he considered the right direction. He rarely gave his opinion unless we asked him for it directly. Alridge had been involved in student activism in his younger years and had also worked with student groups at Pennsylvania State, his previous institution. For the most part, I liked him. He was a strong thinker. My only hang up was his obvious desire to have Kevin step up and be more of the group leader. I figured it was because he knew Kevin. Kevin was also a doctoral student in Social Foundations. He had done a lot of work in the College of Education and with Graduate and Professional Scholars. And, as open minded as Dr. Alridge seemed to be, I knew he would prefer for a man to be the leading voice. This, however, did not seriously effect the way he interacted with me or the rest of the group.

Together, we mulled over public statements President Michael Adams and Provost Karen Holbrook had made regarding the University's commitment to diversity. Then, we compared those claims to current services and resource allocations to determine if such claims were supported in the budget. We found that while, indeed, there were several small steps being made to recruit minority students, in particular African American students, little attention or funding had been given to enhance multiculturalism and diversity in services offered on campus, in the curriculum or the faculty and staff.

¹⁷ In *Why We Can't Wait*, (New York:Menor,1964, pp 15-58). Martin Luther King, Jr. eloquently articulates the condition of Black America. Many of the conditions he

At 2 o' clock in the morning, we had a plan. Kevin and I drove to Kinko's to have 3000 copies of our Six Point Demands printed up to be distributed at the opening ceremony. Jocelyn prepared two eight-foot black cardboard statuettes that were to be placed under the arches. With fists raised, the statuettes represented the struggle of students of color at the University of Georgia. I also had a editorial running in the local Athens Banner Herald mocking the University's efforts to celebrate desegregation. We felt like this was a multi-prong attack on UGA's credibility. The main focus was to take advantage of the outside media coverage that was sure to be available during commemoration ceremonies. Our stated goal all along was 1) tap into campus media, 2) tap into local media, 3) tap into regional and state media and 4) finally, explode unto the national scene with contentious campus politics. Thus, we saw this as an opportunity to make it onto CNN, which was headquartered in Atlanta. We believed we had the potential to reach outside persons for support and to mobilize followers. Our whole plan from the beginning to end of our active campaign centered on the media. The media would prevent the administration from dressing the issues, and would press upon them the need to respond to our concerns.

At 8 o' clock on Tuesday, January 9, 2000, a group of eight students dressed completely in black silently took their seats in Hodgson Hall. We were protesting the rejection we had faced since enrolling in classes at the University of Georgia. We were demanding increase in minority faculty and staff, a revamping of the water-downed position for institutional diversity, a increase in funding and staff to a faltering Minority Services & Programs Office, increase in funding and faculty to existing ethnic studies

describes still effect Black America today. Portions of this book were on NITT's

programs and creation of more ethnic studies programs, increase in oversight for judicial affairs and programs as it pertains to issues of diversity and a public strategic plan that outlined how the administration intended to increase minority enrollment and address campus climate. We had decided that now was the time to demand a change - we had been waiting too long.

CHAPTER 6

BEFORE DAWN

When I was four, I can remembering pulling off my daddy's big, black Army boots. We lived on Ft. Stewart military base in south Georgia. My memories of early childhood are filled with images of men in pressed fatigues and perfectly manicured lawns in family quarters. We lived in a little world inside a world and each time we drove off the base, an MP would say, "Be careful out there." My father took great care to explain to my siblings and me that outside of the base were the civilians. Soldiers, like him, protected their lives and the entire country. My daddy's job was important because it kept America strong and powerful, like him. So, when I yanked his boots off at night, I used to swell with pride. I worked at the feet of a man who protected the whole country. A strong fearless man for all that I was concerned. At 5'10, he towered over my small framed mother. But together, they built a family centered around self-pride, love, and grace.

My parents were young when they married. At sixteen, my mother found out she was pregnant with my older sister. In most families, the news of a teenage pregnancy is earth-shattering and this instance was no different for the most part. My mother was born to Robert Lee and Evelyn Scott August 8, 1958 in Atlanta, Georgia. Both of my maternal grandparents were reared in God - fearing, decent families albeit poor. So, although neither of them had much education, their children were raised with as many values and principles as they could manage in one of Atlanta's poorer neighborhoods. My

Granddaddy Scott worked for Georgia Power as a road worker. In the 60s, this was pretty good work for a Black man to have, and he brought home a decent paycheck to care for his family of five.

My Grandmother often said her first child, my uncle Frederick, took her out of school in the tenth grade. Consequently, her limited skills and education kept her regulated to low-wage labor. Like most Black women of her time, she earned her living sewing or cleaning. She spent 20 years of her life working in a laundry house that offered absolutely no benefits. And, although her only reading book was the Bible, she always stressed getting an education. When my mother, Cassandra Gale Scott, told her parents she was pregnant, they insisted she get married. Grandma Am, as we called her, said “Well at least that boy come from a good family - somebody who can afford takin’ care of yall. Where yall gone stay?”

My mother was not so optimistic about the situation. She was frantic and distraught, and sank into herself. She was an “A” student and a star on Booker T. Washington High School’s track team. She had been voted most popular every year since the ninth grade. A vibrant teenager, she was liked by all who met her and managed to be one of the girls that everybody knew. She had started thinking about college, even though she was still in the eleventh grade, and thought that an athletic scholarship would be the way to a different life. She figured with her raw talent, beauty and grades, she was a sure pick for one of the historically black colleges down south. Furthermore, my father, the Reverend Richard Q. Ward, was not her ideal mate. Quinn, as my dad was called, had been preaching the words of God since he was fourteen. Everyone at Washington High knew him as Rev. Ward. He spoke with authority to young people and adults alike and

always had the praise of God on his lips. He wore a pressed white shirt and black slacks to school everyday. He was popular just in the sense that everybody did know who he was. He stuck out and didn't seem to mind. When he began to speak to my mother, she thought it was because he wanted to try to save her soul. My mother wasn't too into the Gospel at school. She saved that for Sunday morning, like most teenagers, but did fancy the attention my father lamented on her. As one of three children, she rarely got anything just for herself. So, she slowly begin to favor the small gifts my father brought her to school. He was also attentive and intelligent. Although she did fight it, the day came when he simply brought a smile to her face, and she enjoyed his company. Rev. Ward wasn't too bad. But when rumors of the pair started to fly, she still said "No. No. No. I am not the preacher's wife!" After a few dates though, she decided she could see him, occasionally. And, slowly, occasionally turned into everyday and it wasn't too long before she was going to meet my father's family and have dinner.

When my dad took her home to meet his family in the affluent Black neighborhood off of Mason Turner Avenue in Atlanta, the story got a little bit more complicated. My father was from a well-to-do family. Education, strong moral values and appearance were highly regarded in the Philips family. My daddy lived most of his life with his mother, Grandmother Elaine, two sisters, Wanda and Kathy, and his grandparents in a eight bedroom brick house. His father, Pete Ward, moved to the west coast, after a turbulent marriage with my grandmother.

My great-grandmother or Big Mamma, Renita Pace Philips, had been a grade school teacher and ran her home with great efficiency and an iron fist. Big Mama and my great-grandfather, Abasolm Philips, sent all three of their children to college in the 1930s.

So, it was an unstated fact that their grandchildren would all be college educated. My father's older sister was already a freshman at Princeton and his younger sister, Kathy, flourished in private school. Big Mamma said even with God's claim on my father's life, he would formalize his calling in Seminary School. She also felt men and women should be able to run a home and everyone had multiply chores. Their home was always clean and everyone ate three home-cooked meals everyday. And, even though Big Momma had passed away in 1973, the impact she had on the lives of her family was still very much alive in 1975 when my mother came for her first visit.

Big Mama had a solid formula for success. The family would continue to thrive and flourish with clean living, education and marrying up. Everyone knew this, lived this fact. So, it was to everyone's great surprise when my father brought home my mother. A girl, although sweet as pie, who was obviously from a working-class family. After a dinner filled with little embarrassments because of table etiquette, my mother was sure that nothing would come from her afternoon lunches and Saturdays in the park with Quinn.

But, against the wishes of his family, my father insisted on seeing my mother. So, when my father brought home news of pregnancy, his family was more than disappointed. They were appalled. He was an ordained preacher in the African Methodist Episcopal Church and quite frankly, this girl was beneath him. When he told my Grandmother Elaine that he intended to marry my mother and join the armed forces, she screamed, "This girl, this Cassandra, she has ruined our lives!" True to his word, my father married my mother at his home church, Big Bethel AME on Arburn Avenue in Atlanta, and enlisted in the Army. He was stationed in Ft. Benning, Georgia and within

three years there were three children, Retina, Renita and Richard, Jr. As for my mother, it seems she was indeed the preacher's wife.

My parents worked at their troubled marriage for eight years. And, in some respects, the teachings of Big Mama proved to be right. My parents were from different sides of the tracks and for the most part saw life very differently. In my younger years, the differences mattered not. But, as I grew older, I could see the combination of day and night made it hard for everybody to see. Their relationship crumbled and managed to hurt everyone in the process. In the courtroom, the judge said from the looks of it my father could provide a more stable environment for the children. During my parents divorce, my mother became pregnant with my youngest brother, Robert. He was just an infant, so he remained with her. From that moment, our lives changed forever. My father had always spoke of the importance of sisters and brothers growing and living together. Now, we would watch our younger grow up from a distance. And, our mother - our life - gone. The once picture perfect young family was no more. The luxury of a stay-at-home mommy and soldier father slipped away for three young children. Sadly, Robert would never know that family. My father discharged from the Army and became a minister full-time in south Georgia. My mother focused on starting a career in Atlanta. She had gotten her college degree in business management at Columbus State College while my father was stationed in Korea. I was 8 2 years old.

As the daughter of a minister, a lot was expected of me. People in the church, community and school always looked to me to provide a "holy" example of how life should be lived. My movements and words were always monitored. It was during this time that I began role playing, inventing a different me to fit the occasion. My

imagination would run wild, and I began to see the power of self-manipulation. I realized quickly that different environments called for different personalities. Often times my words were not my own in the truest sense. I said what I thought others wanted to hear, and I acted the way others thought a person like myself might act. I laughed inside when I'd hear someone say, "That really doesn't sound like the Renita I know."

In Brunswick, GA, where my father began preaching when I was 12, I honed my ability to crowd please and allowed the "true me" to live inside. Since, a nice preacher's daughter did not get angry, scream, cry or feel any emotions, I packed my emotions inside of myself. The girl I was, it seemed, I could not afford to share with anyone. At 165 pounds, I was ridiculed for my physical appearance. I managed to make up for this by being loud, funny, and quick with a rebuttal. It was by playing with words to taunt others and making the crowd laugh that I got my first glimpse at using my voice. Of course, loud and funny is not the ideal image one has of a minister's chubby child either. So, I often found myself in trouble.

My father was a stern man and rules were rules. My mouth, he frequently said, would be the death of me. I think of that now and know he was right. I talked a lot in school and learned that if you have something to say - say it good enough - someone will listen. My only problem was, most of the time, I had too much to say. My seemingly winning personality won me plenty of friends, but I was still a lonely child in a lot of ways. Although most suffer from feelings of isolation during this period of their life, I felt particularly alone and abandoned. I wasn't the first pick of most guys. And, although my mother managed to visit every month or so, it wasn't normal not to have a mother around. So, I was usually the girl who hung with the guys - they were my buddies, my

friends. They warded off the questions of why I never had a boyfriend. Hanging with the guys, of course, served to make my boisterous and rowdy attitude even rougher around the edges. With no constant woman's touch in my life, I felt abnormal in a lot of ways, different from everybody else.

I can remember floating from group to group in the cafeteria during lunch time. I'd jump into a conversation about a new hairstyle or a mean teacher with girls who lived on my street. Then, I'd slide over to the table where all the "smart" students sat and talk about a pre-algebra test. I prided myself on being in all advanced classes and being able to devour books in a day or two. At the end of lunch, you would find me shooting the breeze with the fellas discussing a possible fight. My head was always full of scenes and dreams and often times they spilled into the lines of poems. As I reflect, I was an extremely creative and imaginative child. I filled pages and pages of journals and diaries with short stories, sonnets and random thoughts. The pages speak to a desperate desire to learn and grow, but I lacked attention.

My father provided a stable, loving environment for us. But, as we crept into our preteen years, it was obvious that we were troubled. The stern hand that my father had was crushing our spirits and further aggravating emotional strains still present from the divorce. My sister, Retina, threw herself into school work, track and boys, while JR, my brother, started to run with the wrong crowd. Me, I was in the principal's office two or three times a week. I wanted to run the whole school according to her. It was obvious something had to give and at age 14, me and my siblings went to live with my mother. I was ecstatic to be leaving the country town of Brunswick. Even more, I was happy at the

prospect of not having to be in church from 9 to 5 on Sundays, every Wednesday and Saturday night. Plus, it was Atlanta, the city, and I would be with my mother.

I quickly realized that single parenting is a strain no matter which parent you live with¹⁸. My mother had maneuvered her life easier with just one child living with her and it was a major adjustment. Schools in Atlanta were different too, and it wasn't nearly as easy to slide in and out of clichés. I managed to get a few friends and tried to explore who I was. But at fourteen, in a moderately troubled middle school in Dekalb County, I fell deeper into what I thought I was supposed to be. I found my rowdiness and 'take no smack' attitude was an asset in this environment. It was 1992 and the images of gang life were flying high in popular culture¹⁹. I decided to try my hat at being a gang girl²⁰.

¹⁸ See James P. Comer and Alvin F. Poissant, *Raising Black Children: Confronting the Educational, Social and Emotional Problems Facing Black Children*. (New York: Penguin Group, 1992). pp 174 -292. These authors describe in detail the emotional obstacles faced by Black children in America. They also explore how societal instances of racism and poverty are compounded by broken homes in the African American community.

¹⁹ See Michele Wallace, *Black Popular Culture*. (Seattle: Bay Press, 1992). pp 95-139, 233-64, Houston A. Baker, Jr., *Black Studies: Rap and the Academy*. (Chicago: Chicago Press, 1991). pp 33-85, Elijah Anderson, *Streetwise: Race, Class and Change in an Urban Community*. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press). pp 112-207.

²⁰ In Stuart Hall, *The Whites of Their Eyes: Racist Ideologies and the Media*, " *Silver Linings*. (London: Lawrence And Wishart, 1981) pp 30-35, M. Foucault, *Panopticism. Visual Culture*. (London: Sage: 1999) pp.61-71, Stuart Hall, *Encoding/decoding. Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-1979* (London: Hutchinson) pp.128-138, R. Roberts, *Ladies First: Women in Music Videos*. (Jackson: Univ. of Miss. Press, 1996) pp.138-161, these authors give some overviews on various ways hegemonic messages are present in mass media. These text, in particular, explore some of the larger implications of negative images for interactions in larger society. I point to these texts because at this period in my life I took most of what I thought Black life was about from television shows, videos and movies. In retrospect, most of what I took was the 'dominant meaning' or the reading that supported the ruling ideology. Consequently, my view of the world and my place in it was largely shaped by programs that did not celebrate the Black experience in positive ways.

My fascination with the darker side intensified when I met John Hubbard. He was a 9th grader at Miller Grove Middle School and lived near our apartment complex. Quick with his fist, he definitely commanded immediate respect in our school and neighborhood. With smooth dark skin, big, clear eyes and a medium frame packed with muscles, he was well sought after by the young ladies. He was also a profound thinker. Often times, he could be found having an in-depth discussion about the complexities of American society and how gang life fit into it. Although more than happy to take John for myself, I still struggled with my weight. I maximized on the advantage of still being able to hang with the fellas and became his debating partner. To everyone the relationship was odd, our friendship, however, was centered on a mutual understanding.

This relationship would prove to be an important one in my young adult years. As I struggled with feelings of hatred for white people and contempt for Black, John shared with me his own pain. Having witnessed countless instances of gunfire and being shuffled in the jail system, today, he speaks passionately about the plight of young Black people. In a recent conversation, he said "I was constantly in trouble and the school would just suspend me - send me home. I mean my dad died when I was 12, and my mom was busy working - trying to provide a good, clean living for us. I didn't want to do the school work because I didn't see the point. Teachers would look at a good grade from me and act like it wasn't even my work. I was in a lot of pain then - still am. But, I really just needed some counseling, someone to explain why my life was the way it was - help me through it. There was never help - just punishment."

Like John, most of the kids in Crest Boyz and Crest Girlz came from decent lower middle- class families. We just relished in the idea of guns, drugs and fighting scenes everywhere we went. Of course, most of us had no real concept of poverty or what gang life was supposed to be. I just tried to fake it. I also remained mindful of my school work, and managed to keep my grades up my first year in Dekalb public schools. But, I was also suspended from school for fighting and disruptive behavior for a total of 17 days that year.

My mother did what she could, but just working and taking care of us took almost all of her strength. I witnessed several of my friends parents give up on their children and wallow in despair because of their children's poor behavior. I will say my mother was determined not to "let the streets have me," as she often said. Rooted in the love of God and a belief that I could and would do better, she would come in my room at night and pray for me. She didn't stop at leaving it "in the hands of the Lord," and wasn't opposed to resulting to drastic tactics to improve my troubled youth. On one occasion, I snuck out of the house to hang out with friends. I left my door closed and music on as a decoy. Not fooled, my mother decided to check on me about 1 o' clock. When I finally returned the next day, I found the door to my room removed. She said, "if you cannot be trusted you do not deserve privacy."

Sinking in a cloud of despair, I simply continued to lash out and seek the real "Black life". I wanted a boyfriend with a nice car with rimmed tires, who sold drugs and had plenty of guns and protection. I floated in images like those I saw on the movie

screen²¹. In the mean time, my mother moved us into a \$120,000 home and a solid middle-class neighborhood. I cringed when we left the crew behind. I couldn't dream of going to another high school. There was talk of sending me to a school somewhere closer to home. But riding on promises of better behavior and my sister's senior year, I prepared to go to Redan High School in Stone Mountain. Several teachers at the school reached out to me and tried to straighten my wayward path.

At fifteen, my life differed greatly from what I can imagine Big Mama had planned for her young ones. My days were spent concentrating on maintaining my tough exterior. Even though I still sat in all advanced classes, my mind was elsewhere. But at Redan, I did have several experiences I had never had before. It was a predominantly Black high school. Most of the teachers, staff and both principals were Black. In fact, they were both Black males.

Mr. Mack and Mr. McGrady were the first images of powerful black males, doing positive work, I had truly been around since my father. My first day of school Mr. McGrady pulled me into his office and said, "I've heard about you Ms. Ward, please don't bring that shit to my school." My mouth dropped and I said, "You really

²¹ In Stuart Hall, *The Whites of Their Eyes: Racist Ideologies and the Media*, "Silver Linings." (London: Lawrence And Wishart, 1981) pp 30-35, M. Foucault, *Panopticism. Visual Culture*. (London: Sage: 1999) pp.61-71, Stuart Hall, *Encoding/decoding. Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-1979* (London: Hutchinson) pp.128-138, R. Roberts, *Ladies First: Women in Music Videos*. (Jackson: Univ. of Miss. Press, 1996) pp.138-161, these authors give some overviews on various ways hegemonic messages are present in mass media. These text, in particular, explore some of the larger implications of negative images for interactions in larger society. I point to these texts because at this period in my life I took most of what I thought Black life was about from television shows, videos and movies. In retrospect, most of what I took was the 'dominant meaning' or the reading that supported the ruling ideology. Consequently, my view of the world and my place in it was largely shaped by programs that did not celebrate the Black experience in positive ways.

shouldn't curse at your students." He opened my file and told me all the things I shouldn't do that I had done. He ended the conversation by telling me not to advise him on proper behavior. I managed to develop a good relationship with Mr. Mack and Mr. McGrady, and they honestly helped keep me on track as much as possible.

My position as Opinions Editor of the *Redan Raider Review* also managed to plant the seed of journalism as a career. It provided me with the opportunity to explore my love of words. I began to realize that perhaps the same power I wielded in negative activities could be redirected. So, even with my troubled high school career, my grades were in tack and I definitely planned to go to college. But, by the time my senior came in 1995, my youth had been marred with tragedy. I had lost four friends to gun shootings and several to jail. Working in a local fast food restaurant, I was the victim of a fatal robbery that left my manager dead from a bullet wound to the head. I had seen far too many teenage pregnancies and black youth fall by the way side to be overjoyed by my acceptance to the University of Georgia.

When I arrived on the predominantly white campus, I couldn't help but laugh. While I had spent my high school years trying to be what I had seen on television and on the movie screen, I realized that many white children spent that time preparing to take advantage of a lovely campus. Armed with an SAT score of 1010 and a 3.0 GPA, I was glad I had made it this far.

CHAPTER 7

THE LIGHT OF DAY

My mother was extremely proud to drive me to University of Georgia. She cried the whole way. My sister was on a track scholarship at Albany State and my young brother was in his senior year in high school. Briefly, I relished in my success. Redan had sent a good group of students to UGA, and I was comforted by seeing some familiar faces.

As the days passed, I realized I wasn't quite as happy as I thought I would be. For years, I had been a roughneck and had immersed myself in a "thug" mentality. As a freshman at UGA in 1995, I quickly had to learn to let that persona go. As I searched for another persona to adopt, I found I had slim pickings. Never before in my life had I been so painfully aware of my color. I had long ago burned inside from the injustices that Black people encounter in their lives. But now, I saw it in a way I hadn't never encountered before.

For the first year, most of the Black adults I saw worked in the cafeteria and cleaned the dorms. I felt like the house Negro because blankets of shame ran over me as they swept the steps and served the food²². I decided to separate myself from that image

²² See Jean Baker Miller, Domination and Subordination. *Race, Class, and Gender in the United States*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998) pp 73-79, Lillian Rubin, Is This a White Country, or What?, *Race, Class, and Gender in the United States*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998) pp. 92-100, Marilyn Fyre, Oppression. *Race, Class, and Gender in the United States*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998) pp. 146-150 for discussions on racial formation, oppression and internalized racism in America and how these phenomena manifest in people's lives.

in the downtown scene. I shopped²³ and planned to travel for spring break. I ran around and hung out. I wanted to have a good, college time. I pushed the faces of the poor, dirty Blacks riding local transit out of my head. Me, I would be educated and wealthy. I was a student at the University of Georgia. As my expensive living started to catch up with me, I realized that I was not rich. Even with Hope Scholarship, my parents could not send me money every week. There was no allowance, and I had to get a job. While trying to earn a few extra bucks at Snelling Dining Hall, I met Elpacio Lattimore. He was a nice young man from Athens. We conversed everyday during my shift, and I thought he had potential, especially as a local. Admittedly, I had a difficult time dating at UGA. When I arrived, there weren't too many Black students here and the ratio of women to men was awful. The one guy I had shown interest in was actively dating two other girls. Left to my lonesome, I felt even further rejected when I saw several of the few Black men at UGA dating white girls.

Pacio became my breathe of fresh air, and I lavished in the attention he gave me. I thought it was cute that he brought me little gifts to work. Occasionally, I began to see him outside of work and before I knew it, I saw him all the time. Girlfriends would scorn me for dating a local Athens guy, but I liked the way he made me feel. After a few months, I learned I was pregnant. Funny, I thought. The girl down the hall had just had an abortion. She didn't even bother calling home. Plus, she was moving into the sorority house next year - childbirth was not on her mind. I thought perhaps it was best for me to

²³ See Celicia Lury, *Consumer Culture*. (New Jersey: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1996), Todd Gitlin, *The Twilight of Common Dreams: Why America Is Wracked By Culture Wars*. (New York: Henry Holt Company, 1995) pp. 126-210 for discussions on how America's consumer culture has influenced the way people conceptualize their identity through materialism.

take the same route. This definitely was less than the ideal situation. Scared to think of life either way, I prayed.

I went home that summer with a heavy heart and three months pregnant. I couldn't believe the mess I had made of things. I wanted to explain how ugly I felt when I walked into a sea of Greek letters, chipper conversations and tanned skin. I wanted to tell my mother how this man had made me feel beautiful, when everything around me told me I was ugly. I wanted to explain that for a whole year I almost had not existed. Most conversations I participated in left me feeling drained and suspect. One day, I picked up the *Red & Black* to read an editorial that said, if Black people had stood up for themselves slavery may have never happened. That day, I cried. Thinking about the feeling of shame, I cry right now. Technically, I, a house negro was pregnant by a field hand. It is funny, but that is how I saw it. We were definitely both Black fish swimming in the bubble created at UGA. I told my family of my decision to return to classes in the fall and have the baby in Athens.

Now, I was even more different than the average student around me, but I suppose I took it in stride. Now in most class conversations - no matter the course subject - people asked me why Black women chose to have babies so young and out of wedlock. Or, why didn't I have an abortion, which would be better for my child in the end. I found it odd that most times these types of questions and comments came from white women. Oddly enough, five other Black young women were pregnant at the same time. Two of them left school. I thought what an odd phenomena as I prepared, at age 19, to become a mother²⁴.

²⁴ See Appendix 5.3 for article "Unplanned Bundles of Joy," that appeared *Kross Kultures Magazine*. I eventually wanted to share my story with other students enduring the same issue of unexpected pregnancy.

My son, Quint Mandale Lattimore, was born on December 3, 1996. His father and I welcomed him to the world with open arms. Together, we started a journey down a path similar to my own parents. It was, however, during my three-year relationship with Pacio that I began to really see and understand poverty for the first time. I realized that the looks of tired workers that I had shied away from my freshmen year were all around the Athens community. They lived in housing projects throughout the small county. It was in Bethel Homes, Pauldoe, Nellie B., that I saw where those 41% of students who dropped out of the local high schools, Clarke Central and Cedar Shoals, came from. I couldn't piece together how I attended one of the best public universities in the nation and just down the road in a total of seven housing projects Black lives slipped down the drain. My relationship with Pacio joined these two worlds together. As a student, I saw the world of privilege afforded at UGA to those in the position to take advantage of it. As a young mother, I also saw the world of those who were rarely in the position to take advantage of much.

Working to make ends meet, I decided food stamps or daycare assistance from the local Department of Family & Children Services would help our small family. My brush with social services was a slap in the face with reality. As I completed my form and handed it to the clerk, she snarled at me. I asked her what was the procedure because this was my first visit. "Sit down - when its your turn, somebody will call your name. If you don't have all your paper work - don't bother waiting," she said. Her eyes seem to be coated with a permanent layer of contempt²⁵. Mentally, I found comfort in the fact that I

²⁵ See M. Gilens, *Why Americans Hate Welfare*. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago, 1999) and Rita Henley Jensen, *Welfare: Exploding the Stereotypes. Race, Class, and Gender in the United States*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998) pp 242-248.

was better off than most women in the waiting room. This pompous attitude dissipated when I sat down to talk with a case worker.

My case worker was in her late twenties, early thirties. She had beady eyes and thin blond hair. Her weak attempt to give my case real attention disappeared as she obviously fell victim to routine. The questions to receive social services were extremely personal in nature and embarrassing to some extent. She provided no comfort. And, even as a college student, I was treated like some sort of societal reject. I wanted to get up and act as if I didn't need the assistance. But, I did. Pacio had started classes at Athens Tech and worked at night. I took classes two days a week and worked part-time. We could barely break even each month. I swallowed my pride in one big gulp and almost choked.

In my classes, I learned about the systems that created various social conditions. I listened to hear what would be said if I didn't speak. Sometimes in courses I took a vow of silence. It is in silence that I begin to learn how some white people think²⁶. I heard white students say, if people worked hard enough and stayed in school their lives would be better. I tried to speak of equal access to quality education, decent wages, healthcare - I heard that everyone has the same opportunities it is their responsibility to take them. I spoke of institutionalized racism and discrimination - I heard of affirmative action programs and reverse discrimination²⁷. I spoke of my own personal life experiences - I

²⁶ See P. McIntosh, *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*. *Race, Class, and Gender in the United States*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998). pp 166 -169.

²⁷ See John Gabriel, *Whitewash: Racialized politics and the media*. (London: Routledge, 1998) and J. Martin and T. Nakayama, *Whiteness: The Communication of Social Identity*. (California: Sage, 1999) for in-depth discussions on how white America formalizes their politics along race lines. These texts also examine how race is coded in various terms.

heard silence²⁸. I spoke of the internal self-loathing that racked my mind and body as a Black woman on the campus of UGA - I heard silence. I spoke of the privilege that continues if those in the position to change it point out ways that only small changes can be made, a little at a time - I heard silence. I spoke of radical change - I heard a need to cater ones message so that it appeals to those in power; the oppressor must feel safe. I started to speak of the world I envisioned for my son - I didn't feel like wasting my breathe.

I did my school work and I went home. I took care of my son and I went to work. I went to campus and I left. I did not participate in much. One day, I went down to the *Red & Black* because it was time to start amassing some clips. I walked into the room and you could hear a pin drop. I tried to attribute this to me being a new face, but the cold atmosphere never seemed to wane. As I talked with the news editor, she talked about their desire to bring diversity to the staff - she was glad I had the courage to stop by. As the Black student, I was frequently offered story assignments that had even the slightest minority angle, although none of the topics spoke to the true issues on the campus. I expressed that I was happy to write about issues related to diversity, but I liked to suggest some stories ideas that shed more light on the minority experience. I turned stories in and the editing process killed my voice completely. Two of my articles were printed. But the lack of support also killed my spirit, I didn't go back.

²⁸ See bell hooks, "When I was a young Solider for the Revolution' Coming to Voice," *Sisters of the Yam*. (Boston: South End Press, 1989) pp 1-9 and Mary Daly, *Gyn-Ecology: the Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978): pp. 315-333 write about the feminist approach to scholarship in sharing lived experiences. In majority of my courses at UGA, there has been great reluctance on the part of students to talk about their personal lives in the learning process.

In 1998, I wanted to work to create a more welcoming environment at UGA. A group of fellow Black students and I started Collegiate Social Embodiment, CSE. CSE was supposed to be a organization that combined community service with academic scholarship to help eradicate racism and facilitate social change²⁹. Six of the ten members were friends from my high school. We struggled for our meetings to be more than gripping and venting sessions. It was a difficult task. With only one male who sat in from time to time, this was one of the only opportunities female members had to bond. At one of the last regular meetings CSE had before it dissolved back into just a group of friends, the Black females shared their concerns. Anna Stacher, who's uncle, David Satcher, was the Surgeon General under the Clinton administration, said, "How do we help? I want to help, but here on this campus, what can I do?" Her voice pleaded with us to provide an answer. "I am trying to go to medical school. I do my work, but it seems like even that is not quite enough here."

CSE's last effort was to raise money for a local high school student to have a scholarship. It was a moderate success, but nobody wanted to hear the larger mission or the message. The UGA Black political organizations wanted to concentrate on social activities, and the larger white community said things were improving - be patient. In 1999, minority enrollment dropped again. It had been decreasing since I arrived. I

²⁹ See H. Simmons, E. Mechling and H. Schreier, The Functions of Human Communication in Mobilizing for Action from the Bottom Up: The Rhetoric of Social Movements," in *Handbook of Rhetorical and Communication Theory*, ed. C. Arnold and J. Waite Bowers, (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1984), 792-867). And, see D. della Porta and M. Diani, *Social Movements: An Introduction*. (Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1999) pp 1-135 for discussions on how social movements begin della Porta and Diani's discussion on movement networks is especially useful for several reasons. Members of CSE went to high school, church and school together. Likewise, members of NITT, two later, participated in multiply organizations together.

prepared to go into my senior year of college, and I had never once considered myself a Bulldog. I had never gone to a football game and didn't own any t-shirts. I'd done my work and got my ABJ in Journalism. I had nothing left to offer this institution. But my son was still young, and I was not ready for the work force. I decided to apply for graduate school.

The acceptance letter I received from the Grady College of Journalism graduate program was a highlight in my life. Affirmative action policies were under fire at UGA, and I felt like I would no longer be stigmatized as someone who was let into the school. I relished in knowing I was accepted on my own merit. I had also ended my relationship with Pacio and was enjoying a new freedom in my social life. I settled back in for another two years of school and looked forward to what the future would bring.

In my first semester, I began to learn something that I had never really understood before - there was theory behind the practice of our everyday lives. I could not believe that the life I had lived and the experiences I have endured had been studied and explained to some extent. For the most part, I was sick. I felt that the larger white society was fully aware of the ramifications of living and operating in an advanced capitalist state³⁰. It was people like me who suffered the most. We would have three-hour class discussions about exploitation, racism, classism, sexism. I never seemed to hear what we would or could do with the knowledge. I devoted myself to being that critical thinker - a creator of new knowledge. But, again, I spent my first year of school trying to imitate the

³⁰ See E. Laclau and C. Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985), L. Althusser, *Ideology and Ideological Apparatuses (Notes towards an investigation): Essays on Ideology*. (Norfolk:Therford,1984) pp1-60 provided a limited discussion on how the State operates

scholarly lingo and disposition. Inside I grew sick. I knew that theory was useful and could help us see the world differently. But, all I could see was what was right in front of me. All I could see was what I lived. I could not decide if I respected or rejected the life of an academic.

However, learning about the media and the power of mass communications allowed me to remain somewhat hopeful. There is great power in words and it is through the media that we share meanings about the world. I was solid in one notion, the media reflected and constructed our reality. I began to examine every form of media around me. I decided that the television was poison and removed it from my home.

I positioned myself to speak to a larger audience- in the newspaper, on the radio or panel discussions. I worked on the diversity campaign all day, everyday. I scheduled meetings or went to luncheons and tried to rub elbows with the people in the position to change policy.

and how the ruling classes maintain dominance. In Althusser's discussion media is outlined as a means for maintaining social control.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION: NOW IS THE TIME

“Yesterday we celebrated the past, “ I said to a room of over a hundred people. “Today, we will focus on the present - we will discuss *why* this campus is not conducive to diversity.”

It was January 10, 2001 and the eight student protesters, who would later be known as Now IS The Time, NITT, held a press conference. Dressed completely in black clothing and passing out six point demands had drawn sufficient attention the day before. Now, administrators, like Vice President of Student Affairs, Dr. Richard Mullendore, and Assistant to the President, Matthew Winston, lined the wall. They told reporters they wanted to hear student concerns. NITT organizers had long discovered that talking through the media was the only way to make UGA’s administration listen.

In November of 2000, I wrote my first editorial for the local paper. It focused on the multitude of problems facing UGA, if President Adams didn’t alter his administrative style. Since it was my first hack at the big dogs, I only mentioned diversity in passing. The article had still gotten the attention of those in charge. I was called in for a lunch with Matt Winston to discuss my concerns. At that time, I suggested that President Adams reach out in a more visible way to minority students already attending the University - a forum discussing campus climate and race relations may be in order.

Perhaps, there should be a small assessment study done to determine how students felt. Sydney Jones, president of NAACP, also suggested Dr. Mullendore explain the

recent restructuring of Minority Services & Programs in greater detail to students. The director, Dr. Sherwood Thompson, had suddenly been fired and apparently the office was being downsized. Winston said the “numbers say that we retain students once they get here, and we are trying to recruit minority faculty and staff. As far as MSP is concerned, we are not hiding this from students. Dr. Mullendore is waiting for the ideal time to present his restructuring plan. “

I, of course, had seen most of the numbers he was referring to and knew that they were being manipulated just a little. The ideal time to present the restructuring of MSP came just as students left for Christmas break - no one heard about. Our conversation seemed to be one of choosing words too carefully. I was done talking when Winston suggested that I stay away from the media. He said, “These are all concerns we will look into - I would say just stay away from the media. They don’ t really present all the issues.” I reminded him that I was a journalist and thus far, the subject of my columns were completely up to me.

The *Athens Banner Herald* editors encouraged me to write about a variety of topics. However, the editors weren’t opposed to me focusing on UGA. Leneva Morgan Calloway, the Lifestyles Editor and a UGA Black alumna, warned me to be cautious in what I said about President Adams. However, she thought it was important to address the issues. She also said that often times people do not want to really hear the issues. When I received emails that were less than polite, she suggested I stay focused on the goal I wanted to achieve. I knew our goal was to keep the issues present and to tell our story as Black students. When I frequently became the topic of articles, my editors discouraged me from writing for a period.

Leading up to our protest, I asked Winston had there been any head way made on the feasibility of the suggestions made at our initial meeting. He said, "I am really sorry - I forgot to bring them up." As we NITT organizers sat in Memorial Hall, he looked ill as I read out our time line of activities. We had individually talked and met with several administrators. His name appeared several times as a point of contact. The press conference made our concerns public and we waited for a response. There was none. NITT spent the month of February meeting with other minority organizations, and worked to organize a minority coalition. It was an exhausting effort. NITT organizers were asked to come out to numerous functions and talk to groups of people. To add to the already hectic pace, it was Black History Month. Administrators attended several of the high profile events to combat rumors that they did not participate in minority events. NITT organizers worked to have visibility at these events as well. And, although the number of students supporting NITT had grown, the organizing core remained at eight students. We received the official support of seven organizations, including *Asian American Student Association, Lambda Alliance, Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, National Association of Black Journalists, Hispanic Student Association, Black Affairs Council, and Graduate and Professional Scholars*, we addressed a letter to President Adams and Provost Holbrook requesting a meeting. As minority students, we wanted to discuss how we felt and recommend strategies that could help change our campus . Our request was denied.

The denial of the request came as a mild shock. Up until this point, NITT had made a point of being in the newspaper at least once a week. We were extremely visible on campus, and we had gained allies in the larger Athens community and on campus. It

was rumored that Adams said he would not be bullied by students, and he would absolutely not have a sit-down meeting with us. Publicly, he suggested students voice their concerns at Open Mic with Mike.

During this time, I was in constant prayer and found my seemingly endless energy in the Most High. I easily worked 19 or 20 hours a day. My phone rang all times of day and night. More than just being a student activist, I became an advisor to students and adults alike. Thrust into the public spotlight, I was forced to be ready to participate in a conversation with vigor and interest at a moment's notice. I worked hard not to falter under the pressure. And, there was Quint. Many days I picked him up from school only to deposit him at his dad's house twenty minutes later. On a day when we drove straight home he said, "Where are we going?" I looked in the rear view mirror and said, "Home." He looked around and said, "Oh, you don't have a meeting?"

I had been going so much - I had not spent much time with my child. I tried to make our moments together count. NITT minority coalition was preparing to have a sit-in.

On the dawn of our sit-in, I called an emergency meeting. NITT minority coalition, complete with white, Asian, African and Indian students, decided to stage a two-hour sit in at the President's office. This was a monumental decision. Students have committed themselves to risk getting in trouble - arrested if necessary. We passed out 500 handouts. So, on March 21, 2001, we lined the steps of the President's Office. With a bull horn in hand, I shouted, "Now IS The Time! Now IS The Time! Now IS The Time!" As television cameras rolled and by passers stopped to stare, I knew that inside myself I had a voice. I knew that if I used it and continually communicated to a mass audience,

change could happen. I had a voice all along. I only had to use it. Now, that knowledge became my truth. That knowledge informed and informs my life.

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