EXPLORING THE REAGAN ADMINISTRATION'S NEOCONSERVATIVE PUBLIC
POLICIES INFLUENCE ON AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES'
EDUCATIONAL AND LIFE OUTCOMES

by

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ABSTRACT

ALEXIS M. YOWELL. Exploring the influence of the Reagan administration's neoconservative public policies on African American males' educational and life outcomes. (Under the direction of DR. GREG WIGGAN)

This study examined the influences of President Ronald Reagan's administration's neoconservative public policies and color-blind strategy on the educational and life outcomes of African American males who attended high school between 1981 and 1989. The study investigated how public policies devoid of a race-conscious or equity-based approach impacted the educational, employment and criminal justice outcomes of African American males. This interpretative case study was designed using a critical race theory framework to address the following research question: What influence did the implementation of Ronald Reagan's administration's neoconservative public policies have on the educational, employment and criminal justice system experiences of African American males who attended high school during the Reagan era [1981 – 1989]? Purposive criterion sampling was used to select the participants for this study from southeastern and northeastern states. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 African American males who attended high school during the Reagan era [1981-1989].The following four themes emerged from the data: 1) Systems of support vs. Institutional racism, 2) Post-High School Aspirations: Getting a Job; Joining the Service; or Going to College, 3) Dealing with the Criminal Justice System, and 4) Attitudes and Perspectives on Life Outcomes. The findings suggest that neoconservative public policies that stemmed from a color-blind framework were an influential factor in the experiences and life outcomes of the African American male participants in the study.

In addition, systems of support emerged as a pivotal factor in the participants' ability to mitigate the impact of neoconservative policies that disregarded the influence of race on life outcomes. The study concludes with implications for policy makers and educators and includes recommendations for future research.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Jesse and Karen Yowell. Thank you for being my biggest supporters! All of my accomplishments are a reflection of the love and guidance you have provided to me throughout the years. I am truly blessed and thankful to call you two "Mama" and "Daddy."

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In the United States, public policy and law have historically been used to censor the social advancement and mobility of African American males. Slavery, Black codes and Jim Crow laws are illustrative of the policy mechanisms used to maintain the status quo of the dominant culture (Alexander, 2010; Arnwine, 2001; Brown, Carnoy, Currie, Oppenheimer, Schultz & Wellman, 2003; Fultz & Brown, 2008). Race and policy are social constructs that are primarily defined and validated by prevailing hegemonic ideology. Therefore, the intersection of race, gender, and policy commonly results in the preservation of the dominant culture's self-serving interests at the expense of the less powerful minority polity. As such, the interests and needs of minorities are disregarded, and they become further relegated to the margins of mainstream society (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Leonardo, 2009). However, the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and 1970s challenged the discriminatory policies that historically precluded African Americans, women and the poor from equal access and opportunity.

Social class, ethnic backgrounds and the pervasiveness of racism were explicitly addressed in equity policies' purpose and desired outcome (Hess & McGuinn, 2002; Katz, 1995, 1990; McGuinn & Hess, 2005; Patterson, 1981). As a response to these issues, Civil Rights' legislation expanded African Americans' social capital and mobilized them towards a state of greater equality (Brown et al., 2003). Social capital refers to "the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a

group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 119). As African Americans began to advance in a variety of social institutions (workforce, politics, etc.), their ability to leverage new relationships for the economic and social benefit of their community increased.

The practice of considering the impact of race and socioeconomic status in policy development became a staple feature in federal legislation. However, the 1980 presidential election of Ronald Reagan marked a stark departure from the 1960s and 1970s federal government's approach to social issues (Alexander, 2010; Grant, 2008; Hutchinson, 1996; Katz, 1995; Krieger, 1987; Levin, 1989; Spritzer, 2003; Verstegen, 1990; Wilson, 1987). Reagan's Administration [1981 -1989] introduced social policy grounded in conservatism and supported by free-market economic principles. Reagan was able to remove the consideration of race and class as factors from policy development by framing the nation's problems in economic terms and promoting a *color-blind* ideology (Brown et al., 2003; Grant, 2008; Shulman, 1987; Spritzer, 2005, 2003). The color-blind ideology suggests that every person should be treated equally regardless of gender, color or creed. Abandonment of equity-inspired federal initiatives for a neoconservative agenda stunted the social mobility of poor minorities, primarily African Americans, by eliminating programming that aimed to increase their economic stability (Grant, 2008; Jaynes & Williams, 1990; Laester, 1997; Palmer & Sawhill, 1984; Spritzer, 2003). Policy analysts and social scientists contend that the implications of the Reagan Administration's neoconservative public and education policies culminated in a decrease in African Americans' social capital and gravely impeded their progression toward

equality (CBPP, 1986; Katz, 1995, 1990; Shulman, 1984). Table 1 provides a brief

description of the primary neoconservative policies implemented during the Reagan

Administration.

Table 1: Reagan administration's neoconservative education and public policies

Policy	Area of influence
Education Consolidation and Improvement Act of 1981 (ECIA)	- Repealed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) - Eliminated targeted funding for schools identified with high poverty populations - Defunded bilingual education and intervention programs - Decreased funding to school nutrition programs and desegregation initiatives - Decreased funding for federal student loans and grants - Tied federal funding to standardized testing - Emphasized standardized, high-stakes testing - Emphasized increase in character education programs
Omnibus Budget and Reconciliation Act of 1981 (OBRA)	- Defunded welfare and food nutrition programs (AFDC, food stamps, WIC, Medicaid) - Lowered income eligibility standards (excluding those individuals previously covered by former income standards) - Eliminated and consolidated public works and job training programs (JTPA, CETA, YCC, Job Corps, unemployment benefits)
Economic Recovery Tax Act of 1981 (ERTA)	- Redesigned tax structure; 20 percent tax cut in highest income bracket; 3 percent tax cut in lowest income bracket and implemented income tax on Social Security benefits and Medicare insurance
Drug Abuse Act of 1986	- Established mandatory minimum sentencing for possession of narcotics - Implemented differentiated sentencing of a 100:1 ratio for crack cocaine versus powder cocaine possession
Omnibus Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988	- Mandated 5-year minimum sentence for simple possession of 5gram of crack cocaine - Mandated that all conspirators in a drug offense be charged the same regardless of their role in the crime - Excluded convicted felons from receiving federal student financial aid, public housing, and social service assistance (i.e. food stamps, WIC).

Reagan's social policies appear to have had the most adverse influence on the educational and life outcomes of young African American men who, historically, have been impacted the most by economic recessions in the form of high unemployment and lack of educational opportunities (CBPP, 1986; Gibbs, 1988; Mauer, 2001; Pettit & Western, 2004; Shulman, 1984; St. Pierre, 1991). Without the safeguards of race-conscious policy, African American males' life experiences and outcomes were once again manipulated and controlled by the interests of the dominant culture (Grant, 2008; Laester, 1997; Shulman, 1984).

Between the mid-1950s and 1970s, unprecedented federal intervention in the education and economic security of African Americans yielded significant gains in their achievement and income (Farrar, 1988; McGuinn & Hess, 2005; Verstegen, 1990). The decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* case (1954) ushered in a wave of federal legislation aimed at creating equal opportunities. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 was the cornerstone initiative of this new equity-inspired policy movement. ESEA was designed to create equitable educational opportunities for underserved children.

The impact of ESEA on minority student achievement was unparalleled and resulted in academic gains that have not been matched since (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Harris, 2005; Kalenberg, 2008; Ravitch, 2010; Rebell & Wolff, 2008; Wilson-Sadberry, Winfield & Royster, 1991). In the 1970s, African American students demonstrated significant improvements in reading and math achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2010 Harris, 2010; NCES, 2009, 2011). Between 1960 and 1980, African American students

experienced increases in high school graduation rates, followed by moderate gains in college degree attainment (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Evans, Garthwaite & Moore, 2012; NCES, 2011). By 1980, 74 percent of African American men had completed 12 years of education. College enrollment of African Americans was only slightly above 5 percent in 1960, but this percentage rose to 12 percent by 1980 (Hauser, 1987). By 1970, African Americans were attending college at a rate comparable to White students (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Rebell & Wolff, 2008). The improvement in African American males' educational outcomes transferred into increased economic opportunities, which had a positive impact on their median incomes and overall quality of life (Hauser, 1991; NCES, 2001). However, the educational, economic and social capital gains were short-lived. The election of Ronald Reagan to the U.S. presidency culminated in sweeping economic and social reform that changed the course of social policy and with it, the lives of African American men (Alexander, 2010; Hutchinson, 1996; Kasarda, 1990; Katz, 1995; Levin, 1989; Wilson, 1987).

Reagan's presidential campaign reflected a staunch conservative platform. He promised to reestablish the morals and conservative traditions of the nation, advocated for a free-market economy, decentralization, restoration of states' rights and the elimination of the welfare state (D'Souza, 1999; Grant, 2008; Katz, 1990; Republican Party, 1980; Wilson, 1996). Reagan's plan to "Make America Great Again," appealed to a diverse constituency united by a common agenda – a return to the status quo of White privilege and cultural dominance (Apple, 2006; Drakeford, 2010; Spritzer, 2003). Thirty years of federal policy dedicated to eliminating poverty and advancing the social status of African Americans, women and the poor led to an intense backlash (Katz, 1990). United

by neoconservative ideology, southern White conservatives, northern working-class, the religious-right and defunct southern conservative democrats galvanized the Republican base and propelled Reagan into the political forefront (Apple, 2006; Lipset, 1981).

The neoconservative movement began in the 1970s as a reaction to political liberalism, which arose during the New Deal era. Neoconservatives maintained that the welfare state of the 1960s influenced a counterculture that crippled the nation's political dominance. According to neoconservatives, the U.S.' prominence could be restored by adhering to free-market principles, individualism, meritocracy and the global promotion of democratic values (Apple, 2006; Bell & Dagger, n.d; Edward, 1999). Subsequently, those concepts disproportionately favored the dominant culture whose social networks allowed them access to freely compete in a market-based economy. Thus, Reagan's election ushered in a political paradigm that shifted the national focus from social welfare to *New Federalism* (Clark & Amiot, 1983; Nightingale, 2011; Pierre, 1991; Pincus, 1984; Verstegen, 1990). Based on the concept of states' rights, new federalism was a political ideology that advocated for the attenuation of the federal government and the transferal of power to states (Clark & Amiot, 1983; Nightingale, 2011; Verstegen, 1990).

New federalism appealed to the needs of newly converted Reaganites who felt that civil rights' legislation had usurped power from the states and jeopardized their privileged status (Brown et al., 2003; Clark & Amiot, 1983; Finn, 1988; Hess & McGuinn; Leonardo, 1997; Verstegen, 1990). Furthermore, they contended that decreases in social welfare spending, which included education, were necessary to end the gross welfare entitlements and inter-generational welfare dependency that was supposedly overburdening the U.S economy (Murray, 1984).

Reagan's primary focus was the economy. By framing the nation's problems in terms of free-market economic principles, Reagan was able to successfully omit race-conscious equity initiatives from public policy (Brown et al., 2003; Grant, 2008; Sullivan, 2006). He proposed a three-prong approach to fulfill his political promises: decrease the size of the federal government, reduce the fiscal budget and cut taxes (Republican Party, 1980). Poor minorities were more likely to rely on federal intervention to help them attain greater educational and economic opportunities (St. Pierre, 1991; Urban Institute, 1984; Wilson, 1997). Thus, the cuts in the federal spending and the elimination of social welfare programs disproportionately affected African Americans as they represented a larger segment of the poor and unemployed.

Reagan's administration advanced its political agenda through the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (OBRA) of 1981. OBRA was not a federal policy or initiative in the traditional sense. It was a massive budget cut proposal that recommended a $131 billion decrease in federal expenditures from 1982-1984 (OMB, 1981). By using fiscal budget deductions as policy reform, Reagan was able to circumvent the traditional policy subsystem that is characterized as an incremental process which consists of congressional committee discussions, experts' opinions, and the mobilization of stakeholders (Clark & Austuto, 1989; Spritzer, 2003). This approach allowed his administration to avoid having to publicly address the ways the budget cuts would impact the lives of minorities and the poor.

The Reagan Administration adamantly affirmed that the public policies proposed were color-blind and racially-neutral, but Reagan's political rhetoric suggested otherwise. Reagan's anti-welfare and social policy discourse covertly invoked negative, racialized

stereotypes (Alexander, 2010; Gilens, 1999; Katz, 1990; Mendelberg, 2001; Reinarman & Levine, 1997; Spritzer, 2003, 2005). His speeches on welfare, employment and crime often referred to the "undeserving poor," "able-bodied poor," "welfare queen," "slum dweller," and "super predator," which for many conjured images of urban, poor Blacks – a visual reinforced by the media's depiction of poverty as a urban, African American problem (Gilens, 1999; Katz, 1990, 1995; Mauer, 2001; Spritzer, 2003). African Americans were never explicitly mentioned in policy strategy. However, Brown et al. (2003), Bell (2004), Spitzer (2003, 2005), Moses (2002), Drakeford (2010) and Mendelberg (2001) suggested that the exclusion of race from policy discussions indicated a race-conscious intent by the Reagan Administration. They refer to the disproportionately adverse impact of the neoconservative policies on minorities' life outcomes as an indicator of the administration's inclusion of race in their purported race-neutral policies (Bell, 2004; CBPP, 1986; Freeman, 1995; Freeman, 1990; Grant, 2008; Katz, 1990; National Urban Leauge, 1989; Spritzer, 2003; St. Pierre, 1990; Urban Institute, 1988, 1984; Western, Pettit & Guetzkow, 2002; Wilson, 1997).

The Reagan coalition, which consisted of neoconservatives, religious-right and southern White conservatives, used the success of the Civil Rights Movement as the impetus for an ultra-conservative movement (Brown et al., 2003; Drakeford, 2010; Omi & Winant, 1994). They proposed that civil rights' legislation was successful in eradicating racism and discriminatory practices from social institutions. Therefore, equality under the law and equal opportunity for all had been achieved (D'Souza, 1995; Wilson, 1978). Accordingly, there was no longer a need for federal race-conscious policy aimed at enhancing the social capital of minorities. Instead, the Reagan Administration

promoted neoconservative policies utilizing a color-blind ideology. From the perspective of neoconservatives, the color-blind ideology advocated "a society where racial considerations [are] never entertained in the selection of leaders, in hiring decisions, and in the distribution of goods and services" (Omni & Winant, 1994, p.117).

The color-blind ideology was first used as a legal strategy to eliminate racial discriminatory laws. In *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), Albion Tourgee, counsel for the plaintiff, Homer Plessy, argued that the law was color-blind and that the rights afforded in the Constitution extended to every person regardless of race (Drakeford, 2010). Although the separate but equal clause was upheld in the *Plessy* decision, the sentiments expressed in Justice John Marshall Harlan's dissenting brief became the founding principle of the Civil Rights Era. Justice Harlan declared:

> In the view of the Constitution, in the eye of the law, there is in this country no superior, dominant, ruling class of citizens. There is no caste here. Our Constitution is colorblind and neither knows nor tolerates classes among citizens. (*Plessy v. Ferguson,*1896)

Brown v. Board of Education illustrated the Court's first step to eliminating the quasi-caste system barrier to equality. In simplistic terms, color-blind ideology advocates that every person regardless of sex, color or creed should be treated fairly and equally. To that effect, the civil rights' legislation achieved legal equality using the argument that race should not be a basis for exclusion. *Explicit* and *intentional* systemic discriminatory practices that fostered inequalities were prohibited by law. To this end, the color-blind paradigm was effective in promoting equal treatment under the law for people of color (Brown et al., 2003). However, in the advent of Reagan's presidency, neoconservatives

used the color-blind strategy to realign the direction of policy initiatives. While civil rights activists and liberals had used color-blind practices to create race-conscious policy targeted at abolishing racial discrimination, conservatives utilized the same ideology to promote an end to race-critical political agendas.

Neoconservatives successfully communicated to the American public that race and racism were no longer an impediment to equality (Brown et al., 2003; Crenshaw, 1997; D'Souza, 1999; Spritzer, 2003; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 1997; Wilson, 1978). The war on racism had been won. As such, they opined that the national focus should now be placed on the real problem facing the U.S. – the economy and the demise of traditional American values. Neoconservatives believed that a free-market economy with minimal federal regulation eliminated the incentive to discriminate in hiring (Grant, 2008; Laseter, 1997). In theory, in a competitive market employers would actively seek the most skilled laborer regardless of color or gender in order to produce the best product. Therefore, the failure of African Americans to flourish in a capitalistic society or find gainful employment was supposedly due to their lack of effort and motivation.

According to neoconservatives, civil rights' legislation had provided the opportunity for African Americans to succeed in education and in the workforce; the fact that many minorities were still poorly educated and unemployed was not because of racism and discrimination, but because of their dependency upon welfare and an unwillingness to work (Katz, 1990; Murray, 1984; Wiggan, 2011; Wilson, 1987). Reagan's moralist and individualism perspective supported this culture of pathology ideology. Consequently, the pervasiveness of racism in the social and economic systems

as a significant factor influencing the educational and life outcomes of African Americans was largely ignored.

The purpose of this study was to examine the influences of the Reagan Administrations' neoconservative public policies and color-blind strategy on the educational and life outcomes of African American males who attended high school between 1981 and 1989. I specifically chose to examine the outcomes of African American males as historically their intersectionality of race and gender in regards to policy has culminated in disproportionate adverse outcomes in educational attainment, employment and incarceration (Barak, Leighton & Flavin, 2007; CBPP, 1986; Davis & Jordan, 1995; Gordon, Gordon & Nembhard, 1994; Parham & Roderick, 1987; Pettit & Western, 2004; Western, 2002).

The *Brown v. Board of Education* decision ushered in significant gains in social capital for African Americans males, but the 1980s signaled a decline of those advances, of which the losses have yet to be recovered more than 30 years later (NCES, 1995; Rebell & Wolff, 2008; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1986; Wilson, 1987). The Reagan Administration, with the support of neoconservatives, facilitated policies that led to an era of economic and social decline in many minority communities – specifically impacting African American males (Claubaugh, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 2010; NCES, 1995; Rebell & Wolff, 2008; Western & Wildman, 2009).

Empirical data suggest a decline in African American males' academic achievement and labor force participation coincided with the authorization of Reagan's public and crime policies (CBO, 1984; Darling-Hammond, 2010; NCES, 2011, 1995; St. Pierre, 1991; Venkentesh, 1994). The high school graduation rate differential that

narrowed for African American men in the late 1970s, stalled then grew exponentially over the next 30 years (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Evans et al., 2012; NCES, 2011). Similarly, African American men's rate of college entry and completion floundered during the 1980s (Katz, 1995; McDaniel, DiPrete, & Shwed, 2009; Wilson, 1987; Wilson-Sadberry et al., 1991). Between 1980 and 1985, the unemployment rate of African American men reached a high of 30 percent (Wilson-Sadberry et al., 1991). Walton (1997) and Wilson (1987) posited that the reduction in funding and elimination of social welfare and anti-poverty programs introduced by Reagan had a negative impact on African American males' economic and educational opportunities.

As suggested in the literature, African American males' educational and life outcomes were altered by changes in federal education and social policies (Baptiste, Orvosh-Kamenski, & Kamenski, 2005; Barak et al., 2007; D'Souza, 1999; Darling-Hammond, 2005; Evans, 1983; Kundhart & Kundhart, 1999; Lipman, 2004; Reed, 1988; St. Pierre, 1991; Walton, 1997; Western & Wildman, 2009). The empirical data do not present a case for causation. However, the research does imply that a decline in the social, educational and economic progress of African American males was concurrent with the enforcement of the Reagan Administration's color-blind, neoconservative public policies. This proposed study is empirically informed and goes beyond the scope of literature available on the influence of Reagan's policies on African American males. The study utilizes a qualitative research approach to explore the educational and life outcomes of African American men who, as high school students and thereafter, directly experienced the Reagan era.

Statement of the Problem

"To be Black and male in America has always been a sociopolitical issue" (Clatterbaugh, 1997, p. 159). In other words, to be an African American male is to be placed at risk for a myriad of adverse consequences predicated by endemic societal factors – *not* precluding public policy. The racialized structure of society unremittingly exposes African American men to systemic racism and discrimination that may influence their life outcomes (Davis, 2003; Davis & Jordan, 1995; Garibaldi, 1992; Gordon, Gordon, & Nembhard, 1994). Fultz and Brown (2008) posited that beginning with colonialism and thereafter, African American men's attempts at social mobility and equality has been manipulated by regulations imposed by the dominant culture. Fultz and Brown (2008) contended:

> From slavery onward, Black men have historically had an uneasy
> relationship with the economies of the regions where they have
> resided. They have often faced rigid, racially stratified labor markets
> characterized by unparalleled forms of economic marginalization.
> As a result, their relationship to the State, and their implicit and
> explicit status as targets of policy regulations, have been marked by
> considerable tension… A multi-faceted dialectic emerged around
> organizing, controlling, and regulating a potentially profitable…
> labor force and corresponding battles for self-determination, family
> and freedom. These struggles formed an overarching context in the
> development of race relations and social order. (p. 856)

Combined with the pervasive societal inequities that impact African American males' lives, public policy influences the social, economic and educational outcomes of African American males. The switch from equity-inspired, race-conscious social policies of the 60s and 70s to neoconservative policies bolstered by a color-blind strategy, affected African American males' ability to mediate structural discrimination. The influence of the federal government's role in decreasing discriminatory practices and increasing equality of opportunities is widely confirmed (Baptiste, Orvosh-Kamenski, & Kamenski, 2005; Claubaugh, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Katz, 1990; St. Pierre, 1991; Rebell & Wolff, 2008). Therefore, public policies enacted by the Reagan Administration and neoconservatives that refuted the need for race-conscious policy may have contributed to the economic and educational decline experienced by African American males in the 1980s.

Research indicates that after considerable increases in academic achievement from the 1940s to the 1970s, African American males' educational attainment steadily declined during the 1980s (Dunn, 1988; Reed, 1988; Wilson-Sadberry, Winfield & Royster, 1991). The African American male − White male college attendance differential rate that had narrowed in the mid-1970s continues to grow (NCES, 1995). Furthermore, since 1976, the parity of high school graduation rates between African American males and White males has widened significantly (NCES, 2001). Even with advancements in education and training, African American men continue to lag behind their female counterparts in wage earnings, annual income and college degree attainment, while representing the highest unemployed population in the nation (McDaniel et al., 2009; U.S. Bureau of Labor, 2012).

During the 1980s, the Reagan Administration blamed American students' poor achievement on a lack of traditional family values, discipline and accountability (Cooper, Cibulka & Fusarelli, 2008; Republican Party, 1984). In an attempt to save "a nation at risk," federal policies were enacted that supported achievement testing and stringent accountability measures. In addition, the Reagan Administration used its political clout to heavily influence the development of standards-based state education reform. However, the more policies and reform strategies changed in the name of academic excellence, the more African American male achievement and attainment declined (Drakeford, 2010; Fultz & Brown, 2008; Lipman, 2006). At the conclusion of the decade, African American males' status as the most underserved and underperforming population of students remained a persistent challenge (Lewis, Simon, Uzzell, Horwitz, & Casserly, 2010).

By the 1990s, imprisonment had become a common life event for African American males (Petitt & Western, 2004, Wildman & Western, 2009). The majority of African American male students were living in urban environments that were highly impacted by poverty and crime (Wilson, 1987). Graduation rates among Black males plummeted, unemployment skyrocketed, and the social science field began to speak of these young men as *endangered species* (Garibaldi, 1992; Katz, 1995; Laester, 1997).

Numerous studies have examined the impact of the Reagan era on various institutions such as the economy and criminal justice system (Alexander, 2011; Beckett, 1997; Bedfield & Levin, 1999; Clark & Amiot, 1983; Clark & Astuto, 1989; Ellis, 1983; Ginsberg, 2011; Grant, 2008; Hess & McGuinn, 2002; Katz, 1995; Kozol, 2005; Krieger, 1987; Lipman, 2004; Ravitch, 2010; Spitzer, 2003; Stewart, 1991; Verstegen, 1990, 1983). The majority of these studies focus on the economic implications of Reagan's *New*

Federalism and supply-side economics approach, and how they impacted labor markets, welfare reform and federal expenditures.

African American males, by default, became the subject-matter when discussing the changes in incarceration rates and within the criminal justice system of the 1980s, as they were the population disproportionately affected by policy modifications. As such, several studies have examined the mass incarceration of African American males as it relates to 1980s federal government policies (Alexander, 2010; Barker, 2009; Pettit & Western, 2004; Wacquant, 2010; Western & Wildman, 2009). These studies produced a wealth of quantitative data indicating gross disparities in the arrest, sentencing and incarceration rates of African American men. However, no concerted effort has been made to explore and further understand the implications of the Reagan Administration's color-blind policies on African American males' educational and life outcomes using a qualitative research method. This study did not only aim to investigate imprisonment as a potential life outcome influenced by the promulgating of neoconservative policies and ideology, rather, it also investigated educational, economic and familial outcomes.

Purpose of the Study

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the influence of the Reagan Administration 's [1981 – 1989] neoconservative public policies and color-blind strategy on the educational and life outcomes of African American males from a critical race paradigm.

Research Question

The study is guided by the following research question:

What influence did the implementation of Ronald Reagan Administration's neoconservative public policies have on the educational, employment and criminal justice system experiences of African American males who attended high school during the Reagan era [1981 – 1989]?

This study utilized qualitative research to develop an interpretative case study method (Creswell, 2003, 1998; Ezzy, 2002; Merriam, 1998) framed within a Critical Race Theory (CRT) perspective (Bell, 1992; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Delgado & Stefanic, 2001).

<div align="center">Theoretical Framework</div>

This study used Critical Race Theory (CRT) as its conceptual framework. The underlining premise of this study suggest that: (a) racism and other forms of discrimination are pervasive forces intricately woven into the operations of social institutions, (b) policy is a social construct that is neither color-blind nor neutral, (c) and policy is utilized as a tool to perpetuate societal inequities by maintaining the status quo of the dominant culture (Bell, 1992; Delgado, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998). The CRT paradigm allows for the explicit acknowledgement of racism and discrimination as structural, systemic mechanisms of oppression that permeate educational, political and economic institutions (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Furthermore, CRT recognizes the intersection of race, class and gender as lens through which inequalities are analyzed.

Critical race theorists challenge dominant ideologies that promote claims of objectivity, color-blindness, gender and race neutrality and meritocracy. deMarrais and Le Compte (1999) contend that these hegemonic ideologies are used to mask class, racial and gender inequalities and preserve the status quo. This is evidenced by policy strategies

which foster beliefs that deny the existence of racism or racial inequality (deMarrais & Le Compete, 1999). CRT provides the appropriate theoretical framework to analyze the educational and life outcomes of African American men whose realities are largely constructed through the intersectionality of their race, class and gender identities. Those categorical identities interact on multiple and simultaneous levels to create several interrelated forms of oppression (Crenshaw, 1989).

CRT originated in the late 1970s as a branch of critical legal studies (CLS) that challenged the traditional legal approach used to combat racism and discrimination. CLS scholars such as Roberto Unger (1986), Robert Gordon (1984), Duncan Kennedy (1982) and Derrick Bell (1976) contended that litigation was ineffective in engendering genuine anti-discrimination reform (Delgado, 1995). CLS theorists proposed that law and policy were not objective, and legal doctrine recreated and legitimized the United States' racialized structure. CLS is primarily founded on Gramsci's concept of *hegemony,* which explains the legitimatizing operation of law in the oppression of others (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Hegemony "describes the process by which the worldview of the dominant state maintains control through the socializing activity of institutions" (DeMarrais & Le Compte, 1999, p. 29). Bell (1992) and other legal scholars noted that CLS failed to adequately recognize the role of race and racism in social institutions (Arrigo, 1999; Delgado, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998). CRT was formed to fill the theoretical void by providing a paradigm that placed race at the center of critical analysis.

One of CRT's primary tenets is that racism is "normal, not aberrant" and inextricably embedded within the United States' social institutions (Bell, 1987, 1992; Delgado, 1995, p. xiv). CRT scholars contend that it is the very prevalence of racism

within in American culture and institutions that make it and its consequences appear
natural (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Essed (1991) referred to these subtle, persistent practices
of discrimination as "everyday racism" (p. 52). Everyday racism entails:

> a process in which (a) socialized racist notions are integrated into
> meanings that make practices immediately definable and manageable, (b)
> practices with racist implications become familiar and repetitive, and (c)
> underlying racial and ethnic relations are actualized and reinforced
> through these routine or familiar practices in everyday situations. (Essed,
> 1991, p. 52)

CRT also acknowledges that legal doctrine is neither value-free nor color-blind.
Critical race theorists contend that laws and judicial action primarily serve the self-
interests of the dominant culture. As such, litigation is not a sufficient remedy to
inequality (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Russell, 2000; Tate,
1997). CRT challenges individuals to "unmask" and "expose" discrimination and
encourages social justice (Bell, 1992; Ladson-Billings, 1998). CRT provides the
theoretical framework necessary to explore the influence of federal policy on African
American males' educational and life outcomes from a perspective that places the
intersectionality of race, class and gender at the center of the analysis. CRT advocates for
the end of subordination through the reconstruction of laws and policies, and challenges
the dominant narrative by giving voice to those historically marginalized through the
naming of their realities (Bell, 1992; Delgado & Stefanic, 2001; Solorzano & Yosso,
2002). CRT's acknowledgement that laws and policies are neither value-free nor color-
blind lends itself to be used as a theoretical lens by which to examine the influence of the

Reagan Administration's neoconservative public policies on African American males'

life outcomes while giving a voice to the experiences of the African American male

participants in this study.

<div align="center">Significance of the Study</div>

This proposed study is of great practical significance. The research addresses the

Reagan Administrations' implementation of neoconservative public policies and their

subsequent influence on African American males' access to positive educational and life

outcomes. Denying the significance of race as a factor in education and life outcomes in

policy development has an impact on historically marginalized minorities. The color-

blind paradigm has migrated into 21st century education and social policies (i.e. standards

and accountability reform; zero-tolerance disciplinary policies). Thus, it is essential that

policymakers and other vested stakeholders be fully informed and aware of how such

racially-neutral policies and practices may adversely affect and further marginalize

minority populations. This study adds to the body of knowledge addressing the impact of

federal policies, especially those that intentionally dismiss the significance of race and

gender, on underserved student populations.

<div align="center">Delimitations and Limitations</div>

Delimitations are stated components of the research that intentionally narrow the

scope of a study (Creswell, 2003). This study includes several delimitations. The study is

narrowed by participant criteria. Research participants self-identified as African

American males who attended a public high school between 1981 and 1989. Participants

in the study were purposively selected based on race, gender and period of secondary

schooling. Participant recruitment was limited to southeastern and northeastern states,

and the participants do not reflect a national sample. Additionally, the study is delimited

by my examination of education and social policies and their influences on African

American males' educational attainment and life outcomes. While the acknowledgement

of other factors such as family background, environment, and peers may have been

expressed as contributing to the participants' life course, the focus of this investigation

was on federal public policy and its remnants. The study was limited to participants who

were in high school during the Reagan Administration. Participants in the study attended

high school at different times throughout the Reagan Administration era [1981-1989].

These participants may or may not have presented variance in their perceptions of the

Reagan Administration's education and social policies influence on their life outcomes.

As it is the case with most qualitative research, the study is retrospective in nature in that

there is a time elapse between when I interviewed the participants and the time of the

experiences and outcomes investigated. Therefore, the study acknowledges that the

participants' recounts of their experiences are social constructions, which may or may not

have been influenced by experiences beyond the period of investigation.

Definition of Terms

Reagan Administration

Reagan Administration refers to the presidential executive office of Ronald Reagan from 1981 to 1989. Reagan Administration is used to refer to Presidential and White House initiatives proposed, submitted, passed or supported by the Office of the President and his appointed cabinets, departments and committees.

Neoconservatism

A faction of conservatism that formed in the 1970s in reaction to the policies of the extreme-left political coalition and the counterculture of the 1960s. Neoconservatism reached full prominence in the 1980s with the presidential election of Ronald Reagan. The primary tenets of neoconservatism include belief in the free-market as an effective distributor of goods and services; individualism; adherence to traditional values as the

foundation of society and the lack thereof as a detriment to the stability (economic and political) of the nation; opponents of a large welfare state and entitlement programs; aversion to race-conscious policies and reform (i.e. multiculturalism; Afrocentricity; Affirmative Action); promotion of equality of opportunity not outcomes (meritocracy); and support of military intervention in the promotion of democracy and national interests (Bell & Dagger, n.d.; Edward, 1999; Iatridis, 1988; Lipset, 1981; Spritzer, 2003).

New Federalism

A political ideology that advocates for the decentralization and diminution of the federal government in domestic issues and a return of governing power to the states.

Compensatory Education Programs

Educational programs intended to compensate for disadvantages (economic, social, physical or mental) incurred by students as a method to improve academic achievement and educational outcomes.

Race-Conscious Policy

 "A critical consciousness awareness of the role that race and racism play in establishing political, social, and economic policies and practices, and the impact that those practices have on the well-being of people of color" (Drakeford, 2010, p.179).

Color-Blind Ideology

A political paradigm, legal standard and type of social order in which race and racism are viewed as irrelevant. Supporters of color-blind ideology posit that a) liberalism has lost sight of its primary mission, b) race and racism are no longer a primary factor in the life outcomes of minorities, c) racial inequalities are caused by individuals not racism, and d) race-conscious policies, programs and reform promote racism and political division (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Brown et al, 2003; Drakeford, 2010; Michael, 2006; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 1997; Wilson, 1978).

Welfare Policies

Federal and state policies that support the immediate physical and mental well-being of individuals who demonstrate a need. Such policies refer to programs that support food and nutrition, medical, housing and employment services.

Education Policies

Refers to policies that directly impact the quality and type of education received by students. Policies include equity initiatives aimed at increasing educational resources among economically underserved, ethnic minority and disabled students and policies that

aim to improve academic achievement via the promotion of specific curriculums, standards and accountability measures.

African American Male/Men

Males who self-identify with an ethnic origin of African descent.

Educational Outcomes

Educational outcomes refer to the participants' high school and post-high school educational experiences and level of educational attainment (i.e. earned a high school diploma).

Life Outcomes

Life outcomes refer to the participants' experiences in the workforce and interactions with the criminal justice system that may have influenced their life trajectories (i.e. incarceration, military service).

Summary

This study explored the influence of the Reagan Administration's neo-conservative education and public policies on the education and life outcomes of African American males, as evidenced by their educational attainment, employment and/or incarceration. Chapter one introduced the issue of 1980s federal education and social policies, and its probable influence on African American males. Chapter two provides a brief literature review on the limited research on Reagan's education and social policies, and their influence on the experiences and life outcomes of African American males. Then it presents a historical overview of pre-Reagan social policies, followed by a review of the Reagan Administrations' political platform and initiatives. Chapter three provides the research method used. Chapter four presents the findings of the study, and chapter five provides a discussion of the findings including limitations of the study and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter explores the limited literature addressing the influence of the Reagan Administrations' neoconservative public policies on African American males' life outcomes. Next, it provides a brief a historical overview of federal education and social policies pre-Reagan (1965 -1980) followed by a review of the public policies implemented during Reagan's administration (1981 -1989).

Chapter Outline

    I.   African American males as a study of interest
    II.   Literature and empirical research on the influence of neoconservative public policy on African American males
    III.   Historical overview of federal and educational policies pre-Reagan (1955 – 1980
    IV.   Historical overview of the Reagan Administration's neoconservative public polices
    V.   Reagan Administration's policy implications

Literature Review

During the 1980s, African American males and their precarious social status was one of the most widely researched and debated issues (Anderson, 1990; Garibaldi, 1992; Gibbs, 1988; Parham & McDavis, 1987; *Plight of African American*, 1991; Venkatesh, 1994; Wilson-Sadberry, Winfield & Royster, 1991). Gordon, Gordon and Nembhard (1994) trace the African American male research focus phenomenon to the mid-20th century. They contend that social science literature related to African American men from that era fell within two disciplinary foci. From the 1950s to the 1970s, studies on African American males focused on the societal ills of Black men and the Black family

as a consequence of slavery (Gordon, Gordon & Nembhard. 1994). In large, the research

sought to legitimate the stereotypes established by earlier studies such as the Moynihan

report (1965), which portrayed the African American community as a social pathogen

(Breggin, 1992; Parham & McDavis, 1987).

During the 1980s, the research agenda shifted to the declining social status of

African American males, as evidenced by their social and educational outcomes.

Numerous studies disseminated findings that contributed to the popular view of African

American men as *endangered species* (Gibbs, 1988). Emphasis was placed on the effect

of poverty, single-parent homes, and urban environments on African American males'

educational attainment, criminal activity and labor-market participation (Anderson, 1990;

Murray, 1984; Sampson, 1986; Wilson, 1987). African American males' negative life

outcomes were quantified with statistical findings that illustrated their high and

disproportionate rates of incarceration, homicide, school dropouts, unemployment,

poverty, social welfare participation, and teen parenthood (Gordon, Gordon & Nembhard,

1994). The research depicted African American males' precarious position within social

institutions as a deterministic factor of their life outcomes. While this type of research

provided alarming statistics on the plight of African American males, it added very little

to the literature on how African American males view their experiences within social

institutions, or what factors they believe contribute to their life outcomes.

In the late 1980s, there was a profusion of research that focused on the

occurrence and frequency of negative life outcomes (i.e. high school dropout rates,

incarceration and murder rates) among Black males. This type of inquiry provided an

abundance of statistical data that highlighted Black males' disproportionate exposure to

negative life outcomes. Subsequently, these studies helped to legitimize the *Black male crisis* theory that was being widely politicized through mainstream media and political factions. Davis (2003) contends, "Much of [the educational research] is not really about understanding the achievement gap among Black boys and their peers. Rather, the field has been concerned about documenting the poor performance and achievement deficits of Black males" (p. 522). Gordon, Gordon and Nembhard (1994) provide an in-depth analysis of the 1980s and 1990s social science literature regarding African American men and conclude:

> It is primarily a literature of the failures and dysfunctional behavior
> of Black males, and it is greatly overrepresentative of Black males in
> the inner cities. This focus neglects the majority of the Black male
> population and fails to more fully address age, class, gender and
> geographical issues. (p. 522)

Overall, 1980s social science literature on African American males' social status lacks a balance treatment of the subject. Furthermore, the studies inadequately address the political economy's influence on African American males' experiences. The Reagan Administration's neoconservative, political initiative marked a swift change from the liberal agenda that had denominated during the 60s and 70s. Numerous economic and political science studies have analyzed the radical political reform of the 80s in each field respectively (CBO, 1984; Grant, 2008; Jennings, 1985; Krieger, 1987; Irwin, 1989; Urban Institute, 1986, 1988). However, limited attention has been given to the influence of Reagan's economic-based, racially-neutral public policies on African American males' educational and life outcomes. The majority of studies that attempt to address the impact

of federal policies on specific sub-groups are relegated to literature on employment, wages and taxes (Allen & Farley, 1986; CBO, 1984, Grant 2008, Urban Institute, 1984, 1986). In addition, much of the existing research utilizes quantitative methods, resulting in decontextualized statistical findings that are limited in explanatory power (Gordon, Gordon, & Nembhard, 1994).

The proposed study helps to fill a void in the research by employing a qualitative approach to explicitly examine the influence of public policies on the educational and life outcomes of African American males. The narratives solicited in a case study provide the opportunity to highlight the perspectives of those most directly impacted by the Reagan policies (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). These stories give a voice to individuals who have been historically marginalized and challenge the dominant ideology that seeks to mask inequalities. Furthermore, a qualitative approach allows for a contextualized interpretation that goes beyond the scope of demographic and other quantitative analyses.

Before providing a historical context for federal public policies, I briefly synthesize the limited literature addressing the Reagan Administration's policies and African American males' life outcomes. I begin with a review of literature that examines the use and influence of neoconservative and economic policies on African Americans. I then examine the research that illustrates the influence of such policies in education, the labor market and criminal justice system.

Neoconservatism and Economic-Inspired Public Policy

The 1980 presidential election gave credence to the neoconservative coalition attempt to reverse the 1970s legislation aimed at increasing inclusion and diversity. Reagan's campaign platform emphasized economic recovery through the diminution of

federal expenditures (Boskin, 1987). Social welfare programs were singled out for elimination and sweeping budget cuts. The administration politicized the notion that Great Society anti-poverty programs had been largely unsuccessful in eradicating poverty. Murray (1984) and Glider (1982) suggested that means-tested programs had only exacerbated the condition of the poor and promoted economic mediocrity. They advocated for the retrenchment of social welfare programs. The Reagan Administration used these findings to support its economic recovery initiative. Reagan proposed market-oriented policies in place of race/need-conscious initiatives (Grant, 2008). Based on the concept of supply-side economics, the administration contended that policies that promote economic recovery will in turn improve the economic stability of all populations (St. Pierre, 1991). Accordingly, race and need-based considerations in policy development were not necessary to improve the socioeconomic status of poor minorities.

Spitzer (2003) explored the presence of racially-motivated strategy in the Reagan Administration's approach to public policy. He analyzed President Reagan's speeches, policy documents and Office of Management and Budget (OMB) fiscal budgets to illustrate a connection between the racially structured politics of welfare and the administration's 1981 welfare reform agenda. Spritzer characterized Reagan's welfare policy as "racially neutral" (2003, p. 2). However, it is the absence of any direct mention to race and use of racially subjective references that highlights the administrations' primary intent (Spritzer, 2003). According to Spritzer, the White majority's perspective of welfare had changed from a program designed to help the poor to a program that provided financial assistance to underserving, able-bodied African Americans. Since race had become inextricably tied to welfare programs, Reagan's anti-welfare agenda

capitalized on middle and working class Whites' public resentment toward African Americans without explicitly referring to race.

His platform galvanized the southern White and northern White working and middle-class electoral coalition. The Reagan Administration's use of phrases such as "the truly needy" and "welfare dependent" successfully conjured up images of two types of welfare recipients – deserving poor Whites and undeserving Blacks (Spitzer, 2003). Reagan's descriptions of "welfare queens," "slum dwellers," and "intergenerational welfare recipients" were seen as stereotypical references to poor, urban African Americans (Spitzer, 2003, p. 19). Spitzer concluded that while Reagan's welfare policy approach was color-blind in that it applied to everyone regardless of racial identity, the inherent racially structured politics of welfare allowed the administration to promote a racialized welfare reform agenda without explicitly addressing the influence of race. Spritzer's research represents a significant contribution to the literature in his attempt to analyze federal public policies from the position of racialized intent. Spritzer's analysis of the Reagan Administration's public policy documents included planning memos, polling data as well as the final policy product. By utilizing multiple forms of data, Spritzer, effectively wove together a synthesis of the findings that suggest that even policy without explicit racialized language can have racialized outcomes.

Iatridis' (1988) *New Social Deficit: Neoconservatism's Policy of Social Underdevlopment* examined the Reagan Administration's social disinvestment policy. Iatridis opined that the neoconservative ideology based on capitalism promoted a social agenda that exacerbated the condition of the poor and working class. His findings suggested that an emphasis on economic recovery and individualism created a social

deficit - "the gap between met and unmet human needs that results in social neglect" (Iatridis, 1988, p. 11). Using the case of unemployment policy, Iatridis analyzed the impact of the Reagan Administration's free market-inspired domestic policy on society. He posited that cuts to federal job training programs and unemployment benefits widened the social deficit gap.

Iatridis (1988) suggested that neoconservatives' reliance on the market to correct high unemployment neglected the existence of societal factors (e.g. racism, sexism, discrimination) that prevent the existence of a true egalitarian society. Therefore, while individuals may have equality under the law, the poor and minorities are not afforded the same protection in a competitive marketplace. Iatridis (1988) concluded that social disinvestment negatively affect underserved populations' ability to achieve social mobility and effectively maintains the status quo. Iatridis' research illustrates how framing social policies within an economic paradigm without the consideration of socioeconomic class' needs can worsen the social condition of the most vulnerable populations.

Utilizing a color-blind strategy in policy development assumes an equality perspective. Neoconservative policies that utilize this paradigm suggest that the impact of a policy is not tempered by one's racial identity. An economic-rational approach employs the same equality principle. Grant (2008) investigated how Reagan's use of an economic-rational in policy development adversely impacted the African American community. Grant opined that Reagan's market-oriented policy reform efficiently maintained the status quo for Whites by neglecting the racial barriers that inhibited African Americans' access to economic equality.

Reaganomics (the term coined to refer to Reagan's economic approach) assumed a cost-benefit rational that did not consider the influence of race in the labor market. According to Grant (2008), Reagan believed that higher inputs of capital and higher productivity manifested as lower taxes and cuts to federal expenditures would provide more employment opportunities and rectify low labor-force participation among African Americans. However, this policy approach ignored the systemic nature of racism within social institutions that precluded African Americans from the marketplace. Grant contended, "Reagan's cost-benefit equations for social-welfare policies were initiated within an economic paradigm that placed no value on the Black experience… [He] believed that Blacks did not face significant barriers to upward mobility, and if Blacks would simply work harder, then they would succeed" (2008, p. 92). Reagan and neoconservatives' view of America as the "ultimate meritocracy" skewed their concept of "equality of opportunity" versus "equality of situation," (Grant, 2008, p. 86).

Grant (2008) posited that free market favors the status quo. In other words, those who have access to the means of production are more likely to experience economic gains. Accordingly, the free market cannot induce anti-discriminatory behavior. Grant concluded that without policies or laws that function as an incentive to reduce racial discrimination, under Reagan, access to economic equality was severely obstructed. Grant (2008) deduced that Reagan's market-oriented policy reform consequently had a long-lasting effect on the African American community. "[Reagan's policies] sought not only the substitution but also the complete elimination of programs that poor Blacks relied on for their very existence" (Grant, 2008, p. 91). Grant continued,

By neglecting race relations and concentrating on self-sufficiency [policy

approaches'], Reagan was able to conceal how the choices of some are

constrained by the opportunities of others. As a consequence, neoconservatives

had successfully shifted the discourse on poverty and, with it, the dialogue on

black pathology. (2008, p. 95)

Grant concluded that the dismissal of race-conscious and need-based policy agendas

successfully advanced the interests of the dominant culture at the expense of African

Americans' social progression. By relying on an economic rational, Reagan disregarded

African Americans' lack of social value within marketized institutions. Consequently,

policies such as Reaganomics effectively increased the value of whiteness while

simultaneously decreasing the value of blackness in the labor market and marketplace.

Public Policy and Education

Clark and Amiot (1983) investigated the transformation of the federal education

role after the 1980 presidential election. They hypothesized that Reagan's ascent to the

Executive Office represented a critical realignment of political ideologies. Clark and

Amoit (1983) posited that an educational policy framework based on New Federalism

would result in the disassembly of the federal educational role. During Reagan's first year

in office, Clark and Amoit (1983) analyzed policy documents and conducted interviews

with administration staff, Congressional representatives and educational policy analyst.

Their findings revealed that substantial progress toward the disassembly of the federal

government's role in education had occurred. The new education initiative resulted in

increased educational autonomy at the state level and a de-emphasis of "need and access"

program consideration (Clark & Amoit, 1983, p. 378). Their analysis unveiled the

intentional avoidance of need or race-conscious language in policy making in favor of

economic justifications for policy changes. Clark and Amiot proposed that:

> Socioeducational concerns are avoided wherever possible as justifications for
>
> [budget] appropriations or authorizations…the concern is translated into the
>
> impact of the program or economic productivity. Concern for the common school
>
> is subordinated to concern over parental choice… Hardly anyone talks about the
>
> problems of need and access, but ability [academic achievement] and selectivity
>
> [choice]. (1983, p. 378)

Based on their findings, Clark and Amiot (1983) concluded that the Reagan

Administration had successfully changed the direction of educational policy to reflect the

goals of new federalism through the diminution, deregulation, decentralization and de-

emphasis of the federal educational role. Clark and Amiot's analysis did not examine the

influence of the new policy directive at the classroom level. However, it is not difficult to

argue that the removal of equity language from the policy making process would

inevitably have an impact on the most underserved students.

Drakeford (2010) explored the influence of color-blindness in educational reform

in the post-*Brown* era on racial inequality of educational outcomes. She found that

neoconservatives, and eventually neoliberals, reliance on color-blind ideology in public

policy "contribute[d] to a complex and all too familiar history of educational reform

aimed at the preservation of White privilege" (Drakeford, 2010, p. 6). Drakeford (2010)

posited that neoconservatives' aversion to race-conscious policies on the premise that

race is no longer a determinant of one's life outcomes is really indicative of the fact that

race *does* indeed still matter. She concluded that school desegregation and affirmative

action policies threatened the political power and privilege of Whites. Therefore, neoconservatives' reversal of such policies under the guise of color-blindness effectively removed race-based considerations and promoted the status quo. Promotion of an "everyone's equal" paradigm puts the blame of racial inequality on the individual rather than on societal factors such as institutional racism that impact individuals' equality of outcomes. Drakeford (2010) concluded:

> Color-blind ideology would have us believe that while, theoretically, all men are created equal, there exits inherent inequalities between and within racial groups that make inequity and inequality of outcomes unavoidable. [At the same time] color-blindness implies that race does not matter and color is meaningless when in reality it fuels White privilege and assumptions of White superiority. (p. 202)

Drakeford's study illuminates the pervasiveness of neoconservative ideologies within social institutions. Her findings reveal that political ideologies influence the direction of education reform. Drakeford's research addresses an often overlooked component of education reform and its impact on students of color – the ubiquitousness of political agenda's in education.

Polite's (1994) longitudinal study examined the influence of the conservative policy reform at the school level. He utilized chaos theory to analyze the social context of schooling of African American male students. Polite used a qualitative approach to explore how the policy changes that occurred at an urban metropolitan high school between 1970 and 1990 impacted the quality of education received by African American male students. Two primary tenants associated with chaos theory are that minor changes

within or surrounding a system can result in significant consequences, and a phenomenon is best explained by analyzing the interrelation of its multiple components. Polite (1994) used these assumptions to highlight how seemingly insignificant actions and policies resulted in poor academic readiness and a chaotic school environment that negatively impacted African American male students at Metropolitan High School (MHS).

His study chronicled the avoidance schooling behavior of 115 African American males who attended high school between 1987 and 1989. Over a span of 3 years, Polite (1994) observed students, teachers and administrators and conducted semi-structured interviews. A follow-up study was conducted in 1992 to document participants' school to work transition. Polite noted that in 1970, the research site school was regarded as the best academic high school in the state. However, by 1990, the high school was ranked as one of the lowest achieving schools in the state, and a drastic change had occurred in the schools' student composition and approach toward schooling. From his analysis, Polite concluded that African American male students' school avoidance was influenced by negative peer pressure to resist academic engagement, their perspective that teachers did not care, lack of parental involvement in educational decisions and school policies that overly emphasized discipline and control rather than individualized learning opportunities. Polite's (1994) study emphasizes school factors in school avoidance of African American males. His research provides a qualitative voice to an otherwise quantitative dominated field. Polite's study lacks an analysis of the influence of home and societal factors on African American males' school engagement. However, Polite's chaos theory framework lends his study to be explored from the perspective of societal factors

as elements contributing to the disruption of systems and how those disruptions mediate educational outcomes.

Public Policy and Employment

There is a depth of literature on the Reagan Administration's economic policies and their subsequent influence on the economy (Allen & Farley, 1986; CBO, 1984; Harris, 2010; Jaynes & Williams, 1990; Krieger, 1987; Okoye, 1997; St. Pierre, 1991; Wilson, 1987). In general, studies relating to the labor market employ a quantitative research approach. However, the unique impact of neoconservative, market-oriented policy reform on the labor opportunities of the urban poor illustrated the need for a qualitative treatment of the issue.

Venkatesh's (1994) research explored the perspectives of African American men on social mobility in relation to Reagan's economic policies and the de-industrialization of urban cities. By utilizing a qualitative approach, Venkatesh (1994) attempted to "situate the urban poor within a historical dynamic [that] elucidates the economic, racial and political forces which reinforce their disadvantage social status" (p. 157). He interviewed inner city African American males who had received public assistance, were unemployed, or had low-wage jobs. Venkatesh (1994) used the participants' narratives to counter the conservative argument against social welfare. His findings refuted the research of Murray (1984) and Mead (1986), which argued that welfare entrenchment fostered an attitude of dependency and contributed to the high unemployment among the urban poor. Venkatesh's findings indicated that African American men desired gainful employment, but societal factors such as discriminatory practices, racism and deindustrialization inhibited their ability to find substantial employment opportunities. He

concluded that job displacement to suburban areas, discriminatory employment practices

and institutional racism trapped many African American men in low-wage, menial jobs

(Venkatesh, 1994). Venkatesh's study was limited to participants in inner city Chicago.

By expanding the scope of his research sample to outside of urban areas, Venkatesh's

analysis may have highlighted that the experiences and attitudes of African American

males regarding employment and the desire to work are similar or different by

geographical area. This study adds to the literature a perspective that does not point to

home life as a contributing factor to African American males' negative position within

the labor market. It instead highlights the significance of institutional factors such as

discrimination and racism in African American males' ability to competitively participate

in the workforce.

The Reagan Administration's free labor market policies emphasized the

diminution of federal intervention in job creation. Shulman's (1984) study concluded that

the policies of the Reagan Administration contributed to a decline in African American

employment by perpetuating unemployment and discrimination practices. According to

Shulman, Reagan's labor market policies aimed at eliminating job training and education,

unemployment benefits and antidiscrimination support significantly added to the

deterioration of the relative employment experience of African Americans. He contended

that the Reagan Administration perceived the issue of unemployment as unnamable by

direct policy. Unemployment was not a result of discrimination but the effects of work

disincentives and an under-skilled workforce.

According to the free market ideology, discrimination and competition cannot

coexist. The presence of competition will encourage businesses to hire efficient and

skilled workers regardless of their background. However, Shulman (1984) argued that the theory was flawed. In a society permeated by racism, competition for employment will inevitably increase the incentive to discriminate in a weak labor market. He found that the persistence of racism requires the development of policies that specifically included a racial component. To suggest that labor market policy is neutral and therefore non-racial "implicitly allow[s] a racially structured economy to operate unchecked" (Shulman, 1984, p. 125). Shulman postulated:

> Equal opportunity necessarily means equally sharing the burdens of
> economic decline as well as benefits of growth. By maintaining [labor
> policies that create] employment advantages for Whites and forc[e] blacks
> to bear the brunt of hard times, the Reagan administration has helped
> usher in the era of the new American racism. (p. 127)

Shulman's findings suggest that by failing to address racial disparities inherent within the labor market, the Reagan Administration's free market approach to labor policy adversely impacted African Americans' employment stability. Shulman utilized a mixed methods research approach which his quantitative findings were substantiated or rebuffed by participants' narratives. Shulman's study bridges the ideological gap between qualitative and quantitative studies regarding African American males. His findings are significant in that they illustrate that unemployment statistics do not accurately portray the labor market disparities that exist for African American males that preclude them from the workforce.

Laester's (1997) study noted a substantial decline in African American male labor force participation. From 1986 to 1988, Laseter interviewed 18 young, inner-city African American men as part of the University of Chicago Urban Family Life Project. He

surveyed the social histories, attitudes, and experiences of the participants regarding joblessness and employment. Laseter categorized his findings on joblessness of African American males into two primary factors – demand-side and supply-side. Demand-side factors included a shift to service economy, spatial mismatch and discrimination and racism. The majority of interviewees acknowledged that the shift from industrial to service economy had adversely affected him or those around him. The migration of well-paying jobs to the suburbs was highlighted as a major factor contributing to joblessness and work instability. Lastly, all respondents expressed that, to some degree, racism and employers' stereotypical perspective of Black men had limited their potential to obtain gainful employment.

Supply-side factors included aspirations and work attitudes, low-wage jobs and underground economy. Laester (1997) found significant differences between the younger and older respondents in regards to work aspirations and labor market expectations. Interviewees between 16-19 years old who were still in school voiced lofty career goals and were optimistic about their future. They also expressed a belief that academic achievement and further education would translate to financial success. Older respondents voiced less grandiose aspirations. The majority of interviewees 20-30 years old expressed aspirations to procure above minimum-wage employment or a desire to go back to school in order to get a better job. A small cohort of young respondents, labeled as the non-aspirers, rejected the notion that education led to better employment opportunities.

Unlike the aspirers, non-aspirers espoused short-term goals such as getting any type of job. These goals were in response to their immediate needs such as providing

financially for children or procuring transportation. Low-wage employment did discourage many of the respondents from continued participation in the workforce. However, two-third of the men in the study were working or had recently worked in a low-wage position. Lastly, contrary to public sentiment, Laseter (1997) found that underground economic opportunities such as selling drugs was not a primary factor contributing to the decline of African American males' participation in the labor market. This study adds to the literature research that addresses the significance of the changes in labor market conditions for African American males. It suggests that African American males, regardless of educational backgrounds, are more susceptible to changes in the landscape of the workforce that include a de-emphasis on low-skill work and deindustrialization.

In *Growing Up in the Projects: The Economic Lives of a Cohort of Men Who Came of Age in Chicago Public Housing,* Levitt and Venkatesh (2001) explored the intersection of class, race and gender on labor market experiences of young African American males in the late 1980s. The study specifically focuses on African American males' who grew up during hyperincarceration and war on drugs era. They utilized economic and ethnographic research approaches to analyze life experiences of 90 African American males. The initial data sample was taken in 1989 and consisted of African American males, ages 17-26. The follow-up interviews and survey were conducted in 1991.

Using survey data and interviews, Levitt and Venkatesh (2001) examined gang affiliation, criminal activity, family structure, educational attainment and work history to determine which factor, if any, had an impact on future labor market participation. They

found that research participants struggled to fully integrate into the labor market.

Educational attainment positively influenced income potential, while gang affiliation

adversely impacted employment stability. Family structure and number of siblings, which

had been suggested as an indicator of poverty (Murray, 1984), did not have a significant

influence on gang affiliation or employment history. Levitt and Venkatesh (2001)

concluded that criminal involvement had a lasting impact on African American males'

economic stability and labor market participation. This study is significant in that it

dispels a common neoconservative refrain that attempts to link single-family homes to

delinquent behavior. The research is strengthened by the use of qualitative and

quantitative data and an extended period of investigation. Levitt and Venkatesh (2001)

study contributes to the existing literature regarding African American males and crime

in that it analyzes the influence of race, gender, and class on African American males'

ability to access opportunities within the labor market.

Public Policy and Crime

There is an extensive proliferation of literature regarding the crime control

policies of the 1980s and the subsequent effect on African American men. The

disproportionate rate at which African American men are imprisoned has prompted a

myriad of studies on the mass incarceration phenomenon (Alexander, 2010; Blumstein &

Beck, 1995; Mauer, 2001, 1999; Mauer & King, 2007, 2004; Pettit & Western, 2004;

Western, 2006; Western & Wildman, 2009). A primary tenet of neoconservativism is

moral accountability and individualism (Iatridis, 1988). This translates into a crime

policy that favors punitive sanctions over rehabilitative approaches. According to this

ideology, criminals lack the moral aptitude to function in society and their removal

(incarceration) is vital to the social and economic success of the State. From this perspective, crime is promoted as moral issue, not a racial or gender issue. Under the color-blindness paradigm, neoconservatives developed policies aimed at preventing the social decline of the nation. However, as the literature indicates, racially-neutral crime control initiatives had a profound racialized effect on African American males' life outcomes.

Miller (1994) investigated the impact of the 1980s and 90s neoconservative-inspired criminal justice policies on inner cities. Miller argued that neoconservatives attributed the urban decline (categorized by high unemployment, poverty and crime) to welfare dependency and single-parent homes. He argued that instead of increasing social programs that addressed the economic inequities in urban areas, conservatives introduced destructive criminal justice practices as a solution to a non-criminal problem (Miller, 1994). Miller found that policies developed to decrease violent crimes led to the excessive arrests of non-violent, African American male offenders (Miller, 1994). The criminal policies put forth to save the urban poor from welfare dependency only exacerbated the social disorganization and breakdown of inner cities. Miller concluded that conservatives' attempt to address a "social problem [economic inequities] through various wars on crime [individualism concept]," devastated the African American community. Miller's research indicates that policy devised by the dominant culture that is void of race-conscious' considerations can negatively influence the experiences of the minority population. Miller's study utilizes document analysis and statistical crime data to illustrate the impact of neoconservative crime legislation on African American males' rate of incarceration. His study is a significant contribution to the literature regarding

African American males and 1980s' crime and drug policy in that it highlights the use of policy as an institutional form of racism and discrimination that exacerbates the conditions of poor minorities.

Pettit and Western (2004) suggested that the most adverse effect from these neoconservative crime control policies is the emergence of imprisonment as a common stage of life among African American males. Pettit and Western (2004) investigated the factors contributing to the disproportionate imprisonment of African American men. They concluded that the extensive changes of crime control policy predicated by mandatory minimum sentences and the criminalization of drug offenses in the 1980s facilitated the mass incarceration phenomenon. Pettit and Western (2004) argued that discriminatory procedures such as racial profiling and random stop and search practices increase African American males' chances of arrest and incarceration. They concluded that legal acceptance of these racially-neutral policies accomplishes a racially-motivated agenda which is the denial of African Americans' Constitutional right to equal protection under the law. The study's findings that illuminate the emergence of imprisonment as a modal event in the lives of African American males illustrate the severity to which crime legislation disproportionately impacts African American males. It suggests that at the center of the arrests and imprisonment disparities paradox are issues of race, gender and class. The study is strengthened by its examination of incarceration trends across African American male birth cohorts from 1960 to 2001. By implementing a cohort analysis, Petitt and Western (2004) highlight the phenomenon that is mass incarceration of African American males.

Tonry (1994) examined the rationale for drug and crime control policies that explicitly produce racial disparities in the rate of incarceration of African American men. He presented that the racial disparities in arrests and imprisonment were the result of political agendas. Tonry posited that conservatives from both political parties used anti-crime platforms to appeal to "anti-black sentiments of White voters" (Tonry, 1994, p. 475). He specifically points to the Reagan and Bush Administrations' promotion of the War on Drugs as the primary cause of the increase of incarceration among African Americans. He found that drug arrests of African Americans were disproportionate to their estimated drug use percentage. Tonry concluded that no credible benefits to society exists that can justify the adverse effects of 80s and 90s crime control policy on the African American population. Tonry's research such that 1980s and 1990s crime legislation was utilized as a tool of institutional oppression against African Americans. His findings add to the literature a race critical analysis of the War on Drugs that emphasizes the presence of racism and discrimination within criminal justice systems' policies and procedures.

In *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness,* Alexander (2010) contended that policies promoted in the war on drugs facilitated the inordinate increase in the imprisonment of African American men. She posited (2010) that disenfranchisement sanctions and other policies that make social re-integration difficult for formerly incarcerated Black males reflects a racially-motivated political agenda. Alexander suggested that "mass incarceration operates as a tightly networked system of laws, policies, customs, and institutions that operate collectively to ensure the subordinate status of a group defined largely by race" (p. 13). Alexander's summation of

the current criminal justice system's policies as an extension of Jim Crow provides a race critical analysis that illuminates the judicial and penal systems as instruments of power and domination. Alexander's finding contribute to the existing literature regarding African American males and the criminal justice system by providing a critique that emphasizes the role of social institutions in perpetuating the status quo and societal inequities experienced by African American males via crime and drug statues.

In *Class, Race and Hyperincarceration in Revachist America,* Wacquant (2010) asserted that African American males' excessive rate of imprisonment is not what many describe as mass incarceration, but *hyperincarceration.* Hyperincarceration, as defined by Wacquant (2010), refers to the:

> Cumulative targeting of one particular category, lower-class African American
> men trapped in the crumbling ghetto, while leaving the rest of society- and upper-
> class African Americans – practically untouched. (p. 78)

Wacquant posited that the term *mass incarceration* implies that the increased possibility of imprisonment is imposed upon the entire population without regard to race, class or locality. However, the implosion of the penal system is attributed mainly to law enforcement hyperactivism directed toward proletarian African American men. The discriminate nature of arrests and sentencing negates the notion that the current criminal justice system has broadly impacted the masses. Wacquant contended that if the crime policies of the 1980s and 90s were truly color-blind, the impact of the penal sanctions would be evenly distributed, indiscriminate of race, among the population. Instead, "finely" targeted practices of enforcement agents, courts and prisons have disproportionately affected the least educated and poorest among U.S. citizens

(Wacquant, 2010, p.78). The use of the word "mass" disguises the racialized and class-driven intent of the criminal justice system's policies. Wacquant's critique of the mass incarceration phenomenon as a ruse to disguise the social oppression intent of crime policies that encourage police hyperactivism of African American adds a race/class critical analysis to the literature. It addresses issues of class and racial disparities in the rate of arrests and imprisonment as a byproduct and intended outcome of neoconservatives' color-blind crime polices. The critique does, however, lack an analysis of how other societal factors outside of policy help to perpetuate instances of hyperincarceration.

The existing literature on the influence of neoconservative, color-blind public policies on African American males lacks a balance treatment of the subject in regards to African American males' educational and life outcomes. The majority of the literature is concentrated within the quantitative paradigm and addresses the subject matter from an economic or crime focus. The literature discussed attempts to move beyond the demographic style of research typically utilized when studying African American males. The research referenced suggest that neoconservative public policies can adversely impact African American males' outcomes within the labor market and criminal justice system. The research illustrates that African American males' opportunities to effectively compete in the labor market are inhibited by policies and procedures that perpetuate racism and discrimination. As such, neoconservative crime policies exacerbate the conditions created by high unemployment and disrupted work history by targeting African American males for arrests and incarceration via aggressive and hyperpolicing tactics and procedures. The literature develops a consensus that illustrates the use of

public policy as a tool of oppression within social institutions against African American

males that maintain the status quo by perpetuating societal inequities on the basis of race,

gender and class. The existing literature lacks a distinct analysis of neoconservative

policies influence on African American males' educational outcomes. This is, perhaps,

due to the difficulty of correlating and quantifying outcomes to specific public policies.

As such, the impact of federal public policy on educational experiences and outcomes is

virtually ignored in the available literature. This study attempts to bridge the gap in

research regarding neoconservative public policies and African American males'

educational and life outcomes. By utilizing a qualitative research method, this study aims

to explore the influence of the Reagan Administration's neoconservative public policies

via the voices of those whose educational and life experiences occurred alongside the

implementation of such policies. The literature review provided a synopsis of the existing

research on specific neoconservative policies and their influence on African American

males. The following section provides an overview of public policies pre-Reagan and of

public policies implemented during the Reagan Administration.

Historical Overview of Public Policies

Education and Public Policies Pre-Reagan (1965-1979)

"The inauguration of Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty and the growing strength of voices within the Civil Rights Movement urging educational equity as a federal responsibility, broke through historical barriers to a stronger federal role in education." (Farrar, 1988, p. 340)

Spurred on by the success of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, the federal

agenda expanded its focus to economic equality. In 1965, President Lyndon Johnson

declared war on poverty and highlighted the need to eliminate inequalities among the

most underserved population. The War on Poverty agenda was reminiscent of the

Franklin D. Roosevelt era, in which a primary priority of the federal government was the

social welfare of its citizens (Katz, 1995, 1990; Patterson, 1981). Johnson's antipoverty

incursion aimed to eliminate the occurrence of poverty and its subsequent consequences

(Katz, 1990). Johnson's *Great Society* was designed to mitigate the severity and

prevalence of poverty, homelessness, scarcity of healthcare, unemployment and low

school achievement (Ginsberg, 2011; Kalifeh et al., 2011; Katz, 1995; Nightingale, 1998;

Wilson, 1987).

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 was an integral

piece of the Great Society movement, and the watershed initiative that asserted a greater

federal role in education (DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009). ESEA was the first federally

funded legislation specifically designed to improve and create equitable educational

opportunities for poor students (Darling-Hammond, 2010; DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn,

2009; Ellis, 1983; Elmore & McLaughlin, 1983; Farrar, 1988; Glass, 2008; Katz, 1990;

McGuinn & Hess, 2005; Rebell & Wolff, 2008). Prior educational policies such as the

National Defense Education Act of 1958 (NDEA), stimulated by the *Sputnik crisis* and

the space race, established a more direct federal presence in public education. However,

the focus of NDEA was not to improve the educational outcomes of minority and poor

students. NDEA was developed in response to Russia's (then Soviet Union)

advancements in science and technology. The notion that America's students were

underprepared in science and math culminated in a billion dollar education package

designed to increase high school science and foreign language programs and scientists

and mathematicians at the collegiate level. NDEA was the first step in increasing the

federal role in education, but ESEA marks the first federal initiative specifically targeted at ameliorating the outcomes of underserved students.

Congress asserted that the ESEA was an act to strengthen and improve educational quality and educational opportunities within schools. Passed into legislation in April of 1965, the ESEA targeted six areas aimed at transforming the educational landscape. The six areas were administered in six titles, which proposed to provide the following things:

- TITLE I— Financial assistance to local educational agencies for the education of children of low-income families and extension
- TITLE II – School library resources, textbooks, and other instructional materials
- TITLE III – Supplementary educational centers and services
- TITLE IV – Educational research and training
- TITLE V – Grants to strengthen state departments of education

Title I was the cornerstone of the Act. The provision declared that the United States had a responsibility to provide adequate funding for students from underserved backgrounds. Title I funding included antipoverty measures such as early childhood education programs, food nutrition programs, health care, hiring of teachers and supplementary instruction. 1.3 billion dollars was appropriated for ESEA, of which $1 billion was designated for Title I programs (McGuinn & Hess, 2005). Congress continued to fund ESEA at an exponential rate – doubling federal contributions by 1975. By 1981, the federal education spending reached $14.8 billion with more than $3.3 billion earmarked for Title I programs (Ellis, 1983; Evans, 1985). In addition to ESEA, other significant education initiatives were established to improve the educational outcomes of underserved students.

The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 (EOA) provided the initial funding for the development of the national early childhood education program, Head Start (Kalifeh,

Vogel & Grass, 2011). Regarded as one of the most effective proposals from the Great Society era, Head Start established preschool programs for low-income 3 and 4-year-old children. Next, the Higher Education Act of 1965 (HEA) revolutionized the higher education system and assisted in narrowing the college attendance differential rate between African American and White students (Wilson-Sadberry et al., 1991). HEA established grants (formerly the Basic Educational Opportunity Grant – now Pell Grant) and federal loans (Federal Direct Loans) for low-income students. ESEA had a resounding impact on public education. It declared that the education of poor and underserved students was a national responsibility. The importance placed on addressing the needs of special populations became the guiding principle of future education legislation.

From the early 1970s to the mid-1980s, a substantial narrowing of the achievement differential rate occurred between White and African American students (Barton & Coley, 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Grissmer, Kirby, Berends & Williamson, 1994; Harris, 2010; Jencks & Phillips, 1998; NCES, 2001; 1995; Reed, 1998). The differential rate of achievement was reduced by as much as 50 percent between 1970 and 1985 (Darling-Hammond, 2010; NCES, 2009). Additionally, the educational attainment of African Americans in both high school and college graduation increased significantly (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Farley & Allen, 1987; Hauser, 1993; McDaniel, DiPrete, Buchmann & Shew, 2009; NCES, 2001, 1995; Rebel & Wolff, 2008; Wilson, 1987; Wilson-Sadberry et al., 1991). The graduation rates among African American males increased by 7 percent. Furthermore, the largest gains in college completion of African Americans post-1954 were achieved between 1970 and 1980

(Hauser, 1990; McDaniel et al., 2009; NCES, 2001; Wilson-Sadberry, 1991). The convergence of the African American/White college attendance rate in the 1970s denotes the only occurrence of such in U.S. history (NCES, 2001, 1995).

In the second half of the 20th century, African Americans began to experience unprecedented economic prosperity (Allen & Farley, 1986). The momentum of the Civil Rights Movement led to a bevy of legislation that elevated the social capital of African Americans. The end of de jure segregation and President Kennedy and President Johnson's call for Affirmative Action policies in the civic sector expanded African Americans' occupational prospects and led to a significant shift in socioeconomic status (Reid, 1982).

In the 1960s, income levels increased for all African Americans across all age and education demographics (Jaynes & Williams, 1990; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1986; Wilson, 1987). African American men earnings increased by 9 percent (Allen & Farley, 1986). Due to need-based programs such as Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), poverty decreased the fastest among families with the lowest incomes (Jaynes & Williams, 1990; Katz, 1990). Between 1960 and 1970, African Americans experienced the greatest increase in higher occupational rankings. The industrialization movement drew many African Americans from the southern rural areas to urban cities. The prospect of better wages and economic conditions spurred the second Black migration and led to the intensive concentration of African Americans in urban sectors (Wilson, 1996). The highest increase of African Americans in middle-class occupations came from positions within the civic sector. As a result of affirmative action initiatives, African Americans attainment of professional jobs in the federal, state and local

government expanded exponentially; however, gains in equality of employment opportunities within the private sector were marginal (Collins, 1983).

By the mid-1970s, economic recessions stalled the income gains of most of America. A slow economy coupled with the energy crisis in 1973 led to severe inflation. After a brief fiscal recovery in 1976, the U.S. slipped into another recession. A second energy crisis and rising interest rates sparked double-digit inflation, gas shortages and a surge in unemployment. By 1979, price inflation had increased to 13.5 percent (Miller, 1983). The 1980 recession continued into President Reagan's inaugural term. Unemployment of African American men increased as the industrial boom that expanded economic opportunities and urbanization started to decline. The economic gains attributed to anti-discrimination efforts (e.g. affirmative action, employment training and job creation, and civil rights' legislation), industry expansion and increased educational attainment began to erode. This essentially set the stage for the 1980s social epidemic.

In the first half of the 20th century, crime and rates of imprisonment remained stable. However, between 1950 and 1970, arrests and reports of crime increased (Barker, 2009; Blumestein & Beck, 1999; Jaynes & Williams, 1990). Criminologists associated the surge in criminal activity to the rapid increase of the youth population (Baker, 2010, Blumstein & Beck, 1999; Jaynes & Williams, 1990). Increased arrest rates may also have been in response to the civil unrest in urban centers and to the growing violence during the Civil Rights era (Alexander, 2010; Baker, 2009; Hutchinson, 1996; Katz, 1995). During this period, crime in metropolitan areas doubled but progressively declined by the mid-70s (Coley & Barton, 2006). In 1973, the National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals recommended the suspension of future correctional

facility construction and elimination of the juvenile incarceration centers (Mauer, 2001). On the federal stage, the Juvenile Delinquency Prevention and Control Act of 1974 advocated keeping youth out of the criminal justice system and provided funding to states to increase preventive and intervention programs that deterred crime (DOJ, 1999).

Ironically, as crime continued to decrease, efforts to enact tougher crime laws at the state level increased. Beginning in the 1970s, states such as New York and California began to transform their penal system (Barker, 2009). New York enacted mandatory minimum sentences referred to as "Rockefeller Drug Laws" (Alexander, 2010; Barker, 2009, Gray, 2012). The sanctions stipulated a 15 year sentence for the sale or possession of narcotic (Barker, 2009; Mauer, 2001). Determinate sentencing garnered bi-partisan favor. Liberals viewed it as a way to circumvent sentencing discrimination based on race, gender and class by judges and parole boards. Conservatives felt that mandatory sentencing would ensure the correct degree of retribution (Alexander, 2010; Barker, 2009; Mauer, 2001). By 1980, most states had transformed their criminal justice system from offender based to offense based (Tillman, 1987). Mauer (2001) postulated that the changes in crime control can be credited to:

- Politicization of crime – crime transformed from a local to national concern
- American culture of individualism – an emphasis on the individual rather than the collective good propelled the use of punitive policies over rehabilitative approaches
- Intensifying conservative climate – the 'tough on criminals" approach mirrored conservatives harsh attitudes toward welfare recipients and other politically weak populations that, to them, seem to reject their principles of hard work and strong morals.

The mid-1950s through the 1970s represented a political era focused on establishing equality. Education and employment initiatives such as the ESEA

(1965) and Affirmative Action provided African American males the opportunity to access a quality education and gainful employment. However, the 1980s ushered in a new political ideology that defined equality as access to the free market and social welfare initiatives as a detriment to traditional American values. The following section provides an overview of the neoconservative public policy implemented during the Reagan Administration and its implications for African American males.

The Reagan Era: Public Policy and Its Implications

The 1980s ushered in a new political ideology. The election of President Ronald Reagan initiated the withdrawal of government intervention. *New Federalism* permeated the legislative initiatives. The administration's focus was on reconstructing the role of federal government (Clark & Amiot, 1983; Verstegen, 1988; 1987; 1983). A color-blindness ideology and market-inspired concepts pervaded policy decision-making. In his first inaugural address, Reagan (1981) contended that government was not the solution to but the problem. The administration promulgated the notion that education and social welfare were local problems, best addressed by local citizens. According to the neoconservative coalition, federal interference was not needed.

After 8 years as governor of California and one failed presidential campaign, Ronald Reagan defeated the incumbent President, Jimmy Carter. At the close of the 1970s, the Carter Administration was contending with a stalled economy, double-digit inflation, energy crisis and national defense disasters. Carter's unsuccessful attempt to end the Iran hostage crisis (the hostile takeover of the Iran U.S. Embassy and captivity of 52 Americans by Islamist militants in Iran from November 1979 to January 1981) and

curb the effects of the oil shortage weakened his political approval domestically and abroad (Shirley, 2009). Reagan campaigned on the promise to *Make America Great Again.* He vowed to restore the nation's military power and rebuild the economy. His campaign platform espoused staple conservative ideologies which included a return to traditions and values, decentralization, small government and support of a laissez-faire economy. Reagan's plan for America included:

- Increase military and advance weaponry
- Stabilize inflation and promote economic growth with supply-side economics
- Tax reductions by 30 percent
- Deregulation of energy production
- Reversal of Roe v. Wade, Affirmative Action and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act (Skinner, Mesquita, Kudelia & Rice, 2008).

Reagan won decisively, receiving 489 of the 538 electoral votes and winning 44 states (Shirley, 2009). However, he narrowly received the popular vote with 50.7 percent. The split among American voters indicated a division along ideological lines. Congress was also divided. The Democrats controlled the House while Republicans had Senate majority. Many of Reagan's plans to scale down big government and increase military intervention appeared to be improbable propositions given the divisive composition of the 91st Congress. However, the unfortunate attempted assassination of President Reagan in March 1981 and his spirited recovery united the nation.

In January of 1981, Reagan's approval rating was 74 percent among Republicans, 38 percent among Democrats, and 53 percent among Independents. After the attempted assassination, Reagan's approval rating significantly increased to 92 percent among Republicans, 51 percent among Democrats, and 70 percent among Independents (Avlon, 2011; Wilber, 2011). The surge in public opinion and congressional approval afforded Reagan with the momentum to push forward his legislative platform (Wilber, 2011). As

such, the first piece of legislation presented by Reagan after his recovery, the Economic

Recovery Tax Act, received bipartisan approval. Similarly, the 1983 U.S. invasion of

Grenada for the purpose of democratic diplomacy and communist intervention received

minimal national disapproval (Moore, 1984; Waters, 1989). During his 1984 re-election

campaign, Reagan promoted a *stay the course* agenda. He continued to endorse

decentralization and market-oriented policy reform. The 1984 "*Its Morning in America*

Again" presidential campaign promised:

- Extension of the space shuttle program
- Advancement of military defense strategies (arms development)
- Roll Back" foreign policy aimed at repressing Communist's influence; education reform (implementation of accountability measures)
- Crime and drug initiatives
- Tax reform

Again, Reagan decidedly defeated his opponent, Democrat candidate, Walter Mondale.

In his first term, Reagan identified five main areas of economic concern:

Inflation; Government regulation; Excessive tax burdens that decreased incentives for

employment and investment; Massive budget deficit; and Expanding federal budget

(OMB, 1981). He proposed a simple remedy – supply side economics. Supply-side

economics was a market concept that suggested that an economy would experience

positive growth with stimulation of supply or production through tax cuts and

deregulation (Laffer, 2004). This market-oriented reform, later coined Reaganomics,

advanced the *trickle-down* theory. It posited that reductions in personal and business

taxes would likely increase incentives to work and invest to a degree great enough to

promote substantial economic growth (St. Pierre, 1991). The Reagan Administration's

promotion of Reaganomics as a simple solution for the nation's troubles suggested that

the problems facing America were all economic based. This type of approach disregarded societal factors such as discrimination, racism, and classism that highly influence individuals' social conditions.

Economic Policy

Reagan's plan *"To Make American Great Again,"* entailed: a) Immediate reduction in federal expenditures, b) Reduction in federal taxes, c) Dismissal of excessive regulations, and d) Incremental growth of the money supply established by the Federal Reserve System (OMB, 1981). The majority of Reagan's policies and initiatives were based on economic recovery. Reagan's entire 1980 platform was based on improving the nation's economic condition: a) Reduce government expenditures; b) Reduce taxes; c) Stop the rise of inflation (Republican Party 1980 Platform). The Reagan Administration contended that supply-side economics would achieve this goal. As explained earlier, supply-side economics suggest that an increase in supply will create price stabilization and halt inflation (Laffer, 2004). Laffer (2004) presented that the major tenet of supply-side economics was the concept of economic "incentives." Later, referred to as the *Laffer Curve*, supply-side theory suggested that extensive tax cuts increased individuals' incentive to work and invest due to the possibility of greater income earnings (St. Pierre, 1991). Economists predicted that the influx of greater income would spur corporation and business investments, which would create employment opportunities, which would then lead to greater consumer spending.

In the Economic Recovery Tax Act, Reagan proposed to reduce taxes by 25 percent over three years; reduce federal expenditures by 20 percent; eliminate superfluous federal regulations; and increase military defense expenditures by 144.5

percent (OMB, 1981). ERTA provided a 20 percent tax cut in the highest income bracket.

The lowest income tax bracket received the smallest tax reduction. Its tax base was

lowered from 14 to 11 percent. In addition the Capital Gains' tax (tax on investment

profits) was reduced from 28 to 20 percent (Niskanen & Moore, 1996). After one year,

tax cuts resulted in a $9 billion capital gains' profit. At the other end of the spectrum,

those in the lowest tax bracket paid slightly more in taxes (Laffer, 2004).

Over the course of Reagan's eight year administration (1981-1989), income and

corporate tax receipts grew by $240 billion, inflation declined, and 16 million jobs were

created. However, minimum wage was frozen at $3.35. This resulted in the largest

increase of full-time workers in poverty (Niskanen & Moore, 1996; St. Pierre; 1991). In

addition, the 1981 tax cuts precipitated the largest increase in the wealth gap (Katz,

1995). While amendments to the tax code and federal fiscal budget were advocated as

race, gender and class neutral processes, the outcomes of the Reagan Administration's

economic reform indicated otherwise. ERTA (as illustrated in the initial 1983 tax

summary) appeared to promote the status quo. St. Pierre's (1991) concluded:

> The [ERTA] plan envisaged a curtailment of governmental expenditures at the
>
> federal level [which] meant at least in the short run, its effect would militate
>
> against the interests of many low-income Americans… Blacks were, therefore,
>
> more likely to bear a disproportionate burden of any hardships emanating from
>
> reduced funds. (p. 328)

During the 1980s, African Americans represented the largest poverty population growth.

As such, African Americans would have been more reliant on need-based, social

programs targeted in the ERTA for elimination and significant funding reductions. The

Subsequently, the Reagan Administration's economic policies (primarily the budget cuts

to social programs including education initiatives) greatly influenced the trajectory of

education policy and reform throughout the 1980s.

Education Policy

As a major platform focus, Reagan denounced the effectiveness of compensatory

programs funded through ESEA and advocated for the decentralization of public schools

Reagan asserted that ESEA was an expensive failure. He posited:

> Excellence does not begin in Washington. A 600-percent increase in Federal
>
> spending on education between 1960 and 1980 was accompanied by a steady
>
> decline in Scholastic Aptitude Test scores. Excellence must begin in our homes
>
> and neighborhood schools, where it's the responsibility of every parent and
>
> teacher and the right of every child. (Reagan, 1984)

The Republican Party Platform of 1980 declared the following education agenda:

- Deregulation: Restore the responsibility (curriculum discretion and financial burden) of education to parents and the states
- Repeal categorical grant programs and collapse other education programs into general block grants
- Eliminate the Department of Education
- Reinstitute prayer in school by constitutional amendment
- End forced busing: *"Our goal is quality education for all of America's children, with special commitment to those who must overcome handicap, deprivation, or discrimination. That is why we condemn the forced busing of school children to achieve arbitrary racial quotas."*
- Encourage "choice" programs by providing parents with tuition vouchers and tuition tax credits for private schools

A return to a smaller, less invasive government meant a reduction in federal expenditures.

Reagan asserted that any problem in education could best be solved by resetting the

nation's moral compass and giving control back to states. This neoconservative

perspective failed to acknowledge the systemic factors, which had contributed to the

inequitable educational outcomes of poor and minority students. Instead, Reagan suggested that the problems plaguing the schools concerned the morality of conduct.

According to Reagan, learning had been crowded out by alcohol, drugs, and crime. As such, Reagan's presidency marked one of the most dramatic overhauls of federal education policy since the War on Poverty initiatives (Clark & Amiot, 1981; Farrar, 1988; Finn, 1988; Verstegen, 1990, 1987, 1983; Verstegen & Clark, 1988). The Reagan Administration was most successful in transforming education policy through budget allocations (Farrar, 1988; Finn, 1988). Verstegen's (1990) concluded that Reagan's lasting impact on the trajectory of the federal government's role in education was largely achieved by fiscal manipulation. She opined that any attempt to eradicate equity-inspired education programs in a traditional policy subsystem would have (and did) fail. Verstegen (1990) postulated:

> The [Reagan] Administration's consistent and persistent philosophy, which called for 'less government and spending' was realized not through a major restructuring of domestic assistance programs but through a slowing in the growth of revenues accompanied by increased obligations …The Reagan legacy, therefore, indirectly accomplished what could not be otherwise achieved… Reduction in aid for education during the Reagan administration diminished the size, cost, and direction of the federal role in American education –mark[ing] a critical turning point in national education policy. (pp. 369-370)

In 1981, Reagan signed into legislation his first education proposal, the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act (ECIA). The act redefined the federal role in

education by reallocating autonomy, as well as financial responsibility, to the states (Ellis, 1983; Farrar, 1988; Finn, 1998). ECIA consolidated the four primary tenets of ESEA - Title I programs; Aid to Handicapped Students; Emergency School Aid; and Adult Education – into one block grant. In addition, it repealed or collapsed all other education programs into a second block grant. Certain remedial education programs youth employment initiatives were eliminated (Cross, 2004).

The consolidation of categorical education programs into block grants was the initial step to removing federal regulation in public education. States no longer had to provide evidence that federal funds were reaching the neediest students. They could choose to allocate funds to schools presenting the most need, evenly disperse the funds among all schools or supply the additional money to districts' with greater political influence. There was no obligation to specifically use the extra funding for underserved students. Thus, the decentralization of federal education regulations circumvented the original intent of compensatory programs created by Title I.

The enactment of ECIA resulted in a 35 percent decrease in funding to food nutrition programs (free and reduced lunch programs), a decrease in higher education grants and student loans, and an 11.5 percent decrease in Department of Education (DOE) funding (Jennings, 1985, Verstegen, 1987). Funding to facilitate school desegregation through busing was significantly reduced (Kosar, 2011; Stockman, 1986). By 1985, the budgetary cuts established by ECIA resulted in 750,000 fewer students enrolled in educational and anti-poverty services (Jennings, 1985). Between 1980 and 1985, federal funding for Chapter 1 dropped by 29 percent. Overall, in Reagan's inaugural year, education spending shrank from $17 billion in 1981 to $14.5 billion by

1982 (Evans, 1985). McDonnell and McLaughlin (1982) noted in their critical report of

education policy:

> The 'Reagan Revolution' [did] not reform federal education policy in a
>
> way that [would] make the federal role more effective. Instead, ECIA . . .
>
> cede[d] responsibility for federal goals to the very agencies whose
>
> inability or unwillingness to address these goals prompted a federal
>
> education policy in the first place. (p. 15)

In 1981, Secretary of Education, Terrel Bell, authorized the formation of the

National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE) to issue a report on the

condition of education in the United States. Concerned about the level of cuts being made

to education, Bell initiated the commission in hopes that it would highlight the growing

need in education for federal attention and additional resources (Kosar, 2011; Ravitch,

2010). The report achieved that goal and more. The report's findings became the impetus

for the education reform movement of the 80s and 90s. In 1983, the commission

published *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform.* The NCEE argued

that American students were lagging behind their global counterparts and being subjected

to "mediocrity in education" that threatened the very existence of the nation (NCEE,

1983, p. 5). The report emphasized that American students were neither prepared for the

workforce nor college. NCEE declared:

> Our Nation is at risk. Our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce,
>
> industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by
>
> competitors throughout the world… What was unimaginable a generation
>
> ago has begun to occur- others are matching and surpassing our

educational attainments… For the first time in the history of our country,

the educational skills of one generation will not surpass, will not equal,

will not even approach, those of their parents. (NCEE, 1983, p. 5)

The commission recommended the implementation of additional standardized

testing, the development of national curriculum standards, teacher accountability

measures, partnerships between businesses and schools and sustained federal

involvement in education. As the neoconservative base pushed for federal de-escalation

and deregulation, the report affirmed the importance of the federal position in education:

We believe the federal government's role includes several functions of

national consequence that states and localities are unlikely to be able to

meet [such as] …supporting curriculum improvement and research on

teaching, learning and the management of schools. (NCEE, 1983)

The Administration's platform of education disinvestment was replaced with one

promoting national standards and teacher-student accountability (Lipman, 2004; Ravitch,

2010; Rebell & Wolff, 2008). The Republican Party Platform of 1984 declared the

following education agenda:

- Continued push for the creation of "choice" programs by providing parents with tuition vouchers and tuition tax credits for private schools
- Deregulation of federal government in education
- Create accountability measures for students and teachers
- Rigorous curriculum programs
- Reinstitute (voluntary) prayer in school by constitutional amendment
- Continue to consolidate categorical education grants into block grants
- End to forced integration programs
- Tuition tax credits to subsidizes the cost of private school tuition
- Preclusion of private higher education institutions in complying with Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1968
- Increase preparation of science teachers
- Reduction of federal assistance to universities and colleges

- Elimination of vocational and technical education

The Administration used research to support their educational agenda and released a myriad of education reports stating the need for tougher accountability measures and increased focus on the sciences and choice programs (Cross, 2004). Perhaps the most significant outcome from the Administration's agenda shift was the reaction of state governors and state education programs. Finn (1988) and Curley (1986) maintained that Reagan's utilization of the bully-pulpit indirectly shaped state-level education reform. States across the nation began incorporating the recommendations in *A Nation at Risk* into their own reform measures.

To support the *Nation at Risk's* recommendation for consistent evaluation of students' performance, the 1988 reauthorization of ECIA included a provision that required states to define and report student achievement levels and illustrate achievement progress in order to maintain federal support (Cross, 2004). The increased frequency of exams led to an initial improvement in scores. However, significant gains gave way to skepticism about the academic progress being achieved. In *The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice Are Undermining Education,* Ravitch's (2010) examination of the effects of testing in education found that as test scores rose in low-performing schools, so did the dropout rates.

In 1986, the Reagan Administration focused on diminution of higher education spending and challenged the emergence of multicultural education. Secretary of Education, William Bennett [1985-1988], criticized the validity of multicultural education at the collegiate and secondary level. Bennett contended that multicultural education undermined the primacy of Western American culture (Moses, 2002). His stark

stance on multiculturalism represented the prevailing conservative thought. Spring (2009) suggested that Bennett promoted American exceptionalism by framing anything outside of the traditional American values as substandard and therefore not worthy of inclusion in curriculums (Hursh & Ross, 2000). Bennett contended, "[Western culture] set the moral, political, economic, and social standards for the rest of the world," and therefore should be taught in every classroom as a framework to American culture and government (Bennett, 1988, n.d.).

In 1988, Bennett challenged Stanford University's curriculum change of a Western culture requirement that required readings from the traditional literary canon to a "Culture, Ideas and Values" course that surveyed literary works from women and minorities (Moses, 2002). He attacked the university for its decision to be more inclusive and blamed it on the liberal elite. According to Bennett, the liberal elite did not value hard work, family and entrepreneurship and rejected Christian values (Spring, 2009). He maintained that multiculturalism created divisions among racial groups and diminished the complex, uniqueness of the American culture (D'Souza, 1995; Hursh & Ross, 2000; Moses, 2002). During Bennett's tenure, funding for programs that supported multiculturalism such as bilingual education was significantly decreased (Moses, 2002).

In addition to decreases in multicultural program funding, significant cuts were proposed to the Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants, Pell Grants, National Direct Student Loans, Guaranteed Student loans, and federal work study (OMB, 1992). Also, college preparatory programs were recommended for massive funding cutbacks. The TRIO program, which provides pre-college counseling and experiences for students from low-income backgrounds who are first-generation college bound, was reduced by

53 percent (CEL, 1986; Levin, 1989). Given all the proposed reductions to financial aid, the Committee on Education and Labor (CEL) concluded that the materialization of such cuts would have prevented 808,000 students from receiving assistance and create a generation of debtors due to the shift toward loans over grants. Hauser (1987) found that the lack of financial aid explained some of the decline in African Americans' college entry rate and was a significant factor regardless of family income level. According to Hauser (1987), between 1975-1976 and 1985-1986, financial aid in the form of grants was reduced by more than 50 percent. In addition, the availability of aid in the form of loans increased from 17 percent to 50 percent.

Funding proposals for 1986 through 1989 fiscal years appropriated minor increases in education spending, but overall represented a loss in actual dollars when adjusted for inflation and compared to the Carter Administration's last fiscal year budget in 1981 (Evans, 1985). The enactment of the Hawkins-Stafford Act in 1988 was the last education bill authorized during Reagan's tenure. It restored many of the programs dismantled and diminished by ECIA. The Stafford Act rescinded ECIA, emphasized compensatory education program for low-income students, and performance accountability.

Overall, $15.8 billion for education was appropriated for the 1989 fiscal year budget which constituted a 13.7 percent increase from Reagan's 1981 budget appropriations. However $15.8 billion still represented a 7.1% decrease in education spending when compared to the 1980 fiscal allocation of $17 billion (Evans, 1985; OMB, 1992). During his tenure, Reagan failed to get Congress' approval for tuition-tax credit, tuition vouchers, the abolition of the Department of Education and constitutional amendments

permitting prayer in school and tax-exemption for private schools that exclude students (Doyle & Hartle, 1984; Kosar, 2011; Verstegen, 1990).

The specific impact of extensive education spending cuts, which shaped the Reagan Administration's education policy, on African American males' academic achievement and life outcomes has not been explored. The dissolution of funding to support school integration efforts led to a return of highly racially segregated schools comparable to pre-*Brown* rates (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Orfield, 1988; Orfield & Frankenburg, 2008). The eradication of education initiatives that increased equitable educational experiences and opportunities for students negated the preponderance of evidence that supported compensatory and intervention programs. Levin (1989) concluded that education programs designed specifically to meet the needs of at-risk students were effective in improving educational outcomes and life opportunities. Verstegen (1990), Farrar (1988) and Jennings (1985) surmised that the unadulterated effect of Reagan's proposed education policies without the intervention of Congress and education advocates would have culminated in the demise of public education. In addition to education, other social public policies that were designed to produce equal opportunities and outcomes were significantly amended by the neoconservative coalition and Regan Administration.

Social Public Policy

"*There's a woman in Chicago… She has 80 names, 30 addresses, 12 Social Security cards and is collecting veterans' benefits on four nonexisting deceased husbands… she's collecting Social Security on her cards. She's got Medicaid, getting food stamps and she is collecting welfare under each of her names. Her tax-free cash income alone is over $150,000*" *– Ronald Reagan.* (New York Times, 1976)

The Reagan Administration embarked on a welfare reform plan to significantly revise the federal role in social development (Katz, 1990; Wilson, 1986, 1996). Reagan

used economic rational and conservative values to restructure welfare policy. The existence of social welfare programs indicated a commitment or belief that some individuals required assistance to meet their human needs. This concept was in direct contrast to neoconservative tenets of individualism, meritocracy and small government. The National Republican Party maintained:

> [The] federal government efforts to help them [poor] have become counterproductive, perpetuating and aggravating the very conditions of dependence they seek to relieve. The Democratic Congress has produced a jumble of degrading, dehumanizing, wasteful, overlapping, and inefficient programs that invite waste and fraud but inadequately assist the needy poor. Poverty is defined not by income statistics alone, but by an individual's true situation and prospect.
>
> > Through long association with government programs, the word "welfare" has come to be perceived almost exclusively as tax-supported aid to the needy. But in its most inclusive sense—and as Americans understood it from the beginning of the Republic—such aid also encompasses those charitable works performed by private citizens, families, a nd social, ethnic, and religious organizations. (National Republican Party, 1980)

Social scientists and economists also supported the conservative movement to end the welfare system. In *Losing Ground*, Charles Murray (1984) contended that social welfare programs from the Great Society era had negatively disrupted the concept of rewards and penalties that provide the impetus to work. He proclaimed that welfare had increased the prevalence of poverty, unemployment among African Americans, teen pregnancy, single-mother households and created a system of dependency (Murray, 1984). George Glider

(1981) presented that social welfare programs were not the answer to poverty. Instead, he suggested a strong reliance on capitalism and work ethics. Glider (1981) maintained, "The first principle is that in order to move up, the poor must not only work, they must work harder than the classes above them…but the current poor, White even more than Black, are refusing hard work" (pp. 87-89).

Issues surrounding poverty and urban population produced a new term in the sociology field. The *underclass* was defined as a sub-demographic of the urban society plagued by violence, poverty and vice (Auletta, 1982; Glasgow, 1980). The media characterized this population as *other*, violent, uneducated and drug addicted. Some sociologists suggested that the problems of the underclass were of their own undoing (Moynihan, 1966, Murray, 1984).

The Reagan economic recovery plan called for extensive reductions in federal expenditures. One-third of the $20 billion budget cut came from social welfare programs (CBPP, 1986). Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) was the largest means-tested program, and it received the largest budget deductions. AFDC was a dually administered program that provided financial assistance to low-income families with children under 18. OBRA decreased AFDC funding by 25 percent which resulted in a loss of $2 billion. In addition to the cuts, recipients were required to secure employment in order to continue receiving benefits. In a veiled attempt to address teen pregnancy, teen mothers were required to live with their parents/guardians in order to receive AFDC benefits. Over the course of Reagan's presidency, AFDC declined by 30 percent (National Urban League, 1989). AFDC payments failed to keep pace with rising inflation. The median value of AFDC benefits deceased by one-third in real dollars.

Wilson (1987) posited that during this period AFDC benefits were never funded at a level high enough to lift recipients out of poverty.

Programs funding for housing assistance was severely decimated in the name of economic recovery. Funds to Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for public housing programs were frozen from 1982 to 1985 (Alexander, 2010; Katz 1990). Urban community development block grants were reduced and funds for the maintenance of existing low-income housing declined. Programs that provided subsidized housing were also altered. Prior to 1981, initiatives such as Section-8 housing allowed low-income individuals to secure housing at a cost no greater than 25 percent of their adjusted income. ERTA increased tenant rent contributions to 30 percent. Housing vouchers were proposed to replace public housing (OMB, 1981; St. Pierre, 1991). However, Katz (1990) suggested that the vouchers were insufficient to secure housing due to a lack of low-income housing developments and high demand.

Food and nutrition services were also slated for economic reform. Funding for the food stamp program, which was regarded as one of the most effective anti-poverty programs, was decreased. Federal regulations lowered the annual income eligibility limit from $14,000 to $11,000, which resulted in the removal of 22 million from the food stamp program. In addition, recipients between the ages of 18 and 60 had to participate in the *Workfare* program as a condition of eligibility. Food stamp recipients were given work assignments and credited food stamps in place of hourly wages (St. Pierre, 1991). School lunch subsides, which made free and reduced lunch programs possible, were reduced by 35 percent. This resulted in the exclusion of 3 million students from the program (Jennings, 1985). The summer lunch program was eliminated and subsides were

terminated for breakfast and lunch meals at childcare facilities for poor children (OMB,

1981).

Employment and job training initiatives were significantly altered by the Reagan

Administration's social policy reform. Reagan considered government job creation a

form of welfare because it artificially created employment to produce a wage for the

unemployed. Youth Conservation Corps (YCC), a program developed to cultivate the

work, social and educational skills of youth, was slated for elimination in the 1981

budget. The budget committed stated that the program was costly, misdirected and that

the work performed by youth was of low importance (Ginsberg, 2011). The YCC

survived elimination, but received a 20 percent reduction in funding. The Comprehensive

Employment Training Act (CETA), which provided public works jobs, youth

employment, vocational training and on-the job training in the private sector was

eliminated and reconstituted as the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA).

JTPA eliminated public service employment and reduced allowances to for work

support programs such as childcare. The Reagan Administration proposed to consolidate

all other employment initiatives such as Summer Youth Employment and Training

Program and Youth Community Conservation and Improvement Projects (YCCIP) into

one block grant (Nightingale, 2009). The consolidation amounted to a 15 percent decline

in funding. In addition, the Administration recommended that funding to the Job Corps

program be decreased 55 percent and that summer youth employment programs enact a

sub-minimum wage (OMB, 1983).

The Reagan Administration suggested the private sector via the free-market

would resolve the issue of unemployment. To entice businesses to hire in urban areas, the

administration proposed to eliminate the minimum wage for youth. However, St. Pierre (1991), Katz (1990) and Jaynes and Williams (1990) contended that removal of the minimum wage for teens would have trapped them in a system of low wage employment. In addition to the outlined welfare programs, substantial budget cuts were made to Medicaid, unemployment benefits and other means-tested programs. Universal or non-means tested social programs such as Medicare and Social Security escaped severe budget cuts. The conservative coalition perceived means-tested programs such as AFDC or Medicaid as *entitlements*. Recipients of these services were often labeled as *underserving poor* or *able-bodied poor* and characterized as urban minorities. However, they viewed universal social programs as *earned benefits*. The recipients of Social Security and Medicare were portrayed as White, middle-class (Katz, 1990).

Sociologists have addressed the effects of the 1980s conservative social public policy reform. Wilson (1987) in *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy*, asserted that the condition of poor African Americans was not worsened by the presence of welfare. He contended that social isolation and a lack of economic opportunities was the primary cause of persistent unemployment, crime and poverty in urban areas. Wilson (1987) posited that a concerted effort to address the historical discrimination and racism ingrained in social institutions had to be made in order to reverse the consequences of poverty for the *truly disadvantaged.* In *The Undeserving Poor: From the War on Poverty to the War on Welfare*, Michael Katz (1990) opined that conservative's perspective on the effect of welfare was misinformed. He argued that minimum wage earnings at a full-time job were more profitable than welfare assistance. Therefore, unlike Murray's hypothesis of disincentives (1984), Katz

suggested it would be irrational for anyone to forgo the opportunity of full-employment for welfare assistance. Katz (1990) noted that welfare opponents failed to acknowledge that public assistance had successful lifted the poorest families from poverty, declined the elderly poverty rate and reduced infant mortality and child hunger. While the Reagan Administration de-emphasized the importance of federal government intervention in social welfare, it greatly increased the federal influence in crime legislation.

Crime Policy

President Reagan's administration presented and supported several crime initiatives during his term. The two of greatest significance to this study are the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 and the Omnibus Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988. The statues outlined in these policies have been widely suggested to have contributed to the accelerated incarceration of African American men (Alexander, 2010; Barak et al., 2007; Barker, 2009; Blumstein & Beck, 1999; Boggess & Bound, 1997; Cayley,1998; Coley & Barton, 2006; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Gray, 2012; Mauer, 1999, 2001, 2004, 2007; Stutman, 1992; Tonry, 1995; Wacquant, 2008, 2010; Western, Pettit & Guetzkow; 2002 Western & Wilderman, 2009; Western, 2006). Crime control policy is often regarded as color-blind and racially-neutral. However, for African American males, the intersection of race, gender in relation to crime policies from the Reagan era have produced racialized outcomes.

From 1981 to 1989, the Reagan Administration's initiatives to address the declining drug problem grew expansively in force and spending (Beckett, 1997; Mauer, 2001, 2008). The War on Drugs was a cornerstone of Reagan's administration and has had lasting implications on the federal role in the criminal justice system. The 1971

revelation that 1.3 percent of the American population was addicted to narcotic drugs prompted President Richard Nixon to declare a *war on drugs* (Gray, 2012). Nixon proclaimed that drugs were the nation's "public enemy number one." It was widely propagated that drug use was responsible for half of all crime. This claim was primarily supported by Robert DuPont's 1969 medical study which found that 44 percent of individuals arrested in a single month in D.C. tested positive for heroin (DuPont, 1971). Nixon declared war against drugs, but it was Reagan's administration that initiated the battles.

From 1981 to 1991, the Department of Defense's antidrug budget grew from $33 million to $1.3 billion (Mauer, 2008). Likewise, the Drug Enforcement Agency's budget increased from $86 million in 1981 to $1.2 billion by 1991 (OMB, 1991). The federal dollars directed toward containment rather than reform transformed the federal governments' drug policy to a full-fledged war (Alexander, 2010; Barack et al., 2007; Mauer, 1999, 2001; Mauer & King, 2007; Wacquant, 2008, 2010).

The emergence of crack cocaine provided the Reagan Administration with the perfect newsworthy culprit to promote the anti-drug movement (Gary, 2012; Reinarman & Levine, 1997). Crack was simply a different physical form of powder cocaine, yet it attracted the title of "public enemy number one" by politicians and the media. Subsequently, powder cocaine was regarded with the same amount of attention given to cigarettes and alcohol use. What separated the two forms of the same drug? In the 1970s, powder cocaine was typically used as a recreational drug among the affluent. In 1977, *Newsweek* published an article romanticizing cocaine as the "in" trend of the moment and downplayed its harmful effects. It reported:

> Among hostesses in the smart sets of Los Angeles and New York, a little cocaine,
> like Dom Perignon and Beluga caviar, is now de rigueur at dinners. Some party
> givers pass it around along with the canapes on silver trays... the user experiences
> a feeling of potency, of confidence, of energy. (Newsweek, 1977 as cited in
> Thirty years of America's war on drugs, n.d.)

The 1985 National Institute on Drug Abuse survey reported that more than 22 million people across all socioeconomic classes had tried cocaine. However, this seemingly prevalent drug failed to attract the legal and media attention that the arrival of crack received.

In 1985, crack began to appear in urban cities. It was relatively inexpensive compared to powder cocaine. The inexpensiveness of the drug allowed it to be marketed and sold in large quantities in poor and low-income areas. Crack dramatically increased the frequency and profitability of drug dealing in urban neighborhoods (Evans et al., 2012). Sensationalized reports about the effect of crack permeated the nation's airwaves and political campaigns. Crack was said to be instantly addictive and a cause of violent behavior (ACLU, 2008; Alexander, 2010; Reinarman & Levine, 1997). Reinarman and Levine (1997) posited that there was nothing special about crack to warrant what they refer to as the political and media "crack scare" other than who the common users were. They contended:

> Crack attracted the attention of politicians and the media because of its
> downward mobility to and increased visibility in ghettos and barrios. The
> new users were a different social class, race and status…crack was sold

…to poorer, younger buyers who were already seen as a threat.

(Reinarman & Levine, 1997, pp. 47-48)

Reinarman and Levine (1997) continued that crack and its poor minority users provided the scapegoat conservatives needed to support their ideology and policy agenda. They commented:

> Reagan and the New Right [viewed] most social problems …as the consequences of individual moral choices. They conceptualized people in trouble as people who make trouble; they made social control rather than social welfare the organizing axis of public policy. For the New Right, people did not so much abuse drugs because they were jobless, homeless, poor, depressed, or alienated; they were jobless, homeless, poor, depressed, or alienated because they were weak, immoral, or foolish enough to use illicit drugs…. Crack was a godsend to the Right. They used it and the drug issue as an ideological fig leaf to place over the unsightly urban ills that had increased markedly under Reagan administration social and economic policies. (Reinarman & Levine, 1997, p. 58)

The media circulated images depicting the urban underclass as drug dealers and crack addicts. Perhaps, the most dramatized headline of the crack scare was the death of Len Bias. In the summer of 1986, Bias, a prominent college basketball player, died from a drug overdose. Bias' death was blamed on a crack (this claim was later reversed as the cause of death was not crack but an overdose from powder cocaine and alcohol). His highly publicized death became the impetus for legislative action. In 1986, Congress expedited the development and passage of the Anti-Drug Abuse Act. The Act authorized

the severest federal mandatory minimum sentencing stipulation in U.S. history (as of

1986) (Gary, 2012).

The Act targeted drug czars and drug traffickers. However, the implementation of

mandatory sentences for the sale or possession of cocaine and crack cocaine affected

mainly street- level dealers (Blumstein & Beck, 1999). Prior to 1986, the maximum

sentence for drug possession of any amount was one year (Gray, 2012). The Act

discriminated between crack cocaine and powder cocaine – imposing harsher sentences

for possession of smaller quantities of crack than cocaine at a 100:1 ratio.

The Drug Abuse Act authorized the following sentencing guidelines:

- Crimes involving 500 grams of powder cocaine or just 5 grams of crack
  were sentenced to at least 5 years imprisonment

- Crimes involving 5000 grams of powder cocaine and 50 grams of crack were
  sentenced to 10 years imprisonment.

The 100:1 ratio passed through both the House and Senate with minimal debate;

likewise President Reagan did not request any amendments to the mandatory sentencing

terms (ACLU, 2008). Opponents noted that because of its inexpensiveness, poor

individuals were more likely to use crack. African Americans were more likely to be

arrested and convicted for the sell and possession of crack because of the nature of drug

dealing in urban neighborhoods (Barak et al., 2007; Gary, 2012). Studies indicated that

powder cocaine users were more likely to be White and middle-class. Individuals who

sold cocaine did not deal in conspicuous locations such as street corners like crack

dealers, and thus they were less likely to be arrested and convicted (Alexander, 2010;

Mauer, 2001; 2007). Congress provided no official reason for the gross sentencing

disparity other than that they believed that crack trafficking resulted in more violence

than cocaine trafficking. Off the record, congress members revealed their support for the sentencing disparity by stating their belief that "crack was more addictive than powder cocaine, that it caused crime, that it caused psychosis and death, that young people were particularly prone to becoming addicted to it, and that crack's low cost and ease of manufacture would lead to even more widespread use of it" (ACLU, 2008). Studies later confirmed that crack was no more addictive than powder cocaine, and the physiological and psychoactive effect of each are similar (Hatsukami & Fischman, 1996).

It is worth noting that during this time a much larger international drug trade was occurring. The lucrativeness of the narcotic drug trade made U.S.' ports and border cities key destinations for international drug cartels. Vice-President George H.W. Bush formed the South Florida Drug Task Force to curb the import of cocaine to Miami and other port cities. Intervention of drug trafficking abroad was increased (PBS, *Thirty Years of America's Drug War)*. The trafficking provision in the 1986 Anti-Drug Abuse Act was targeted at capturing international drug czars. However, the end result of mandatory minimum sentencing was an increase in incarceration of low- level drug dealers. The majority of these offenders were African American men (ACLU, 2008; Alexander, 2010; Blumstein & Beck, 1999; Mauer, 1999, 2001).

In 1988, Reagan's administration reauthorized the Anti-Drug Abuse Act as the Omnibus Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988. The Act prevented individuals convicted of a drug offense from receiving federal financial aid, public housing and other social services. The Act allowed public housing authorities to evict residents suspected of or engaged in criminal activity in the dwelling or near it. This sanction applied to a tenant even if he or she were not the accused indicated in the criminal activity.

The Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988 authorized the following:

- Mandated a 5-year mandatory minimum and 20-year maximum sentence for simple possession of 5 grams or more of crack cocaine

- Doubled the mandatory minimum to 20 years for an offender convicted of engaging in a continuing criminal enterprise

- Mandated that all conspirators in a crime be penalized for drug distribution, importation, or exportation, regardless of their role

- Mandatory minimum sentencing provisions to offenses involving the distribution of five grams or less of marijuana to persons under age 21

- Included as a prohibited criminal act under the Controlled Substances Act: (1) possessing a controlled substance with the intent to distribute it in or near a school; (2) distributing, possessing, or manufacturing a controlled substance within 100 feet of a playground, public or private youth center, public swimming pool, or video arcade facility; and (3) receiving a controlled substance from a person under age 18

- Increased the criminal penalties imposed on persons who use firearms in connection with violent crimes, drug trafficking crimes, and certain other firearms offenses

After Reagan's first term in office, the Republican Party applauded the administrations' successful efforts to decrease crime. It noted, "For the first time in the history of recorded federal crime statistics, rates of serious crime have dropped for two consecutive years" (Republican Platform, 1984). The declining crime statistics should have suggested that the existing criminal justice policies were working and that significant changes to policy were not needed. However, in the same platform outline, the Reagan Administration proposed a significant increase in law enforcement and arrests. "The federal law enforcement budget has been increased by nearly 50 percent. We added 1,900 new investigators and prosecutors to the federal fight against crime. We arrested more offenders and sent more of them to prison" (Republican Platform, 1984). This type of

hyper-crime control legislation continued throughout the 80s on the federal and state level.

Policy Implications

Reagan's *War on Welfare* came at the height of an economic and industrial decline. Urban centers riddled by a declining industrial sector experienced staggering unemployment rates. The national unemployment rate reached its pinnacle in 1982 at 10.8 percent. However, the conditions were worse for African American males. In 1983, the unemployment rate for African American men was between 28-30 percent and 48 percent for African American male teens (Wilson-Sadberry et al., 1991). Deindustrialization and a surplus of adult, low-skilled workers placed African American male youth in direct competition for jobs with a more experience pool of applicants (Katz, 1990). The employment condition of young African American males continued to worsen with the loss of job training and summer employment programs (St. Pierre, 1991). Forty-four percent of African Americans in urban cities were living in poverty by the end of 1980s (Katz, 1990). In 1960, the job participation rate for African American males ages 18-19 was 71 percent. By 1984, their participation rate was 55 percent (Jaynes & Williams, 1990). Between 1970 and 1986, the proportion of African American men earning less than $10,000 grew by 15 percent (Jaynes & Williams, 1990).

The downward shift in economic stability had the greatest influence on children of color. The Reagan era saw the largest increase of children living in poverty – increasing from 15 percent in 1974 to 21 percent in 1986 (Katz, 1990). In 1970, African American children accounted for 20 percent of the poor population. The percentage of Black children in poverty increased to 45 percent by 1985. Many of those children lived

in highly concentrated areas of poverty and contended with poor schools, inadequate access to healthcare and limited access to goods and services (National Urban League, 1989). Thirty percent of the poverty was attributed to decreases in federal funding. In 1986, 200,000 fewer African American children were provided with health services due to cuts in Medicaid funding (National Urban League, 1989).

Extensive budget cuts were made to social welfare programs while defense spending increased by $100 billion annually between 1981 and 1989. Reagan engendered the largest military personnel increase during a peace period (Higgs, 1994). In addition, the Savings and Loans crisis of the 1980s and the brief stock market crashed of 1987 resulted in an increase of corporate welfare. Interestingly, the cause of the 700 failed Savings and Loan institutions has been attributed to lending deregulations implemented by the Reagan Administration (Jaynes & Williams, 1990). All demographics experienced some loss of income due to the 1980s fiscal downturns. However, African Americans' swift decline back into poverty suggested the need for and the effectiveness of public policies that emphasized employment opportunities, economic development and physical well-being (CBPP, 1986; Shulman, 1984; St. Pierre, 1991; Wilson, 1987).

By the mid-1980s, African Americans' academic achievement momentum of the 1960s and 70s slowed, stalled and plummeted (Darling-Hammond, 2010; NCES 2001; 2009). Evans, et al. (2012) contended that the majority of the decline in the rate of educational attainment and academic achievement among African American students' achievement was from African American males' academic performance. By 1984, more than 45 percent of 13-year old African American males were enrolled in a grade below the modal grade for their age (NCES, 1995). Extensive funding decreases to ESEA's

Title I programs facilitated the deterioration of school infrastructures and increased

educational inequities among urban and rural students (Darling-Hammond, 2010;

Jennings, 1985; Kalenberg, 2008; Lipman, 2006; Verstegen, 1983, 1988; Wilson, 1987).

Fewer African American males' attended college between 1980 and 1990

(McDaniel et al., 2009). Hauser (1990) maintained that a lack of financial aid was a

prime factor in the decline of Black males' college attendance rate. In the 80s, the cost of

college increased 17 times faster than the amount of financial aid appropriations (Hauser,

1990). During the same period, the Reagan Administration decreased the funding for Pell

Grants, student loans and work study (Evans, 1985). From 1975 to 1986, the amount of

aid available in the form of grants declined from 80 percent to 46 percent (Hauser, 1990).

Limited access to funding for post-secondary education was identified as a significant

factor for African American males' enrollment in the armed services. Hauser (1990)

contended that African American students may not have perceived going to college as a

rewarding endeavor because of the financial burden it presented.

It is imperative to not overstate the federal governments' contribution to public

education (it constituted only 6.2 percent of states' education budget in 1986). However,

Title I funds' stipulations ensured that dollars were directed to underserved schools and

students. The diminishment of Title I meant that states had to make up for the loss in aid.

However, the effects of the recession and shrinking tax bases in urban centers limited

states' ability to provide adequate funding (Kozol, 2005; Wilson, 1987).

Extensive media attention to crack cocaine incited Congress to pass punitive anti-

drug legislation with sweeping national support (ACLU, 2010). Drug Enforcement

Agency's (DEA) antidrug budget increased from $33 million in 1981 to over $1 billion

by 1991. Local law enforcement drug units' budgets more than doubled (Alexander, 2010). Greater discretion in arrests practices and stringent sentencing policies created a mass incarceration epidemic. By the mid-1980s, African American men began experiencing high rates of imprisonment (Alexander, 2010; Coley & Barton, 2006). From 1980 to 1990, the imprisonment rate increased by 134 percent. African American men constituted the majority of new prisoners (Alexander, 2010; Boggess & Bound, 1997). In 1990, one in four African American males, ages 20-29, was under some form of criminal supervision (Mauer, 1995). Subsequently, the African American percentage of the imprisoned population increased from 39 percent in 1979 to 53 percent in 1990 (BJS, 1999). Between 1980 and 1992, African American males' drug-related arrests tripled. By 1990, Black males in their 20s had a 16 percent chance of going to prison (Western & Wildman, 2009). The trend toward mass incarceration is a pervasive remnant of the Reagan Administration (Pettit & Western, 2004; Western & Wilderman, 2009; Western, 2002, 2006).

Based on the literature, the Reagan doctrine, which embodied a neoconservative, market-oriented approach to public policy, had a sweeping impact upon African American males. The degree of influence of those policies on the educational and life outcomes of African American men continues to be debated. The Reagan public policy agenda was characterized as primarily racially-neutral in intent and purpose. However, the racialized difference in outcomes for people of color indicates that race and gender was a significant determinant of one's life experiences in relation to public policies.

Summary

This chapter provided a review of the literature regarding the Reagan Administration's public policies and African Americans. It then provided a historical overview of the federal education and social policies pre-Reagan (1955 -1980) and during Reagan's presidential administration (1981 -1989). The literature indicates that Reagan's racially-neutral, market-oriented policies were a response to economic needs and a reflection of neoconservatives' self-interests. The neoconservative paradigm was implemented to promote the concept of equality of opportunity and outcomes. The literature reveals these policies had a racialized impact on poor minorities. Next, chapter three provides the research method utilized in the study.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHOD

The purpose of this study was to obtain an in-depth understanding of the influence

of the Reagan Adminstration's neoconservative federal public policies on the life

experiences of African American males. This interpretative case study informs

policymakers and educators of the impact that racialized policies and laws have on

African American males' access to equality of opportunity and outcome. CRT frames the

investigation of Reagan's neoconservative public policies influence on Black males'

educational attainment, labor force particiapation and criminal involvement. An

intrepretative case study aligns with the CRT paradigm. It allows for the presentation of

rich, thick descriptions which serve as the counter-narrative to the dominant, hegemonic

account of reality. The study is guided by the following question:

> What influence did the implementation of Ronald Reagan Administration's neo-
> conservative public policies have on the educational and life outcomes African
> American males?

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race theory (CRT) is an extension of and a separate framework from the

Critical Legal Studies (CLS) movement of the 1970s. The movement was founded by

legal scholars and law professors who sought to challenge the traditional analysis of legal

doctrine that prepetuated the ideoloigies of meritocracy and objectivity within the law

(Bell, 1976; Crenshaw, 1988; Gordon, 1984; Kennedy, 1982). CLS acknowledges that

law is a legitimating structure in society (Ladson-Billings, 1998). As such, it is an ineffective tool for obtaining equality (Russell, 1999). CLS places socioeconomic class at the center of analysis. Bell (1992) criticized CLS' lack of analysis on the importance of race in social institutions' ability to promote racial inequalities. Furthermore, he arued that the movement only illuminated the existence of oppressive structures and neglected to provide a prescription for transformation of the laws that legitimated subordination. CRT was developed in response to the theoretical inadequcies within CLS to address the issue of race as a critical component in the operations of the American society (Delgado, 1995).

The works of Derrick Bell (1987, 1992) primarily established the founding tenets of CRT. Other influential CRT scholars include Alan Freeman (1988), Kimberle Crenshaw (1988, 1997) and Richard Delgado (1995, 2005). CRT has been successfully used as anlalytical framework in non-legal disciplines. The works of Glordia Ladson-Billings (1995, 1998) and William Tate (1995) have been instrumental in advancing the theoretical framework in educational research. Elements of pre-critical race theory can be traced back to the works of W.E.B. DuBois. In *The Souls of Black Folk*, DuBois (1903) provides one of the earliest critical analysis of race in the U.S. He declared that race was the premeire problem of the 20$^{\text{th}}$ century. DuBois suggested that racism was the source of racial inequality in employment, housing and education. Similarly, Carter G. Woodson analyzed the role of race in the education of African Americans. In *The Miseducation of the Negro*, Woodson (1933) argued that African American students were receiving a quality of education that perpetuated infeoritiy ideologies. Based on his analysis, schools were deemed as socializing agents that maintatined racial stratification and inequality.

Relatedly, Martin Delany's (1879) ethnography, *Principia of Ethnology: The Origin of Races and Color,* challenged the dominant ideology of Black inferiority. Delany's counter-narrative chronicled the historical achievements of Africans and created an alternate perspective on issues of race.

CRT's primary tenet posits that racism is conditioned within the American society (Bell, 1992; Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). The pervasiveness of racism in the daily operations of social institutions allows it be perceived as natural. From this primary premise, several principles of CRT emanate. First, the existence of racism – a social construction that uses racial classifications to achieve subservience – negates the artificial creation of equality. This principle is mainly in critique of civil rights laws' ineffectiveness in egendering equality. According to critical race theorists, civil rights' legislation did not remedy racial discrimination (Bell, 2004). In essence, it only addressed overt acts of discrimination by "neutralizing the wrongdoing of the perpetrator" (Drakeford, 2010, p. 113). The core issue of systemic institutional racism and discrimination remain unfazed by litigation efforts. The subtleties of racist practices are woven into the fabric of American culture, therefore *authentic equality* must come from the reform of social institutions (Bell, 1987; Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Second, CRT promotes the notion of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1988; Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). Intersectionality suggests that social and biological categorical identities interact on multiple and simultaneous levels to create systematic forms of oppression which are interrelated (Crenshaw, 1988). In a highly stratified society, the intersection of race, gender and class create multiple realities and outcomes for individuals. Intersectionality theory posits:

Disadvantage or exclusion can be based on the interaction of multiple factors

rather than just one. Yet conventional approaches to social problems are often

organized as though these risk factors are mutually exclusive and separable. As a

consequence, many interventions and policies fail to capture the interactive

effects of race, gender, sexuality, class, etc. and marginalize the needs of those

who are multiply affected by them. (African American Policy Forum, p. 3)

The inclusion of intersectionality allows for other forms of discrimination (sexism,

classism, ageism) to be placed at the center of the analysis.

Third, CRT rejects claims of color-blindness, neutrality and social objectivity.

These hegemonic ideologies mask the existence of oppression and inequality. Value-free

claims suggest that race, gender and other social identities are not inhibitors to equality of

opportunity. These ideologies neglect the historical persistence of racism that is endemic

to American culture. In addition, color-blindness, and similar claims, rationalizes

inequality. Differences in outcome are rationalized as inherent differences in individuals'

abilities (Brown et al., 2003). When color-blind ideology informs public policy

development: (a) the significance of race is devalued, (b) institutionalize racism is

ignored, and (c) there is no analysis of organizational or racialized practices that create or

support racial inequalities (Drakeford, 2010).

Fourth, CRT establishes a commitment to social justice by advocating the

unmasking racism (Bell, 1992). To this end, CRT utilizes the *voice* of those who are

oppressed to create a counter-story to the dominant narrative. Dominant ideologies have

historically marginalized the perspective of the oppressed (Delgado, 1990; Ladson-

Billings, 1998). CRT seeks to illuminate the voices of those silenced through the use of

storytelling and narratives (Russell, 1999).The method of "naming one's reality" brings the perspective of the minority to the center of critical analysis (Delgado, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Critical race theory is an appropriate choice of framework when examining the racialized educational and life outcomes of African American men. CRT recognizes the existence and impact of racism, sexism and classism on the lives' of minorities. A CRT approach allows the researcher to gain an understanding into the lived experiences and perspectives of those most affected by racism and discrimination through interviews and analysis of data that acknowledge the complex implications of race biased policies and their color-blind implementation strategies (Solorzana & Yosso, 2002).

CRT was used to analyze the collected data and develop an interpretative analysis from the perspectives of research participants. CRT encourages a critically conscious process at every stage of research. CRT supports framing interview protocol questions in a manner that explicitly asks how the influence of Reagan's public policies impacted research participants' life trajectory. This allows for rich descriptions of how interactions with the education system, criminal justice system, labor market, family and community positively or adversely impacted participants' life outcomes.

The CRT lens allows for an analysis of the data that acknowledges and examines the complex experiences of African American men who have been historically marginalized by the dominant culture. The counter-narrative method gives voice to those silenced by discrimination and moves their "reality" to the center of discussion on policy development and in the race critical analysis of how those policies influence individuals' life outcomes.

Research Design

A qualitative research approach was chosen to examine the educational and life outcomes of African American who attended high school during the Reagan Administration era. An interpretative case study method framed within the CRT paradigm guided the study (Creswell, 1998, 2003; Ezzy, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Merriam, 1998). Creswell (2003) defines qualitative research as an "inquiry process of understanding based on [the exploration] of a social or human problem" (p. 15). A qualitative research approach allows the researcher to understand and describe social phenomena using rich and thick descriptions (Merriam, 1998).

This qualitative study utilized an interpretive case study method (Creswell, 2003; Merriam, 1998). An interpretive case study presents a detailed account, containing rich, thick descriptions in which the data is used to create conceptual categories (Merriam, 1998). A case study is the exploration of a bounded system – in which the case is bounded by time and place (Creswell, 2003). A case may refer to an individual, a group, or event. In this study, the case investigated was African American males. This case was bounded by time and place in that only African American males who attended high school (place) between 1981 and 1989 (time) were included in the sample. Case studies allot for multiple sources of information (both qualitative and quantitative) to be included in data analysis and interpretation. In addition, case study methodologies provide a "means of investigating complex social units" that include of multiple factors of potential importance in understanding the phenomenon (Merriam, 1998, p. 41). The ultimate goal

of an interpretive case study is an analysis that yields thick description of the case as evident by themes that support or illustrate theoretical assumptions (Merriam, 1998).

Multiple data sources are used as a triangulation strategy (Creswell, 2003). Interviews, policy review (including federal fiscal-year budgets and Reagan Administration briefs) and the literature review inform the study. These data provide context for the larger analysis of research participants' interviews. Creswell (2003) contends that concurrent triangulation strategy "offset[s] the weakness inherent within one method with the strengths of the other method" (p. 217).

Participants

Purposive criterion sampling is a sampling technique in which research participants are selected based on their ability to provide information relevant to the case (Patten, 2007). Purposive criterion sampling was used to ensure the selection of "information-rich cases for study in-depth" (Patton, 2002, p. 46). Direct recruitment was used to locate participants for the study. Recruitment letters were distributed to individuals who fit the sample criterion and to individuals who had professional or personal access to men who fit the criterion. Recruitment letters were also distributed at local churches, community colleges, and African American fraternity organizations. This study does not represent a national sampling. Recruitment efforts were limited to southeastern and northeastern states. African American males who were adolescents and/or teenagers between 1981 and 1989 were identified as information-rich in regards to describing their educational and life experiences in relation to the implementation of the Reagan Administration's policies. In addition to purposive criterion sampling, referral sampling (also known as snowball sampling) was used to garner an adequate selection of

potential participants who fit the criterion. This sampling technique involves identified participants locating other participants who are "information-rich" in the research topic (Creswell, 1998).

The desired sample size for the study was 8 – 12 participants. This range was selected on the basis that this sample size would provide a sufficient amount of data to reach saturation based on the scope of the study (Creswell, 1998). Creswell (1998) contends that sample sizes of five to 25 are acceptable in qualitative research. Participant recruitment efforts garnered 10 participants who fit the criteria and were available to participate throughout the entire study. Each participant was asked to sign a disclosure statement to acknowledge that he was (a) an African American man who (b) attended high school in the United States between 1981 and 1989. There were specific reasons for selecting the participants based on the sample criteria. First, the criterion of having had attended high school between 1981 and 1989 was chosen because it represents the time period of investigation. Second, teenagers (14 -18) demonstrate more autonomy in decision-making. As such, students at this level may be more cognizant of how their choices and experiences are influenced by outside factors such as public policy. Third, high school is the time period when most students begin to make significant life decisions that are directly and indirectly influenced by public policy. As with all qualitative research, the study is reflective in nature. There is a time elapse of thirty years or more between when I interviewed participants and the case of investigation. Therefore, the study acknowledges that the participants' accounts of their experiences are social constructions which may or may not have been influenced by other social phenomena and outcomes experienced after the period of investigation.

Data Collection

Initial Interviews

After receiving approval from the Internal Review Board (IRB), I began the data

collection process. Primary data was collected by semi-structured interviews. Participants

were interviewed twice throughout the study. The initial interviews were conducted using

the initial interview protocol (Appendix A). The protocol was piloted with fellow

doctoral students to improve clarity of the questions. Using a CRT paradigm allowed me

to frame the interview protocol questions in a manner that explicitly asked how the

influence of Reagan's public policies impacted research participants' life trajectory. The

interview protocol provides structure and organization to research participants'

experiences and thoughts. Participants were interviewed individually in person and by

phone. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for data analysis

and member-checking. I also took notes during the interviews. Initial interviews were

between 60 to 90 minutes.

Follow-up Interviews

Follow-up interviews were conducted with participants three-to-four weeks after

the initial interview. Prior to the follow-up interview, participants were mailed or emailed

their initial interview transcription. The follow-up interview provided participants the

opportunity to verify the accuracy of their responses from the initial interview and

provide their insight as a basis for my initial interpretations of the findings. An interview

protocol was used to conduct the follow-up interviews (Appendix B). Additional

questions were asked to participants on an individual basis based on questions that may

have been formed after analyzing their initial interview data. Follow-up interviews were

between 30 to 45 minutes and were audio recorded for data analysis. Conducting a second interview strengthened my understanding of participants' experiences and outcomes and afforded me with the opportunity to follow-up on themes that emerged from the initial data analysis (Stage & Manning, 2003).

<div align="center">Data Analysis</div>

Data analysis is a continuous process that begins during data collection (Creswell, 2003; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Constant-Comparative analysis technique was used to create and categorize emerging themes (Ezzy, 2002; Glesne, 2006). This data analysis technique entails constantly comparing newly collected data to the emerging categorical themes (Creswell, 1998). This method allows for continual review and reinterpretation of the data as it is collected throughout the study.

Constant-Comparative analysis was achieved through coding. Coding is the process of sorting data into themes that are germane to the research focus (Glense, 2006). Coding allowed for the creation of an organizational framework design that is guided by the theoretical underpinnings of the study. The data was coded to develop prevalent categories and thematic concepts (Creswell, 1998; Ezzy, 2004; Merriam, 1998). The data underwent two coding procedures: open coding (also known as initial coding) and axial coding (Creswell, 1998).

The initial data collection process entailed reviewing the interview transcripts and interviewer's notes. Utilizing line-by-line coding, I developed initial categories pertaining to the influence of the Reagan Administration's neoconservative education and public policies on African American males' educational and life experiences by highlighting significant words and lines. A second coding process was then conducted that used the

initial categories to create thematic categories driven by theoretical constructs in respect to the central phenomenon (education experiences and life outcomes of African American males) (Creswell, 1998). This type of coding resulted in an exploration of conditions (types of conditions that influence the phenomenon); strategies (action that are result from the phenomenon); context and intervening conditions; and consequences of the overall phenomenon at the center of the study (Creswell, 2003). Categories and emerging themes were then constantly compared culminating in primary themes that depicted the case of inquiry.

I used CRT to frame my analysis of the data. As such, I examined the interview data and the emergent themes from a position that placed the participants' race and gender at the center of the analysis. I not only looked for ways in which the data told a story of the participants' experiences as influenced by neoconservative policies, but how their identity as African American men uniquely influenced their educational and life outcomes as well. CRT provided the framework in which to analyze and re-present the findings in such a way that elevated the voice of participants through the rich, thick descriptions found within their counter-narrative.

<div align="center">Trustworthiness</div>

In qualitative research, trustworthiness refers to the credibility of the findings (Glense, 2006). Creswell (2003) puts forth eight verification procedures to ensure validity:

1. Prolonged engagement and persistent observation
2. Triangulation
3. Peer Review
4. Negative case analysis
5. Clarification of researcher bias

    6. Member checking
    7. Rich, thick descriptions
    8. External audit
(Creswell, 2003, 196)

This study utilized four of Creswell's verification procedures. Validity was established through triangulation (Creswell, 2003). The primary purpose of data triangulation is to strengthen the study's credibility by analyzing the research topic from multiple perspectives (Glense, 2006). Data from multiple sources including interviews and policy review was compared for consistency of information.

Clarification of the researcher's bias requires the research to recognize his or her subjectivity and how it may influence data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2003). In qualitative research, the researcher is the main data instrument. Consequently, it is not possible to fully separate my personal beliefs and understandings from my role as a researcher. Reflexivity practices allowed me to acknowledge how my experiences, beliefs and backgrounds influenced data collection, analysis and interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Throughout the research process, I constantly reflected upon my subjectivity through memo-taking and reflexive journaling. Through these activities, I recorded my personal thoughts regarding the data and addressed potential bias (Glense, 2006).

The primary distinction of qualitative research from quantitative research is the presentation of thick, rich descriptions of participants' experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Thick descriptions that accurately depict the investigated phenomenon help the reader to draw conclusions on the credibility and transferability of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I used the transcribed interviews to provide distinct perspectives of the

participants. By using the research participants' narratives, I was able to present a detailed description of the case and the context surrounding each participant's experience.

Validity was also established through member checks. Member-checking is when data, emergent categories and themes, interpretations and conclusions are reviewed with members from the group of which the data were obtained (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that member checking is one of the most imperative processes to maintaining and establishing credibility. Member checks provide research participants with the opportunity to:

- Validate the accuracy of their responses
- Challenge initial interpretations
- Provide their own interpretations of the data
- Provide additional information

Participants were provided with transcripts of their responses and briefed on initial emergent themes and interpretations. During the second interview, participants were asked to verify the accuracy of their responses and note the need for any corrections. Research participants also had the opportunity to provide their own interpretation of the data and findings.

In order to establish dependability, I also developed an audit trail. An audit trail is a transparent account of the research process and the steps taken from data collection to reporting of findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For this study, the audit trail included interview data, data synthesis notes (codes and themes), researcher's notes and reflexive journal, and interview protocols. In this chapter, I provided a detailed description of the study's method which may be used as a guide for those interested in replicating the study.

Subjectivity Statement

In qualitative research, it is imperative that researchers be aware of his or her bias, background and experiences in relation to the context of the study (Creswell, 2003). My decision to examine the educational and life outcomes of young African American males in relation to 1980s public policy was influenced by my professional background in education. As a teacher at an urban high school, I witnessed the academic successes and shortcomings of many African American male students. Each school year, I taught one remedial English class. After a few years, I began to notice a pattern in that class' demographic. The majority of my students in the remedial class were African American males. These students were talented and bright. Yet, they encountered barriers that made maneuvering through the process of schooling difficult. State education policies such as mandatory computer-testing, graduation-exit exams and federal policies such as No Child Left Behind presented formidable barriers to their educational attainment. Other students confided that their interactions with the criminal justice system were a major obstacle inhibiting them from achieving the type of educational outcomes they desired. From these observations, I began to question how the policies and practices in schools and other social institutions negatively impact minority males. During the course of my graduate research on urban schools and African American males', one time period was repeatedly referenced as a cultural turning point in American history – the 1980s.

Educational researchers, sociologists, economists, medical pundits, and criminologists all note significant changes in their respective disciplines during the 1980s. Public schools were defined as in *crisis*; Black men were labeled *endangered*; the turbulent economy created extreme poverty among the indigent and unprecedented

wealth among the influent; HIV/AIDS and drug addiction were presented as issues of morality; and U.S. citizens lost their freedom to incarceration at rates higher than any other country. Therefore, my interests in education and public policy from this era and its influence on African American men grew from my previous academic studies.

As an African American woman, my experiences and interactions with social institutions are different from that of my targeted research population. I attended public schools and grew up in small, rural towns. By most measures, my two-parent home would have been considered middle-class. I lived in high, racially-segregated neighborhoods, but attended high racially-integrated schools. No educational or public policy restricted my college or career choices. However, my position within the academic and African American community has allowed me to observe the experiences of others whose lives have been highly impacted by public policies. From these observations, I have formed beliefs about the purpose, effectiveness and influence of certain public policies. I believe that the structure of the legislative system creates a process by which policy is designed and implemented by a sub-population that is markedly different from the general public to whom the policy applies. I believe that, in some instances, this results in latent consequences that adversely affect populations with less political authority. I contend that policymakers and educators should consider the influence of race, gender, socioeconomic status and the corresponding discriminations when developing policy. My beliefs and experiences add bias to the research. However, awareness of these potential biases allows me to bracket my subjectivity during data collection and analysis.

Summary

In summation, this study uses a qualitative research approach. An interpretative case study method is used to explore the influence of Reagan's Administration's neoconservative education and public policies on African American males' educational experiences and life outcomes. Data was collected via interviews, policy document review and review of the literature. A constant-comparative technique was implemented for data analysis. From initial coding and axial coding, primary categories and themes emerged. Organization and interpretation of the categorical themes allowed for thick and rich descriptions of the research participants' responses. Validity was established and maintained through triangulation, member checking, clarification of researcher's bias, and use of rich, thick descriptions.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This study explored the perspectives of African American males' regarding the influence of the Ronald Reagan Administration's [1981-1989] neoconservative public policies on their educational and life outcomes. It specifically aimed to capture the experiences of African American males during the period of their secondary schooling years (high school) and thereafter. The study was designed to produce narratives centered on three primary outcomes: education, employment, criminal justice system interactions. Chapter four presents the findings from the study. The findings are categorized based on the focus of the research question:

> What influence did the implementation of Ronald Reagan Administration's neoconservative public policies have on the educational, employment and criminal justice sytem experiences and outcomes of African American males who attended high school during the Reagan era [1981 – 1989]?

Themes were formed based on the interview data collected. These themes specifically highlight the participants' lived experiences as teens and young adults as it relates to education, career aspirations and criminal justice interactions during the Reagan Administration era [1981-1989].

In part one of this chapter I introduce the 10 participants. Table 2 provides a brief demographic introduction of each participant. An in-depth description of the participants

provide the reader with a context in which the narratives of their experiences can be placed. The study included ten African American males who attended high school between 1981 and 1989. The sample of study participants is diverse in both demographic characteristics and personal experiences.

In part two of the chapter, I present four major themes that emerged from the findings. The findings are presented utilizing a critical race theory framework. CRT allowed me to ground the analysis of the narratives within the assumption that their intersectionality of race and gender impacted their experiences within social institutions. Through constant-comparative analysis, data was organized into categories based on the research question which allowed for themes to emerge that highlighted the shared experiences of participants. By comparing the interview narratives of participants to newly collected narratives, I was able to identify overlapping responses and construct themes that portrayed the common experiences of participants. The themes represent the lived experiences and educational and life outcomes of the African American male participants in this study. The four themes that emerged are:

1). Systems of Support vs. Institutional Racism
2). Post-High School Aspirations: Getting a Job; Joining the Service; or Going to College
3). Dealing with the Criminal Justice System
4). Attitudes and Perspectives on Life Outcomes

Part I: Participants

Table 2: African American male participants' demographics

Name	H.S. graduating class (cohort year)	Region/Sate (where participant attended high school)	Family's socio-economic background	Education level	Occupation field
Brian	c/o 1987	Urban, Central - Southeastern state	Low-income	High school diploma	Construction
Ricky	c/o 1987	Rural, Southeastern	Mid-middle class	High school diploma	Armed Services/ Self-employed
Orlando	c/o 1992	Urban, Central - Southeastern state	Lower - middle class	GED	Service sector
Tyquan	c/o 1981	Urban, Central-Southeastern state	Working class	High school diploma	Armed services/ Manufacturing
Jalen	c/o 1982	Rural, Southeastern state	Working class	Bachelors	Retired (Corrections)
Corban	c/o 1992	Rural, Southeastern state	Working class	Master's	Education
Joe	c/o 1988	Suburban, Northeastern	Middle class	Master's	Education
Jordan	c/o 1992	Rural, Southeastern state	Low-income	Bachelor	Education
Tony	c/o 1984	Suburban, Northeastern state	Middle class	Master's	Education
Charles	c/o 1988	Urban, Central-Southeastern state	Low-income	8th grade	Service Sector

Table 2 summarizes the demographic characteristics of selected participants.

Brian

"As you get out of high school, you start working and stuff, the dream of going to college and furthering your education, that fell farther and farther back on the back burner as you push harder and harder to try to start a life and take care of bills and your family and stuff."

Brian is a 44-year-old African American male from an urban city in a central-southeastern state. He grew up in a two-parent home in project housing. Brian was the third oldest of four children and described his family as close-knit. He noted the racial demographics of his neighborhood as majority White, which he later noted was a point of strife growing up.

> It was kind of hard being black in the neighborhood because there was a lot of white people that didn't want blacks living there. It was more cool during the daytime, but in the night time, you had the fighting if you got caught out after dark.

According to Brian, there were not many activities for kids outside of parks and this meant that he and his friends were responsible for entertaining themselves. Even with the racial unrest and lack of community activities, Brian suggested that his neighborhood was a fairly good place to grow up because of the diversity of people. Brian did not attend the neighborhood high school. Due to the busing integration initiative in his city, Brian attended a magnet school on the other side of town. In contrast to the teachers at the neighborhood schools, Brian suggested that teachers at his school were nice, hands-on and "really tried to teach." He stated that he liked school – particularly art and gym- but that college was only an afterthought connected to the idea of running track. The lack of financial resources and access to college prep classes were major factors in his decision to not go to college.

After graduating high school in 1987, Brian entered the workforce. He worked a variety of jobs within the service sector from security guard to short-order cook before finding employment in the construction field. Brian identified racism as a major barrier in finding employment.

I've seen some jobs, they wouldn't hire you just because of where you lived or where you came from. It was more or less if you come from the inner cities, like from certain neighborhoods and you put that on your resume, they'll treat you as if you had a felony or you'll kill somebody. You don't want this and that, and they'll try to use some excuse, talking about, "Well, we'll need you to go here and go there," which you can do everything they want you to do, but they're just trying to find something other than saying you're the wrong color or you come from the wrong neck of the woods.

Brian served a year in prison for attempted assault with a weapon. He denies having committed this crime and expressed that the criminal justice system is set up to take advantage of those who are poor and do not know the law.

Either you've got the money to fight for it, or if you don't have the money to fight for it, you don't have no money for the lawyer to fight for it, they're going to railroad you. … so I opted out for a year for something that I didn't do. That's how they end up getting the justice system filled up and backed up around here.

Brian indicated that he regrets not going to college. He expressed that not having a college degree has limited his career options and employment stability.

If I had the opportunities that most of them got nowadays, I probably would be in a Fortune 500 company by now or something… Me and this one guy were applying for the same position. He never had no work experience in the position we're applying for, but I did. I had years of experience, but by him having a college degree and me not having one, he got the job and I didn't. It was a big deal, when it comes to that furthering the education.

Ricky

Why go to a job where somebody's enslaving you and you can get out here hustling and make the same amount of money, or more money, you know?... I was young and I was dealing and I was worrying about making money. I didn't know nothing about 401(k) and profit sharing and getting yourself set up for retirement.

Ricky is a 44-year-old African American male from a rural town in a southeastern state. Ricky grew up in a single-parent home in a farming community. He described his neighborhood as close-knit and comprised mostly of family members. Although he was

the oldest of six children, he self-reported that he was very "spoiled" by members of his

extended family. School was a second home. The majority of his teachers were his aunts

and cousins, and his maternal and paternal grandmothers were the head cafeteria cooks at

his elementary and middle school respectively. Ricky reported that school "came easy" to

him, yet he avoided advanced courses and going to college.

> When I was in middle school, they wanted to skip me from 5th
> grade to 7th grade because I always doing my work quickly,
> but in the summertime, sometimes I would get my aunties to
> call me. They had a lot of school paperwork they wanted me
> to help them go over, grade paperwork and whatnot…
> My aunties bought me a computer. I had got a computer and an
> encyclopedia, all kinds of books. I was just interested in
> this. I don't know why I didn't go to school.

He graduated high school in 1987. According to Ricky, his decision to forgo

college was explicitly tied to his desire to "get away from all the country shit," and make

money. Interestingly, Ricky's narrative revealed that this same mantra guided many of his

major life choices including joining the U.S. Army and selling drugs.

Ricky described most of his life experiences through a cost-benefit analysis. He

remarked that he would have made the military a career but that the risk of losing his life

during his deployment for Operation Desert Storm and Desert Shield was not worth his

meager salary. Ricky reported that after returning from Iraq, he began to sell crack

cocaine and marijuana. According to Ricky, he made more money in a week from selling

drugs than he did at his full-time manufacturing job. However, given the stringency of the

Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988 that stipulated longer minimum mandatory sentencing for

crack cocaine possession, Ricky decided that the benefit no longer outweighed the cost.

> It [crack cocaine] was so much, man, and it was so good and cheap. It was stupid
> money. It was just stupid money, man…You know, once you found out the

stiffness of the penalties and stuff, then it's retarded to even get yourself caught up with it. You've got to be smarter than that, you know?

Ricky reported that he never served a prison sentence for his involvement in drug dealing. He also stated that while racism was prevalent in his rural southern area, that if one "knew where to go and who to talk to" it [racism] did not impact you much.

Orlando

It used to be prison was about actually trying to make a better person to go back into society. It's not about that anymore. It's about punishment. You're here to do your time, period.

Orlando is a 38-year-old African American male from an urban city in a central-southeastern state. He grew up in a two-parent, lower-middle class home with one sister. Orlando described his neighborhood as diverse with both African American and White residents. However, he described his school environment as being comprised mainly of African American students. Orlando explains that his parents did not play a major role in his academics. According to Orlando, his mother, a business owner, and father, a minster, were more concerned with his conduct which was a constant point of contention in his school and home life. He often expressed that school was never difficult for him. In fact, Orlando claimed it was "too easy" and that his boredom with the curriculum was the source of his mischief.

> Academics wasn't a problem for me. It was actually too easy. I guess my main problem, when I was in high school, in middle school or any other grade was my conduct. Because I finished my schoolwork so fast, I just had time to kill. … when I was in middle school, they placed me in an advanced class. I think I was in the 7th grade, and they had just started a program and they placed me in it where I was taking Algebra II and Pre-Calculus and French classes and stuff like that, when I was in the 7th grade. That didn't last too long because of my conduct, because of my attitude.

Orlando excelled in sports and received letters of interest from colleges and universities for track, basketball and football. By the time Orlando reached high school, sports were the only thing keeping him engaged with school. Orlando would have been a part of the high school graduating class of 1993; however, he dropped out of high school during his junior year. Orlando cited "problems at home" as his main reason for dropping out. Although later he self-admitted that his issues with authority figures and control were the primary underlying forces. After earning his G.E.D. at Job Corps (a federally funded, alternative education program for youth and young adults 16-24), Orlando's issue with authority eventually led to extensive involvement with the criminal justice system. Between the ages of 19 and 37, Orlando spent 17 years in jail and/or prison for an array of robbery charges from basic to aggravated robbery and kidnapping. Orlando claimed full responsibility for his actions that led to incarceration. He stated, "It was just me, the choices that I made, my own decisions, the addictions that I had."

He self-reported that he came from a household that valued hard-work and industriousness and was well-connected to the community. Interestingly, Orlando believed that being exposed to those values and opportunities separated him from his peers.

> Like I said, because of the household that I was in with my father being a minister and my mother being a businesswoman. They knew different people. I was one of the more fortunate ones growing up. Now, we didn't have a lot. Our family didn't have a lot, but as far as my mental capabilities, I was beyond my peers.

Furthermore, Orlando noted that crime and drugs were visible in certain parts of his community, but that was not something that he was involved in as a youth.

> I'm not saying that it wasn't in my community. It was just me, myself, my focus was on something totally different. I had friends that did what they

did, but that was them. It wasn't me. I had friends that sold them, I had
friends that did them and whatnot, but at that particular time in my
life, that just was not me. I was strictly focused on playing sports, trying to
get to the next level that way. That was just my mentality, but it was there.
I've seen it, every day, but it just wasn't me.

Tyquan

*For me, it was being scared of going to jail and having small children
that I had to take care of and feed and clothe and make sure they had a Christmas. I
chose to work instead of taking an opportunity on being killed or imprisoned or maimed
for the rest of my life and not be able to be a part of my children's lives. I just chose to
work.*

Tyquan is a 49-year-old African American male from an urban city in a central-

southeastern state. He grew up in a single-parent home with his mother and two older

siblings in the projects. Tyquan's parents divorced when he was a young child, but his

father was present in his life. According to Tyquan, having household responsibilities and

a solid family structure built his work ethic – a trait many of his peers lacked. His

neighborhood was predominantly African American and low-income.

According to Tyquan, his educational experiences were mired by the presence of

overt racism and discrimination. He graduated high school in 1981. Tyquan attended high

school during the start of his city's school integration initiative. As such, he was bussed

from the inner city (which was a majority African American population) to schools in the

"county" (which was the rural area on the outskirts of the city with a majority White

population). Tyquan attended three different high schools as a result of 1) redistricting

and 2) his reaction to encounters with teachers and students who he identified as racists.

Ironically and sadly, Tyquan attributed his experiences with school integration as the

primary cause of his distrust of White people.

They had the Ku Klux Klan marching out there, while we're

in school. …It was a rough situation, which eventually turned
volatile. …Not only would the white people spit on us and spit at us
and throw rocks, but also the blacks thought that they were
better than the people that was coming from the urban area.

Well, what it did is it taught me to be prejudiced towards people of
light skin, light-skin people, White people. I hadn't been taught
that and that was my introduction to discrimination, when they
integrated the schools.

There was one guy in particular that spit at our bus when I
was going to the bus…and I always remembered that I was
going to get him. I went to the school my first year, which was the ninth
grade, and I didn't say anything to him, didn't even remind him that he spit
on our bus and it hit me when it came through the window. I was running
cross-country, and I was getting ready to go out and practice, and he
approached me and started saying things that I didn't want to hear,
so I beat him up. I told him that's for spitting on me when he was coming
down the street and on the bus.

Tyquan's family did not emphasize going to college, but his athletic ability earned him a

partial football scholarship to a local university in his city. However, Tyquan noted that

his family's financial struggles prompted him to dropout of school and find a way to help

support his mother and two sisters. He joined the U.S. Air Force and served for five

years. He credited his time in the military overseas as a major deterrent that kept him

away from the "pitfalls" that many of his African American male peers fell victim to such

as drugs and crime.

After leaving the Air Force, Tyquan worked an array of odd jobs from factory

work to insurance sales. He expressed that well-paying jobs were often moved from the

city to rural parts of the county which made applying for those positions difficult for

African American males in the inner city. Tyquan often referred to his strong work-ethic

and sense of responsibility as a key factor in his determination to find a good job. Tyquan

ultimately ended up securing a job with a major car manufacturer before retiring due to physical disability.

Jalen

I think just because a person makes a mistake, they shouldn't be held for it all their life, you know? That's the way it is with the Blacks, period - mostly Black males. It's like they want to keep the Black male under their thumb with some of these policies of keeping them in poverty because that's what it does.

Jalen is a 50-year-old African American male from a small rural town in a southeastern state. He grew up in a two-parent home with five brothers and two sisters. Jalen is the fourth oldest child and the first to go to college in his family. He described his family as middle-class, as both his mother and father worked outside of the home. The family profession was commercial fishing. Jalen commented that neither he nor his siblings were strangers to hard work. They often helped their uncles on the docks and in the tobacco fields. He described his neighborhood as a "village" of caring adults that looked out for one another. Jalen grew up in a strict household with parents that held him and his sibling to high expectations.

Jalen criticized the lack of education and job opportunities outside of agriculture in his community. The lack of such resources led many of his family members, siblings, and peers to choose a career in the Armed Forces – a path he almost selected as well.

> I was not intending to go to college because my other three brothers went into the United States military, so that's what I wanted to do. But my mom started to mention that I had three sons that could have went to college, blasé, blasé, so she made me feel bad and then I ended up going to college.

Jalen described his overall high school experience as good, even though there were a few incidents of discord between the African American and White students. Jalen noted that most of his teachers were African Americans from the community who had attended

local historically black colleges/universities (HBCU). While Jalen did not particularly

take an interest in math and science, he excelled in athletics and music. He was a member

of the marching band and played baseball, basketball and football. Jalen's athletic ability

earned him a football scholarship to a HBCU in North Carolina. However, Jalen stated

that his lack of academic achievement prevented him from accepting college offers at

larger, predominantly white institutions (PWIs). Jalen graduated high school in 1982.

Jalen earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Criminal Justice and immediately took a

position with the state department of corrections in 1986. Jalen recalled noticing the

changes in the prison demographics during the late 1980s and the frequency of

convictions among African American males. Jalen commented:

> During that era, I think for blacks, me as being a Black male, working in the
> Department of Corrections, as I read their charts as they came in, I would say
> eight out of ten of them came in for drugs.

Jalen recently retired from the state department of corrections and now works with youth

enrolled in behavior treatment programs.

Corban

*"You're a dreamer," and my parents never told me I couldn't be something. I would have
some crazy dreams, becoming this and that. "I want to be a magician. I want to be an
astronaut. I want to be Batman," just wild stuff. They never told me I couldn't. Actually,
Spiderman was the first thing I wanted to be, and they were like, "Okay, alright." Never
once did they say, "Boy, you can't be Spiderman."*

Corban is a 39-year-old African American male from a rural town in a

Southeastern state. He grew up in a working class, two-parent home with two brothers.

Corban is the second oldest child and the first one in his immediate family to attend

college. He referred to his town as fairly integrated, but that traces of racism were still

deeply embedded within the community's structures. Corban's family was the only

residents who were not related to members of the community.

> Everyone in that neighborhood, they were either related – we were the
> outsiders in that neighborhood. We were the only folks who were not
> related to anybody… Everyone was cousins with somebody else and
> their uncle, something crazy like that, but we were just the
> Jones family, but everybody got along.

Corban reported that his father worked hard at a local textile plant to provide for his

family and that his mother ensured that he stayed ahead of the game in school.

As a child, Corban enjoyed reading and learning about new things. His parents

encouraged his curiosity and passion for education. Corban fondly recalled his parents

buying him a set of encyclopedias. Corban commented:

> I was the guy who would see something on television and want to learn
> more about it… they loved that I would ask them to take me to the
> library… My parents really encouraged me to keep doing that,
> and school in general.

.

He excelled academically and was the only African American student in his

school in the gifted and advanced placement courses. According to Corban, he had a few

teachers that discriminated against him because he was African American. However, his

mom and aunt were vocal in getting Corban access to academic opportunities.

Corban commented that his neighborhood was fairly safe and that crime was not

an issue until high school. "You'd hear about a lot of people getting shot

when I was a freshman. I was in the tenth grade, when the first person

got killed, and then it started going from there." He reported that more and more

of his peers were getting involved with selling drugs, but that he and his close

friends were shielded from much of that lifestyle.

I ran with the athletes. We had dreams of getting out of Lampton, you know? That
was really it. You got out of there. That was the
goal, to get out of Lampton. … just early on, I had the pushing
in my head that I was going to college. "Don't get stuck here in
Lampton. There's more for you out there. "You're a dreamer."

Corban looked up to his older brother, the "cool" athlete, and aspired to be just like him

from playing football to joining the Armed Forces. However, Corban jokingly noted that

his parents had a different plan for him.

My brother, he was all sports and all-neighborhood. He was
like, "Whatever," and I was the geek … He didn't do
everything he was supposed to. He wanted to go to North Carolina
A. & T. They told him that he needed to go to a junior college or
community college before coming there. He decided to go into the
military… I mentioned something about the Marines one time, and
they [parents] killed me on that one. It was a given. I would have been the
first [to go to college], and I was, so that was a done deal.

Corban graduated high school in 1992 and attended a private HBCU. Although he

received a small academic scholarship, the lack of finances was a major concern for

Corban. He worked part-time and earned a scholarship spot on the university's football

team to help pay for school. After graduating with a degree in Computer Science in 1996,

Corban entered the corporate sector. He stated that pay was great, but the work was

ultimately unfulfilling. "I made a lot of money, but I wasn't happy. I knew I should have

been a teacher." He quit his position in IT and became a teacher. He currently is an

education administrator.

Joe

I remember the first college I went to - the day I was leaving, my mom was trying to give
me advice. My dad was saying, "I don't know why you're telling him all that. He ain't
going to listen." And he was right.

Joe is a 43-year old African American male from a suburban area outside of a metropolitan area in a northeastern state. He grew up in a middle-class home with his mother, father and four siblings; however, Joe remarked that his father worked so much that it was like he lived in a single-parent home. He described his neighborhood as a predominately White, Jewish community. Joe and his family were the only African Americans on the block. He referred to his neighborhood as a safe environment and stated that he got along with the kids in the community. Joe self-described himself as a "troubled teen." He stated that much of his high school career is a blur due to his addiction to alcohol and frequent truancy.

> I don't remember anything about high school, either. High school,
> I was horrible. I was a skipper, I was a drinker, a smoker. I was
> in trouble a lot. I was suspended. I was in AA when I was in
> tenth grade. I was locked up when I was in tenth grade. I was a
> troubled teenager.

As a teen and young adult, Joe was arrested multiple times for disorderly conduct to theft auto. Joe never revealed the motivation behind his actions as a teen. He placed the blame on himself for his lack of focus in school and brushes with the law. Interestingly, none of Joe's arrested resulted in convictions or prison sentences.

Joe declared that he never liked anything about school, but managed to graduate high school with his cohort in 1988. College was not an immediate aspiration of his. After graduation he attended a university in the Midwest for 3 semesters before transferring to a community college in his home state. Joe attended a total of eight colleges and universities before graduating from a HBCU in Florida and entering a career in education. In between his college stints, he joined the U.S. Army. He was discharged after a few weeks for having active outstanding warrants.

Joe expressed that there wasn't any type of epiphany that made him change the course of his life other than he was ready to "buckle down."

> It was so hot, the sun woke me up. I was just lying in bed, sweating… At the time, I had a whole bunch of stolen phone cards, and so I called a bunch of colleges, historical Black colleges. I called all of them, had them send me applications and financial aid and stuff, and I filled them out and sent them away to see who would accept me. And I got accepted by quite a few. That was the turning point, but I did good from that point on.

Jordan

I loved my classes, all that, because we knew what we had to do. Basically, my mom, she wasn't really strict on me, but I guess it was something in me that said, "Yo, you need to do what you need to do."

Jordan is a 39-year-old African American male from a rural town in a southeastern state. He grew up in a single-parent home with his mom and sister in what he described as the projects. As a young child, Jordan was in foster care before being adopted by his mom. According to Jordan, the only aspect he liked about school was sports and hanging with friends. Jordan always earned good grades – a task he said was very simple once you learned the system.

> They would go from page one to the end of the book, and a lot of times, I was like, "I'm smart," so I would just take the book, read it, look a couple of pages ahead, go into class the next day, I know what I'm doing.

Jordan also used sports as an extrinsic motivator to stay in school. Jordan took advantage of the JTPA summer jobs and credited those programs for helping to establish his work ethic. He also credited summer employment, sports and programs such as "Scared Straight" for helping him stay away from the crime and drugs that some of his classmates chose to partake in.

> Some of the guys that I grew up with, they were breaking into people's houses, stealing different things, but never in our neighborhood. It [drugs] wasn't really a

big thing. You'd hear about marijuana, you'd hear about pot – they called it reefer. You'd heard about it, but we've never really seen it. We didn't care about it. We didn't think about it.

Jordan's father was not an active part of his life after his parents' divorced. However, throughout the interview he referenced several African American men who were key role models in his life. Jordan's uncle, a U.S. Marine, took a special interest in his academics.

My uncle was a big influence on me, because he always asked me – more so than my mom did, "How's your grades? How are you looking? Your report cards are good, I'm going to get you something," stuff like that, and "Man, I'm proud of you." To me, that was a big deal, and I did that for him, because I didn't want to let him down.

Jordan was set to go into the military until another African American male role model intervened as well – his high school counselor and basketball coach.

Coach Johnson had told me he went to Johnson C. Smith and he was a Kappa and he was talking to me about different things, so he kind of pushed me.

Jordan graduated high school in 1992 with an academic and athletic scholarship to a private HBCU in North Carolina. After graduating from college with a degree in education, Jordan earned a temporary spot on a NBA team. When his contract was not extended, his former counselor from high school reached out to him with a career opportunity. Jordan returned to his home state and took a position as a middle school teacher. Jordan expressed that his education positively impacted his life. He stated that having a degree has provided opportunities and job stability that his peers don't have.

I have a good friend of mine; he and I grew up together. We still hang out all the time. Basically in high school, we used to hang out. He didn't go to college. He didn't really do anything. He started working out in a plant, and a lot of times, I was jealous. He was making money and I was in college. I said, "Dang, he makes more money," making about the same as me when I first started teaching, too. I was like, "Dang, he's still making as much as I do." But now he's unemployed.

…It was hard for him to find a job, and he doesn't have any skills. Whereas, for example, he was asking me if I'd seen any jobs, and I was like no. I told him about this other job that's dealing with computers, and he was like, "Man, I don't know much about computers." That kind of hindered him.

He's lost, because all he knew was that plant, and he's been doing that for about twelve years, before they let him go. Now, it's like you're in prison. Then you get out of prison and you're lost from the world. His educational level is behind, his technology level is behind, so I think it affects him greatly now.

Jordan stated that he enjoys being a teacher and that his experiences have helped him better understand and reach the young African American males he teaches.

Tony

Going to college was the norm not the exception in our family. It was understood. "You are going to college." Everyone in my clique thought the same way. We all knew we were going college.

Tony is a 47-year-old African American male from a suburban area in a northeastern state. He is from a middle class background and grew up in a two-parent home with his two sisters and brother. Tony described his neighborhood as a diverse, working class community. He attended a local performing arts school, which he stated was well funded due to the more affluent surrounding areas in his city. Tony reported that he enjoyed going to school and that his involvement with sports and the arts allowed him to meet a lot of "characters." He recalled that most of the teachers were White and from outside of the community. Tony expressed that this led to many of them holding unfounded stereotypes about their African American students. Tony's parents were very active in his academic life. His father, a community activist, and mother, a homemaker, were vocal in ensuring that Tony received access to a quality education.

Yes in my 8th grade social studies class. I did very well in the class. I made A's and going in to 9th grade, they only selected top students to be in the 9th grade Honors social studies class. And for whatever reason I wasn't chosen to be in the

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class. I knew it wasn't right that they didn't pick me. I went home and told my parents what happened. They were at the school the next day asking why I wasn't selected for the class. Needless to say they let me in the class after that. But after that, I didn't want to be in the class anymore. So I never enrolled in it. I just wanted them to know that I was good enough and belonged there.

Tony recalled that he and his peers competed with each other academically. His close-knit group of friends made a pact to push one another to be better. This also meant making wise choices when it came to crime and drugs. Tony saw first-hand how hanging with the wrong crowd could negatively impact "your life" as he referenced the experiences of his older brother who ended up going to prison. Tony graduated from high school in 1984 and then attended a private liberal arts college in the Midwest. Paying for college was a major issue for Tony and his family. "Putting money together for that was a real challenge. But with partial scholarships, my parents and loans, I made it through." Tony transitioned straight from college to his career in education as a teacher. He credited his longevity in the workforce to his educational background.

> When I graduated, I taught social studies for two years at a private school in Ohio. After that I continued teaching in Maryland, then NY and NC. My educational attainment, especially my background in special education has put me in high demand in the work field. I've lived in 3 different states and always had a job waiting for me before I arrived. I can say in that way having a college education has benefited me. Employment has never been an issue.

Charles

A lot of the stuff that you do and get away with at home or whatever your home life is, the things going on at home really affected my school life and my mentality in school. Had I been set up maybe better, under better circumstances at home, I might have been able to be a better student in school.

Charles is a 43-year-old African American male from an urban city in a central-southeastern state. He grew up in a low-income, single-parent home with his mother, brother and three sisters. Charles expressed that his childhood was not always smooth. He

and his younger sister worked to bring in extra income to help their mother. Charles

described himself as a rebellious child. His mischief in school often led to detention and

corporal punishments. As the oldest of five children, Charles remarked that his mom did

not have a lot time to make sure he was getting the attention that he needed to do well in

school.

> But I guess as far as school goes, it could have been a lot better for me, had I
> applied myself and maybe with my mother, she had five of us, so I was pretty
> much raised by my own self at an early age, and she was looking after my little
> brothers and sisters. She couldn't keep an eye on me at all times, so therefore, I
> ended up getting into trouble and doing stuff.

Charles reported that he hardly attended school which resulted in his retention in

elementary school. He mentioned that he liked math, but gradually began to lose interest

in school.

> I actually was doing so good in school that they jumped me up to the 8th grade,
> halfway through the year. They were doing that because there was a certain aid
> that was trying to get people through that had maybe failed and was a year or two
> behind on up to the next level. I actually applied myself, I was doing the work, so
> I knew I was capable, you know what I'm saying? I just applied myself, I started
> studying, and I was one of the ones that went from the 7th to the 8th grade in
> maybe three or four months. Then when I got to the 8th grade, I started fooling
> around again. Once I accomplished getting that, it was like, "Alright, now what?"
> Actually, I slipped off and ended up going back to the 7th grade. They put me
> back. I think I did another year in the 7th grade, and most of the time - half the
> time I wasn't at school. So eventually I quit school as soon as I turned sixteen.

Although Charles did not graduate from high school, all of his younger siblings did. He

stated that he regretted the decisions he made, but feels that he set an example of what not

to do for his sisters and brother.

> I had some hard choices after school. My wild lifestyle, it sowed a lot of bad seed
> in me. Eventually, that stuff started to catch up with me. It was like, "Why didn't I
> apply myself in school? Why didn't I do this and why didn't I do that?" Even
> though you may have some hard circumstances, I didn't have that positive role

model to push me. But I was like, I can't let that define who I am and keep me stuck and get stuck in the mindset that, "Well, this is all you can get. You didn't get much education, you didn't have a great home life, so this is your life," you know what I'm saying?

Charles spent a few months in the Job Corps program, but did not earn his GED.

Charles worked at several jobs in the food service sector. The minimum wage jobs did not pay well, but were in great supply and easy to come by for a high school dropout. "I didn't have any problems with jobs that were on my level. I didn't seek out jobs that I knew I was under-qualified for, so I pretty much stuck with restaurants, factories, Kroger grocery stories, stuff that didn't take a high school diploma." Over time, Charles developed an addiction to alcohol that began to impede his ability to keep a job. He noted that the War on Drugs did more to push drug and alcohol abuse underground.

> Nancy Reagan even had the little stickers, "Say No to Drugs". I saw them on bumper cars, on their windows, and that pretty much flooded the community and everybody knew the War on Drugs, and everybody knew Say No to Drugs and Nancy Reagan and that whole campaign of taking a stance against drug abuse… it kind of made people not be so open and free with drug abuse and alcohol abuse in public …so people just started hiding it and smoked their reefer inside places and put their alcohol in cups and hid that.

While the message "Just Say No to Drugs," was prevalent in Charles' community, he still incurred numerous run-ins with the criminal justice system that were alcohol/drug related. Charles explained that his interactions with the criminal justice system began in his teens and went on throughout his 20s and 30s. Charles expressed that his Christian faith and belief in God helped him change his lifestyle.

> I've been a Christian now, and I'm checking yes, because I'm looking at this like, I'm not going to try to lie or do anything that's sugar-coated or covering it up. Yes, I'm a convicted felon. I've been to prison… I've done my time as far as that goes, so it wasn't hard as getting the jobs because I knew I had a higher power, I had God working through my prayers.

Part II: Themes

Part two of this chapter presents the findings that emerged from data collection and data analysis process. The narratives collected during interviews provided rich and thick descriptions that served as the primary source from which themes emerged. To be identified as a theme, at least half of the participants had to share that common experience. The categories and themes were organized during the data analysis process according to the research question. The research question was specifically developed to highlight the experiences and outcomes of African American males who attended high school between 1981 and 1989 within three significant social institutions: schools; workforce; and criminal justice system. The process of constant-comparative analysis techniques allotted for further analysis of the most prominent themes among participants, and the critical race theory framework allowed me to analyze each narrative from a perspective that placed race and gender at the center of analysis. The themes represent the participants' perspective on the Reagan Administration's neoconservative policies influence on their life outcomes within the context of their education, work and justice system experiences. Four primary themes and sub-themes emerged:

1). Systems of Support vs. Institutional Racism
        Sub-themes: Support; Racism & Stereotyping; Tracking and College Counseling;
                School athletics as a system of support against institutional racism

2). Post-High School Aspirations: Getting a Job; Joining the Service; or Going to College
        Sub-themes: Manufacturing/Service Industry Occupations; Getting Out of the
                Neighborhood; Family Legacy of Service; and College Preparation

3). Dealing with the Criminal Justice System
        Sub-themes: Crime Pays: Alternative Livelihood; Undereducated and Under
                arrest; and Policies and Procedures

4). Attitudes and Perspectives on Life Outcomes
        Sub-themes: Internal Locus of Control and Work Ethic

During the interviews, each participant was asked to describe their secondary educational experiences. Participants were encouraged to discuss aspects of their educational background such as the school culture, curriculum, student demographics and teacher/faculty relations. A primary goal of the study was to examine the educational outcomes of African American males who matriculated through high school during the era of the Reagan Administration's neoconservative influence on education. As such, the initial interview protocol guided participants towards a discussion on their educational experiences in high school . Initially, participants provided basic demographic information regarding their school experience such as school size and location. However, during the course of the interview, participants began to offer a more critical, in-depth portrait of their encounters in the public education system during the 1980s. A common refrain continued to surface among the narratives – *Systems of support vs. Institutional racism.*

Theme One: Systems of Support vs. Institutional Racism

 Systems of Support

The education policies implemented during the Reagan Era decimated federal funding to education programs. A particular target of the ECIA was compensatory and intervention education initiatives funded through the Title I provision such as school lunch and TRIO programs. As such, participants in this study attended schools during a period where education programs designed to provide equitable educational experiences and opportunities for them were being diminished and eradicated. Consequently, the academic achievement of African American males significantly declined throughout the

1980s (Evans et al., 2012). Western (2002) noted a connection between low educational attainment and incarceration. Therefore, the decreased educational support made possible via neoconservative policies may have adversely influenced African American males' educational and criminal justice system experiences and outcomes.

The data revealed that participants who expressed having strong systems of support while in school, had more positive educational experiences for a longer period of time than those who indicated having less support structures. Participants from rural areas indicated having stronger system of supports than those from urban areas. They commented more frequently on the connectivity of their teachers to their community, which suggested that teachers from within the community and with similar backgrounds of their students were able to offer a form of support that mitigated the effects of the neoconservative educational policies of the 1980s. Jalen stated:

> I think I had a healthy upbringing [in] school because the teachers that I had – let me say, I would say 70 percent of my teachers, believe it or not, during that era, was like black teachers. …75 percent lived right in the town or in Billings County, because Billings Country is a big county, but 75 percent of the people were from Billings County as teachers. Even my principals, coming up through elementary through high school. My teachers, most of them graduated from Elizabeth City State and North Carolina A&T, North Carolina Central.

Jalen noted that his teachers' background within the African American community was influential in his educational decisions. Subsequently, participants with strong support systems expressed that regardless of the political climate, teachers from their community exhibited a genuine interest in their academic achievement and educational outcomes. Brian suggested that teachers who shared his cultural background were more diligent in their instruction and efforts with students. He suggested that knowing that his teachers

cared about his academic future had a favorable impact on his perspective of education.

Brian commented:

> Some teachers, they really tried to teach, other than some schools back in the day, they just pushed you through just to get rid of you. But Isaac Middle School, they took time with each child, if you needed the help, The high school was the same way… They worked with you hands-on and everything… it was a good experience, going back then. I wish I could go back again.

Additional supports against the influence of neoconservative education reform policy and federal budget cuts was also a significant factor for participants whose families were active in their school life. This occurrence influenced participants' receptiveness of – and level of satisfaction with their education. Ricky, who is from a small, rural southern town, grew up in family of educators who taught in his school district. School was an extension of Ricky's home life in which his aunts and grandmothers' presence ensured a positive learning environment for him. Ricky stated:

> It was different for me, growing up back then because all of the teachers were from the community, from my own community. Most of them were like cousins, aunties. My grandmothers all worked in the school system. Everybody knew each other. Anybody could give you a whooping, unless your parents didn't like them, you know what I mean? I liked it though. We knew everybody. My cousins knew all the teachers and stuff, so we got whoopings in school. I enjoyed it.

Participants with allies in the school system in the form of relatives or community members had academic opportunities that were not readily available to others, and as such were able to stay on a positive education trajectory longer the participants who lacked advocates. The influence of familial and community advocates resulted in those students gaining access to advanced courses/academically gifted programs, college prep programs and scholarship opportunities during a period when policies implemented during the Reagan Administration era were reducing access to programs in low-income

schools. Jordan recalled that his high school counselor, who was also his neighbor,

provided him with access to SAT and college application fee waivers, and reviewed with

him the advantages of a college education over military service. Jordan commented:

> Actually, I was about to take the ASVAB [Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery test], and then also, my counselor, Mr. Washington, Coach Washington. He's a former basketball coach. Coach Washington had told me he went to Johnson C. Smith, and he was a Kappa and he was talking to me about different things. So he kind of pushed me - getting me a fee waiver. He said, "Man, just take the SAT, get a fee waiver, and you can go to college and make this much amount of money." He started showing me different things and I was like, "Wow." That kind of turned the tables for me as well. … he was doing it[providing information and access] openly for everybody, but by him knowing me because I didn't stay too far from him, and his son and I were pretty good friends, he kind of talked to me as well, one on one.

Strong systems of support increased participants' investment in school even against the

growing tide of disengagement occurring among African American male students during

this period (Polite, 1999). Participants who identified their school as having teachers who

supported their academic achievement expressed that their academic strengths were

continually recognized, acknowledged and fostered. The presence of Ricky's aunts and

cousins in the classroom resulted in his academic promotion. Ricky commented:

> My Aunt Lena always said I was good at math in school…when I was in middle school, they wanted to skip me from 5th to 7th grade because I always did my work quickly… my aunties bought me a computer. I had a computer and an encyclopedia, all kinds of books. I was just interested in this.

Tony noted that his parents continual supported his education endeavors and stressed the

importance of education in his life. Tony commented, "Our mom pushed us the most do

well in school and go to college… My dad pushed that as a Black man you had to have

an education." Corban's parents and extended family's support helped him maintain a

positive life trajectory for a period longer than many of his peers in this study. Corban

commented, "But just having those high expectations from my parents, they kept us going with that. They just stayed on us." Corban noted that while his other African American male peers were being denied access to educational opportunities or succumbing to the peer pressure of drugs and crime, his parents provided a positive support structure that allowed him to circumvent possible barriers to positive educational and life outcomes.

Racial Discrimination and Stereotyping

The presence of a strong support system mitigated the influence of racial discrimination and stereotyping that participants reported experiencing in school. Events related to discrimination and stereotyping at the hand of teachers and fellow classmates impacted participants' educational experiences and outcomes. The data revealed that participants experienced suspensions, tracking, and preclusion from pertinent information regarding higher education processes that were racially motivated. Tony commented on the racial tensions present within in his school as such, "Yes, there was racism. There wasn't enough Black teachers there to counter the stereotypes held by White teachers in the school." Tony's teachers' perceptions of African American males were most likely influenced by the pervasiveness of the negative depiction of African American males circulated by the media and later referenced by the Reagan Administration. In the mid-1980s, the rise in juvenile crime was attributed to the emergence of the super-predator criminal – "amoral, radically impulsive, and brutally cold-blooded pre-adults who murder, assault, rape, burglarize, deal deadly drugs, engage in gang warfare, and generally wreak communal havoc" (Gilliam & Iyengar, 2005, p. 4). Reagan's assault on

welfare as a debilitating vice of the urban poor further advanced the stereotype that African American males were dangerous, unproductive members of the underclass.

While having systems of support mediated participants' exposure to racial discrimination, being recipients of such discrimination still influenced their educational trajectory as well as their perspective on race relations and integration. All the African American males in this study attended high school between 1981 and 1989. However, most of the participants' narratives included their experiences with school integration. While the ruling of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) officially declared the segregation of public schools unconstitutional in the mid -1950s, states' opposition to integrating public schools delayed integration in many districts in both rural and metropolitan areas. Four of the participants were from a metropolitan area in Kentucky that heavily opposed a mandatory busing desegregation plan introduced in the late 1970s (Orfield, 2011). When asked to discuss his educational experiences and outcomes, Tyquan immediately began by framing his experiences within the context of racial strife and discrimination due to school integration practices. Tyquan commented:

> Beacon had just started the integration and the kids would spit at us, the white children, because they felt as we didn't belong out there in the county. In addition to that, they would start fights with the Black people. They shot down a Black that was timid or wouldn't stand up for themselves. They called em' bad names. They had the Ku Klux Klan marching out there while we're in school. It was a rough situation, which eventually turned volatile. The Black parents started coming to the school with their children, and the Blacks and Whites clashed over the way that the children were being treated. And that was at Westin High School.

According to Tyquan, he dealt with the discrimination and racial taunts by responding in an aggressive, and sometimes, violent manner. This resulted in school suspensions and an expulsion – and the continual disruption of his academic progress. Tyquan revealed:

> As soon as the teachers, the white teachers, seen this though, they had it out for me. And I was in the Air Force ROTC. We had a white instructor. He asked me to move out of what was my permanent seat, so that this white girl could not speak to me. I told him no, and so he attempted to physically remove me from the seat, so I hit him in his face and knocked him out , and they put me out of the school. That's what happened there.

For Tyquan, the county's attempt to provide him with equal educational opportunities via integration resulted in the denial of his educational rights. He commented, "It took an adaptation to survive the constant threat of being put out of school or being spat on or being bullied by the Whites." Tyquan's educational experiences influenced his perspective on race relations to the degree that he voiced that being in that type of environment "taught me to be prejudiced towards people of light skin … white people." Reagan's Education Consolidation and Improvement Act (1981) significantly decreased funding to assist school districts facilitate integration initiatives. The Reagan Administration opposed forced busing, arguing that it was a distraction from the real issue, which was achieving quality education for all students regardless of what school they attended. As such, individuals who opposed racial integration in schools now had the backing of the White House to support their claims to end busing.

Jalen reported that in his close-knit community, friction between Black and White students created racial tension in the school. Jalen stated:

> There was not a lot of fighting until I got to high school…Once that was brought to the forefront about one of the white kids called another black kid the n-word, so that brought on a lot of controversy among the school for a couple of days, but the high school coach and principals brought the high school football team together to verbally issue out their concerns. Once it was hashed out, I would say within another week, I think things pretty much went back to order, but you still never forgot that. You forgive the person, but you can't forget it, you know?

Corban reported that the racial discrimination and stereotyping he received from some of

his White teachers made him doubt his academic abilities. Corban recounted:

> Yes. There were times where I knew I had some teachers who didn't like me for no reason. I was quiet. I was a quiet kid. I remember specific teachers. Looking back at the moment, you can think of a few things, but as you get older and look back, I really don't think she liked Black people. I really do not, and I had a few teachers – hers was just so blatant. It's what it was. Those were the things that I didn't like.

Although, Corban self-identified as an academically gifted student, his fear of validating

those teachers' stereotypes of African American boys kept him from seeking help for his

issues with reading. Corban commented:

> It was a gifted program, and in about the seventh and eighth grade, I felt dumb. I felt dumb because some of the things that they [White students] were exposed to, I hadn't been exposed to. …Give me the skills, and I'd knock those out. Some of those things like that, it made me second guess myself.

> I had issues with reading. Math was nothing. Reading, I struggled... At one point, I was stuttering, reading and stuff because I didn't know it and I was trying to go back and just read it. I was stuttering, looking like I couldn't read, something crazy like that. I was so used to folks thinking I was smart that I didn't want to bring that up. For years, I just had to come up with my own strategies to do that because I never told someone. They probably could have helped me, but I was scared when I was young.

The promotion of the image of African American males' as violent, unintelligent, amoral

brutes in the media and then reinforced through federal crime and welfare policies,

perhaps, contributed to the racial discrimination African American males' experienced in

social institutions. As such, strong systems of support were necessary for participants in

this study to survive the precarious environment many of them faced in schools.

Tracking & College Counseling

As a result of racial discrimination and stereotyping, participants also experienced

being tracked into vocational programs and away from advanced courses, and received

limited counseling pertaining to the college admissions' process. Nine of the participants

reported attending schools that had advanced/college prep courses. However, only four

participants, Orlando, Corban, Jordan, and Tony, noted taking advanced courses in high

school. Of those four, three went on to attend and graduate from college. The interview

data illustrated that while most participants attended schools with some form of advanced

or college preparatory programs, most were precluded from enrolling in those courses

and were pushed into a vocational curriculum track. Brian stated, "Yes, I took a

vocational trade up. I first was in masonry and then from masonry, I transferred to

cosmetology, to do hair. Back then, when you took up cosmetology, that's when they had

barbering and cosmetology in the same classroom." Ricky and Jalen acknowledged that it

was their decision to not take advanced courses, but that no one conveyed to them the

importance of college preparatory courses in college admissions. Jalen commented:

> We had wood shop. I was in wood shop. I did take mechanics. They did have a mechanics class. Those were the vocational, wood shop, carpentry. They did have masonry as well, so I did take wood shop, which is carpentry, to build things… I didn't take advanced courses. I just took my normal courses, and to be honest with you, that was kind of stickler when it was time for me to go to college because I had the University of Minnesota. I even had NC State wanting me to come down there and play basketball, but I did not have all those advanced courses, with that, I think we fell short. The guidance counselor may have fell short because honestly, I was not intending to go to college…

Jalen went on to attend a local state-funded HBCU, and credited that university with

helping him to develop skills and assets that are desirable in the workforce. However, he

expressed that his career and educational opportunities may have been greater if he had

the academic credentials needed to attend a Division-I university. Other participants

inferred that racial discrimination was behind their and other African American males'

exclusion from advanced and college preparatory courses. Tony stated, "Yes, we had

advanced courses. I took several of them, but those courses seemed reserved for White

kids or Black kids who did well or were from high income backgrounds. If you didn't fall

into that category, you weren't going to get the opportunity to take those classes." Tony's

account suggests that African American males without strong systems of support –

especially within schools – educational trajectories were impacted by racial

discrimination in that they faced additional barriers to courses that may have allowed

them to pursue a positive education pathway for a longer period of time or at least

through high school graduation.

Corban provided the following narrative of how he was able to gain access to the

academically gifted program at his school. Corban commented:

> It didn't seem like it was open to everyone. I think my mom had made a call, and then I was in it because it wasn't like my grades were changed or anything. The reason I didn't improve dramatically in it all of a sudden, I think my mom called and questioned why I wasn't in there. I had an aunt who was a teacher in town, and she would question it because she thought I was the smartest kid ever. I had all kinds of puzzles and all kinds of stuff for me to do, and I didn't know why she was always giving me stuff.

> The one reason I can think of - she noticed I was pretty good in math and all the patterns and everything that goes with that. I think she got into my mom's ear. My mom made a phone call questioning why I wasn't in there, and I started in seventh grade. I think it started in fifth grade or something like that, so she questioned it and I ended up in it in seventh and eighth grade….These were kids from my school and from the rival school in the next town, Duvall [in the gifted program]. They were actually coming into our program, so I was the only one [African American student], out of both schools, which made no sense at all.

In Corban's case, his system of support allowed him to circumvent what he

perceived as racially motivated attempts to exclude him from advanced courses.

Tyquan recounted a similar experience with gaining access to advanced classes. He

explained that he and his peers (other African American males) were not aware of the

college preparatory courses and that even the clerical/office skills classes were limited to a few African American students. Tyquan stated, "The word processing seemed to be offered to individual students. I don't think it was offered to anybody that just wanted to take it… but out of the one year that I took word processing, there was only two black students, me and a young lady. It was pretty much discriminatory, also." Tyquan's ability to navigate the educational system was limited as a result of lack of individuals in his support system who advocated for or were knowledgeable of college preparatory courses.

In addition to being pushed toward vocational courses and deterred from advanced classes, the data revealed that the participants' educational outcomes were highly influenced by lack of access to college counseling. College counseling refers to guidance and information provided to students pertaining to college-entrance exams, college application process/requirements, and scholarships/financial aid. Only Tony and Jordan reported having guidance counselors who provided the necessary information they needed to be informed about their educational options. Tony spoke fondly of his high school counselor and referred to him as a source of academic support. Tony said, "I had a good counselor. He was an Italian guy. He made scholarship information available to everyone. He was cool and believed in me and my ability. And really pushed me." Jordan also referenced his counselor as the main person who changed his perspective on going to college. Yet, Jordan added that the extra time his counselor spent working with him was because of his relationship with the counselor outside of school. Here again, a system of support was an essential buffer that mitigated the influence of the media's and subsequent public policies negative depiction of African American males on participants' ability to receive equitable educational opportunities.

Limited knowledge of the SAT and/or ACT was a common refrain among

participants' narratives. Even participants who went on to attend college or who were

placed in advanced courses noted that their counselors and teachers failed to tell them

about or prepare them for the college-entrance exams. Jordan stated, "It was basically

hand-picked because you heard about it, but you didn't really take it seriously. It was like,

"Okay, SAT," you know. It wasn't really, Hey, let's take the SAT, guys. We've got to do

this to go to college." When asked about his guidance counselor's role in his educational

outcome, Corban responded:

> My counselor sucked, so I never got a call from the counselor. I knew it came
> from my parents and … I had a cousin who graduated two years before me, who
> had taken the SAT. So my mom and my aunt were talking. That was a real push
> taking it my junior year and then my senior year. …I think they [guidance
> counselors] chose certain people. A buddy of mine who now has his bachelor's
> and his master's, they told him that he didn't need to go to college. We had that
> type of situation. I can still see him – he didn't seem like a mean type of guy, but
> he didn't seem like he put in any work into making sure we were informed. A lot
> of stuff came from one of my coaches, just giving it as a heads up about a few
> things here and there.

Jalen blamed his counselor's lack of individualized college counseling on the fact that his

counselor may have assumed that he was not going to college since none of his three

older siblings went. When asked if he was aware of or knowledgeable about the SAT or

ACT, Jalen replied:

> No. Now, that's where I think that my guidance counselor fell short because of the
> history of my family's military guide, and I kind of chalked that up as she figured
> that I was just going to do the military as my other brothers. So once I kind of got
> older and recognized, that's where I'm able to say that's why I think that's why I
> was not pushed into those advanced courses.

His counselor's failure to advise him on the importance of advanced courses in the

competitive admissions' process due to his family's history of military service highlights

the pervasiveness of the Reagan Administration's military personnel recruitment initiative in minority schools during the mid-1980s. Between 1981 and 1989, the U.S. military achieved the highest increase in personnel during a peacetime period. Interestingly, African American males constituted the majority of new enlistees (Armor & Gilroy, 2010). Tyquan provided a race critical rational for why he and his peers had limited knowledge of the SAT.

> Tyquan: Right. We didn't even know about SAT and ACT testing until we were in the 12th grade, ready to take the test. All the White people had books that they were using to study for the test, and we weren't aware of that. It wasn't offered or suggested.
>
> Researcher: Other than that, your guidance counselors and teachers, they never brought it up?
>
> Tyquan: No, they wanted to see you fail. We didn't have no Black guidance counselors or anything. They were all White and educated and they didn't want to see the Blacks being as educated as their own children, or even on the same level.

Tyquan, who faced multiple instances of racial discrimination within the school system, noted that while his family encouraged his education aspirations, they were not active advocates in ensuring his access to equitable education opportunities. As such, his system of support at home and within the schools was not strong enough to mitigate the influence of racism on his educational outcomes.

School athletics as a system of support against institutional racism

During the initial interview, participants were asked to discuss the aspects of their educational experience they enjoyed or liked. Eight of the ten participants explicitly stated that playing sports was what they enjoyed most about school.

> Orlando – "*Mostly it was, as far as what I enjoyed, the sports, especially once I got into high school. It was mainly just sports.*"

Tyquan – *"Playing sports was a highlight for me. I was on the football team."*

Jordan - *"No. See, one thing with me, I played sports, so that was a driving force as well. "'This is what I'm going to do.'" That was my energizer."*

Jalen – *"I enjoyed sports, which I played high school baseball, basketball and football in high school, but my scholarship to college was on a football scholarship, even though I played college basketball as well."*

Brian – *"I was a creative person. I liked art, gymnastics, and I ran track."*

Charles – *"Math was good. I love numbers. Of course, I liked gym and going to play basketball and going outside and recess and all that stuff, but pretty much math and science was a little difficult."*

Tony – *"I loved going to school there. I loved it all. I played basketball, football..."*

Joe – *"I liked going to gym. I liked to play ball."*

The analyzed data illustrated that athletics was a primary component of participants' educational experience and had a significant influence on the educational outcomes of four participants – Tyquan, Jalen, Corban and Jordan. All ten participants reported playing sports in school. Even participants who described themselves as "good students," or voiced an affinity for an academic subject still placed the experience of being a student-athlete over being a student. Corban stated, "My brother, he was all sports and all-neighborhood… and I was the geek and I would go and learn more about those things. My parents really encouraged me to keep doing that, and school in general." However, it was Corban's athletic ability that school staff recognized and promoted. The fact that Corban's academic abilities were not acknowledged without his parents' intervention, but that his athletic abilities were praised by school officials reflects the

popularity of the stereotype of African American male students as athletes before academics. In addition to positive stereotype reinforcement, playing sports provided participants with the opportunity to be validated based on their own merit. Participants' race and socio-economic backgrounds did not matter on the field or court. Likewise, race could not be used to discriminate against or deny their athletic ability. The affirmation participants received from playing sports represented one of the few merit-based areas in which they could negate the negative images and stereotypes perpetuated by the media and be evaluated solely on their own ability.

Jordan commented that school "came easily" to him. He excelled in advanced courses and completed his high school graduation requirements prior to his senior year. Jordan explained that his uncle had expressed to him the value of education. "He was persistent about telling me, 'Hey man, be better than me. Go to college, get your education,' so I said alright." However, when discussing what kept him grounded and focused on the goal of completing high school, Jordan replied, "See, one thing with me, I played sports, so that was a driving force as well. 'This is what I'm going to do.' That was my energizer." Interestingly, all the participants emphasized the value of education, especially as it relates to employment and job stability. Yet, higher education was generally discussed as a four-year extension of their athletic career. The following are participants' responses to the question, "Did you have aspirations to go to college after high school?"

> Brian – "*Yes, at first I did. I used to run track, and I wanted to run track for a college. I also wanted to become an art teacher, but it was hard to get scholarships back then…When I was coming up, if you didn't play football or basketball, nine times out of ten you weren't going to college*."

> Orlando – "*I mean, I had aspirations to attend college. I was getting letters from colleges and invitations to colleges and different things like that, but that had to do with athletics. I guess my main focus was athletics.*"

> Tyquan – "*I didn't decide that I wanted to attend college until my senior year. Yeah, and that was motivated primarily because of me wanting to play football at the college level.*"

> Jordan – "*Well, in a way because of basketball. I wanted to go to the Marines, basically.*"

> Jalen - "*That's what led me to go to ES University because I really respected my coach a lot, and he made great decisions when it came to his athletes on going to college.*"

Participants noted that the notion of higher education as an extension of one's athletic career was common among their African American male peers. Brian described the lives of two of his African American male relatives and how the opportunity to play sports in college positively influenced their lives. Brian commented:

> I had a couple friends, their mother got married and moved to Fort Yow, married a guy who was in the military and moved to Fort Yow, which gave them opportunities to play for the schools, to become football stars, like my two cousins. They're brothers, they were both stars for Fort Yow, and they both got scholarships, both went on to have a good life after they furthered their education.

The concept of going to college to develop skills or major in a particular subject was not a common theme. The data illustrated that participants in the study did not begin to place an intrinsic value on education until much later in their lives. The connection between higher education and academics and future educational and employment outcomes only emerged during participants' reflection about the influence of their level of education on their present life trajectory. For participants who experienced instances of racial discrimination and stereotyping within their schools and communities due to the proliferation of the negative depiction of African American males as 'thugs,' drug dealers

and killers, sports may have provided an avenue in which they were able to mediate the effects of such prejudices. In this instance, sports may have been used as a tactic to mitigate negative stereotypes by making them appear less threatening to individuals within social institutions who harbored negative assumptions about African American males.

Theme Two: Post-High School Aspirations

A primary goal of the study was to examine the educational and employment experiences and outcomes of African American males who matriculated through high school during the era of the Reagan Administration. Thus, during the interviews, each participant was asked to describe their post-high school educational and career aspirations. Through data reduction and analysis, three common refrains surfaced – *Getting a Job; Joining the Military; and Going to College.*

Getting a Job

The concept of "a good job" was a common refrain among participants' narratives. For young, African American males, the criteria of what constituted a good job were based on the experiences and recommendations of their parents and other relatives who had entered the workforce twenty years prior. Based on participants' narrative, the shared definition of a good job included one that provided the potential of being employed long term. These jobs were typically identified as those in the manufacturing or service sector. During his interviews, Corban made reference to the perception of manufacturing positions as "good jobs." Corban commented, "We were seen as doing okay because my dad worked at the factory. BrandCo – folks worked at BrandCo, then you were great, you were doing alright…" Ironically, the manufacturing jobs that had

been coveted by the participants' parents and relatives for their stability, pay and benefits

were on the verge of extinction due to urban deindustrialization, suburban job relocation

and globalization (Wilson, 1997). In addition to the decline of the industrial sector,

Reagan's labor market policies elimination of job training and education, unemployment

benefits and antidiscrimination support (i.e. Affirmative Action) negatively contributed to

the unfavorable labor market conditions for African American males (Laester, 1997;

Shulman, 1984). Brian described how his difficulty finding a job in manufacturing or in

his high school trade led to his career in construction. Brian stated:

> Basically, if you took up masonry in school, vocational, you took up cosmetology
> or barbering, if there weren't no openings, you had to set up for the next best
> thing. Whatever was hiring…Well, back then, the only big job that I really tried to
> apply for was construction because back then they were the ones that were paying
> the most money… I was a framer and laborer, which back then in '88 and '89 they
> were paying starting off at $15 an hour, which some jobs nowadays pay that
> much, but that was a good job back then, construction.

> If you didn't work in construction, you worked in a place like GE or Ford or
> something like that, but you either had to know somebody to get in on jobs like
> that … they wanted somebody that had experience, family members that used to
> work there that can put in a word for them or stuff like that. Most of the
> construction jobs back then you didn't really have to know nobody. If you were
> willing to work, you had a job.

Participants' outlook on future career aspirations were tempered by the economic

landscape of the 1980s, which included three economic recessions including one

precipitated by the 1987 stock market crash (Jaynes & Williams, 1990). The data

indicated that labor market conditions varied by regions. Tony stated that his African

American male friends had similar career aspirations to find a good job. However, Tony's

recount provided insight regarding how the meaning of a "good" job varied by

geographical location and race relations. Tony grew up in the northeast and described

racism within the civil sector as minimal. According to Tony, his peers' post-high school

goals included going to college, the military or getting a civil servant job. Tony

commented:

> That was big – getting a job with the city as fire fighter, police officer, post
> office…They were considered good jobs – stability. People retired from those
> jobs. …Those were the best jobs to get with a minimal education. Good pay,
> benefits. Usually a family member had to get you in. If your father was a fireman,
> he could get you in. And it was not as difficult for Blacks to get those positions in
> Waukegan. Waukegan didn't have the same racism as in NYC that kept Blacks
> out of the fire department and police department. Of course, Affirmative Action
> helped change that some as well.

Ricky stated that he had no aspirations to further his education because his

immediate goal was to find a good job that paid very well. He commented that, at the

time, he did not see the connection between going to college and his ultimate goal of

making a lot of money. Ricky stated:

> The only thing I was thinking about was getting out of school and getting a good
> job also, making about $3,000 or $4,000 a month and chill out, find me a house
> and a truck or boat or car, probably get married, you know what I mean?

Ricky eventually found an employment option that provided him with the salary he

desired – selling drugs. However, he discussed freely his regret of turning down "good"

jobs in favor of fast and easy money. Ricky stated, "But you know what I regret? I regret

turning down those post office jobs, and that job for Toyota because I'd have been retired.

I'd have put in over 27 years if I had took those jobs, you know what I mean?" Ricky's

narrative reflected the conditions of the time in which a lack of employment and job

training public policy initiatives reduced African American males' career aspirations to

essentially a job that entailed working with one's hands. Budget cuts to federal job

programs such as the Comprehensive Employment Training Act (CETA) and the Job

Training Partnership Act (JTPA) meant that African American males' opportunities to gain skills beyond those applicable to industrial work – a disappearing field – was significantly reduced.

As manufacturing positions dwindled, participants, mainly those who did not go to college or complete high school, sought their "good" job in the service sector. The service sector refers to jobs in retail, restaurants, hospitality, etc. The unstable economy of the 1980s precipitated the largest increase of working-poor in U.S. history (Katz, 1996). The loss of manufacturing jobs, which sparked the growth of the African American middle class, was being replaced with low-wage, service jobs (Jaynes & Williams, 1990). Charles' narrative illuminated this occurrence. Charles stated:

> Actually, I didn't have any problems with jobs that were on my level. I didn't seek out jobs that I knew I was under-qualified for, so I pretty much stuck with restaurants, factories, Kroger grocery stories, stuff that didn't take a high school diploma or didn't take a GED to get. I didn't have any problems getting any jobs. …I can always go out and get a restaurant job or go to the Kroger, get a job at the Kroger store, or even working at different little warehouses. I can always get the job…The unemployment, that was pretty much at a record high, but in the lower level jobs, Reagan and Reaganomics things that he set in motion and what he took out, those jobs that were higher up were definitely affected by the Reaganomics and the whole Reagan era, you know what I'm saying?

> A lot of the little jobs that I was going after that was on such a small scale, I don't think what Reagan was doing with those high jobs - I think they could trickle down to those little restaurant jobs, you know what I'm saying? Even if it did, there was so many restaurants and it was always like, "Well, you can go get a restaurant job."

While Corban chose college and the corporate world, he recollected on the experiences of his African American male friends who turned to temporary work once the factories began to close. Corban stated:

> "We were going to work at Kelly", and that used to be the saying, "I'm going to work with Kelly." It was temp work ... A lot of folks went to work for Kelly. That

was actually the saying and I thought Kelly was a place, like, "We work at Kelly, and this is Kelly," not a placement firm or something, a temporary agency. I didn't know that. I just knew it was Kelly.

Participants' aspirations to find a "good job" and their struggle to secure such a position with just a high school diploma, illustrated the shift that occurred in the workforce simultaneous with the Reagan Administration's implementation of public policies that de-emphasized the importance of anti-discrimination employment practices and job training for minorities. Without employment safeguards in place, deindustrialization and the displacement of manufacturing positions forced many of the participants to consider careers in another field that had traditionally provided opportunities for social mobility for African American men – the U.S. Armed Forces (Neal, 2008). Ironically, African American males' limited occupational options and their subsequent decision to pursue military service was directly in line with the Reagan Administration's defense initiatives (Higgs, 1994).

Joining the Military

The data analyzed indicated that joining the military was a common career aspiration among participants and a significant factor in their educational and employment outcomes. Seven of the participants revealed that they seriously considered joining the military after high school. Two participants stated that they had no aspirations of military service, and one participant was precluded from serving because of his academic achievement. Of the seven participants who expressed an interest in the armed forces, only Ricky, Tyquan and Joe enlisted with one of the four military branches.

Throughout U.S. history, African American males have used military service as an avenue to education and employment opportunities. African American males have fought

and served in every American war. However, it was not until 1948, by President Truman's Executive Order, that the U.S. military was integrated. The order mandated equality of treatment and opportunity for all regardless of race, color and religion. The meritocratic nature of the U.S. Armed Forces provided African American men with opportunities for job training, career advancement, leadership, and financial security that were more difficult to attain in the civilian sector (Armor & Gilroy, 2010). Thus, the military enlistment data indicate an overrepresentation of African American males in the Armed Forces (Armor & Gilroy, 2010). Enlistment of African American males tends to correspond to labor market conditions. When opportunities for sustainable employment are favorable, enlistment of African American males decreases (Neal, 2008). During the 1980s, there was a sharp increase of African American males' enlistment into military service. Two primary factors that contributed to this phenomenon were poor labor market conditions for African American men, which was related to the Reagan Administration's defense initiatives to advance military defense strategies (which included increasing the number of military personnel) and roll back of foreign policy aimed at repressing communists' influence abroad (Higgs, 1994; Wilson, 1987).

There was no differentiation in participants' propensity toward military service by geographical location. Participants from both rural and urban areas indicated that they seriously considered or did join the Armed Forces. Jalen estimated that at least 75 percent of his senior class joined the military while Jordan, Corban, Tyquan, Brian and Ricky reported that 40-50 percent of their peers opted for careers in the Armed Forces. In each participant's school, U.S. military entities were prominently showcased via military recruiters and Junior Reserves Officers' Training Corps (JROTC) programs. While

established in 1916, JROTC was heavily relied on between the mid-1980s and 1990s as a

pseudo U.S. Armed Forces recruitment strategy. At the time, the majority of JROTC

programs were placed in inner city high schools and half of the enrolled students were

minorities (Pema & Mehay, 2009). The intensive emphasis on military service in

participants' schools as well as in their communities, coupled with the Reagan

Administration's recruitment drive, inveigled the majority of participants to consider

joining a branch of the U.S. Armed Forces.

The participants' narratives revealed that their decision to pursue military service

post-high school greatly influenced their educational and life outcomes. The data

illustrated several factors that motivated participants' military service aspirations. The

findings are presented based on the two most prominent factors: Getting Out of the

Neighborhood and Family Legacy of Military Service.

Getting Out of the Neighborhood

The concept of "getting out" was a reoccurring narrative among participants from

rural areas. Throughout the interviews, participants from the "country" suggested that

they viewed joining the military as a way to escape their small towns and explore their

world. Corban expressed that it was partly his limited access to social groups and cultures

he had only read about that made him consider the Marines as a way to broaden his

experiences. Corban commented:

> It was definitely the traveling, seeing the world. I'm in a country town. I only see
> this stuff on TV and books. My parents, we used to vacation – I think I've been on
> three vacations. One was to Disneyworld, which I ran into the first person who
> couldn't speak English. I remember that.

Corban viewed the military as a way to experience other cultures and traditions that intrigued him as a child. However, his peers from similar rural backgrounds in the study simply saw the military as a way out. When asked why he chose to join the Army, Ricky replied, "I wanted to get away from all of that country shit. I just wanted to get away from that, you know?" Jordan and Jalen voiced similar sentiments. In response to why he wanted to join the Marines, Jordan stated, "Getting out of Bakersville - the travel. He [uncle] went to Japan. He stayed there for a year. … So I was like, 'Man, I'm going to go with my uncle.' He was telling me, 'Hey, you might not be in Japan. They might send you somewhere else.'" Jalen noted that his family and peers from his rural southern town bonded over their shared international experiences. Jalen stated:

> The military, as my father and brothers say, teaches you a lot of trade, gives you a lot of knowledge on things, and it also gets you out to see the world. I think that's why a lot of them took the military because when we're home for like family reunions and class reunions and stuff like that, that's the first thing they talk about, "Man, how did you enjoy Germany or Korea?

In contrast to Corban, Ricky, Jordan and Jalen, Orlando and Joe expressed that their military aspirations were not so much based on a desire to get out of a geographical location, but an opportunity to get out of negative situations. Joe revealed that he enlisted in the Army after becoming tired of going to community college. Orlando considered going to the Navy after dropping out of high school. After earning his GED, Orlando abandoned his plans to join the service and was arrested shortly after for his first major crime. The Reagan Administration's defense agenda promoted the expansion of the U.S.' military power. A large standing military was an essential part of Reagan's and neoconservatives' defense strategy. Consequently, between 1981 and 1989, funds that could have been allocated to education, social welfare and job training programs to

ameliorate the economic and social condition of the lower-class and minorities, were

instead funneled into the defense budget at a cost of an additional $100 billion a year

(Higgs, 1994).

Family Legacy of Service

Participants' military career aspirations were influenced by family members' prior

military service. In many ways, the Armed Forces was referred to as the family

profession. Participants' accounts of their families' service in the U.S. military often

spanned back to two or three generations. For participants who linked their desire to join

the military to family traditions, the concept of serving one's country was perceived as an

honorable and respectable decision – not an occupation of last resort. Jalen's father and

three older brothers all served in the military. He looked up to them and desired to follow

in their footsteps. He explained that his decision to go to college made him feel like an

outsider. Jalen stated:

> Honestly, I was not intending to go to college because my other three brothers
> went into the United States military, so that's what I wanted to do. Believe it or
> not, my three older siblings, they're better in athletics than I was, but the reason
> they went, my father is a military guy, and a bunch of my cousins are military
> guys, so I think they took that because they knew it was an honorable thing to do.
> We tend to follow somewhat in our parent's leadership, you know? We all are a
> product of our environment, and that was our environment. … They relate to each
> other, and I can't relate because I've never been in the military. But for me, going
> to college, I can talk fraternity stuff that they can't talk fraternity stuff, you know?
> There's a trade off on which way you chose to go or to take your path in life.

During his interviews, Ricky revealed that he chose the Army because it was the

military branch that most of his family members joined. Ricky commented:

> We had recruiters at the school and whatnot. What got us is just like word of
> mouth when talking with your cousins and close friends who left and came back
> and they were saying they enjoyed it. … I mainly chose the Army because my
> uncle had been in the Army, my Uncle Jimmy, a mechanic. I had an Uncle Dave

who was in the Air Force, retired, but most of them were in the Army. My
grandfather was in the Air Force though, but I chose the Army.

Having a family member with a military background did not always influence

participants to consider enlistment. Brian commented that stories of his grandfather's

experience in a segregated Army dissuaded him from joining the military. Brian stated,

"Oh, no. I mean, they had recruiters and everything, but no. My grandfather told me from

his experience in the military when he was in World War II - he said the military was not

a place for a Black man." Corban's father echoed this perspective. Corban commented

that he wanted to join the Marines like his older brother, but his father opposed the idea.

Corban recalled:

> My brother went into the military. I was in the ninth grade when he was in the
> military, and I would hear on the phone that he's in this country or this place. "I'm
> going there." He's like, "No, bro, don't do it. Go straight through to college." And
> I had a cousin come along who went into the Marines and gave me his Marine
> book, like a yearbook, and I loved the uniform, the two-tone uniform. …My
> parents were like, "No, bro. This is not going to happen."

> … My dad, because he was military, he got drafted and went to Vietnam, that
> whole thing. But he doesn't have a great outlook on the military. You can talk to
> my brother about it, but my brother made his own decisions. He never was
> drafted.

Corban expressed that his father's involuntary enlistment to serve in an unpopular

war impacted how he perceived African American males' role in the Armed Forces.

Corban's family's military lineage presented an interesting dichotomy of African

American males who voluntarily selected military service as means of accessing

economic and social opportunities, and those who were involuntarily selected to serve.

For Corban and his peers in this study, joining the military was a favorable career option

in an unfavorable labor market. Neoconservative policies that increased international

initiatives and limited African American males' opportunities to advance in the workforce, and the Reagan Administration's defense agenda may have influenced African American males' decision toward serving in the Armed Forces.

Going to College

Of the possible post-high school aspirations, the most common education choice among participants was going to a 4-year college or university. Between 1980 and 1990, fewer African American males attended college than in past decades (McDaniel et al., 2009). Eight participants reported that they had aspirations to go to college after high school; however, of those eight participants, five inextricably linked their desire to go to college to playing sports. The participants' college aspirations represent a consequence of budget cuts to college-ready/counseling programs in low-income schools. Reagan's ECIA (1981) decreased funding to TRIO programs, an education program that provided pre-college counseling and college experiences for students from low-income backgrounds who are first-generation college bound, by 53 percent (CEL, 1986; Levin, 1989).

College Preparation

In this study, five of the participants who attended college were first generation college students and would have been eligible to participate in TRIO programs such as Upward Bound – a program that offers students exposure to higher education experiences and summer education opportunities in preparation for college. The data indicated that being the first member of a family to attend a college or university influenced participants' educational outcomes. Corban noted that he knew his parents were depending on him to start a tradition of higher education in his family. Corban stated:

My parents didn't allow any other thought to enter my mind. I mentioned

something about the Marines one time, and they killed me on that one. But no, it was a given. It was a given. I would have been the first, and I was, so that was a done deal.

Corban graduated from a HBCU in 1996 with a Bachelor of Science in Computer Science. His younger brother followed his lead and attended college as well. Jordan, Jalen and Tyquan shared how their family encouraged and supported them in their quest to be the first ones in their family to attend and complete college. Jordan expressed that his uncle was more vocal than his mom in asserting the importance of a college education. Jordan stated, "No, just basically by him keeping telling me, 'Hey, man, you're going to be the first one to go to college. You should do this.'" However, some participants' systems of support were not strong enough to make up for the loss of government sponsored education initiatives. Jalen noted that not having a blueprint to follow or an example of how to make it in higher education made his transition from high school to college difficult. Jalen commented:

> My freshman year in college, this was my first time being away from home, so I just had that parent pressure on me, you know? I just had to learn to grow up on my own, and I was not going to class my first semester in college, because I thought I would just there to play basketball. I knew I had to do my work, but I was slacking in my work. I ended up with a GPA of 1.9 … My freshman year that was my hardest year because it was hard for me to distinguish work and no work and freedom away from home.

Jalen was able to rebound from his first semester in college. However, without adequate college preparation and lack of college counseling, many of the other participants did not fare as well. Tyquan, who earned an athletic scholarship to a local university, dropped out after one semester. He recounted how his difficulty with writing papers contributed to his decision to dropout. Tyquan commented, "I always had a problem with English, and while in college I majored in biology because that fascinated me…but I could never get

through writing papers about books that I always felt as though were boring. I just dropped out of college." Neoconservatives' de-emphasis of compensatory education programs was also reflected in the Reagan Administration's budget allocation to federal financial aid.

Between 1981 and 1989, the availability of federal education grants and loans was significantly decreased (Hauser, 1990). During this same period, the cost of college increased at a rate 17 times faster than the amount of financial aid allotments. The simultaneous rise in tuition and decrease in federal financial aid greatly influenced African American males' rate of college attendance and educational outcomes (Hauser, 1990). The majority of participants in this study reported growing up in a low-income to working class family. For those who aspired to go to college, paying for school presented major hurdles. Corban described how the lack of scholarships and loans almost ended his collegiate career. Corban reflected:

> All scholarships came for folks who had straight A's, academic scholarships. Even though I was surprised when Smith gave me a thousand dollars, an academic scholarship…. I needed to do something to help my dad. …I wasn't recruited for football, so I walked on and I knew I needed help because I had a little brother who was coming, who was also going to college. I needed to do something, so I walked on, they took care of me the last few years, the last four years.

> [Without the football scholarship] It would have been tough. I think my dad would have found a way. I would have had to do some other things on my own, have loans. The scholarship they gave me at the beginning wasn't a full ride because they were still trying to figure out whether I was good enough for something. I had loans I had to take out. My dad would have really, really been struggling to try to get me through, and have two of us in there, and neither one of us had scholarships. We would have been in trouble.

Participants from middle-class backgrounds also expressed difficulty affording higher education. Tony, who grew up in a middle-class home with an college-educated father,

stated that although going to college was a certainty for him, how to pay for it was less

clear. Tony commented, "Finances were an issue. I went to a private liberal arts college

and putting money together for that was a real challenge." In 1986, the Committee on

Education and Labor predicted that the prosed cuts to financial aid in Reagan's education

policies would have prevented almost one million students from receiving assistance and

would have created a generation of students with massive debt due to a shift from grants

to loans. As such, the population most affected by the decrease in federal grants and work

study were African Americans, who were most likely to rely on external funding to pay

for college.

Participants' post-high school aspirations were highly influenced by the Reagan

Administrations' public policies. The economic and labor market conditions of the time

impacted their outlook on future life outcomes pertaining to employment and education.

Federal public policies that promoted internationalization and an end to

antidiscrimination labor practices limited African American males' access to quality

employment opportunities, job training and education. Consequently, the absence of

employment training and work initiatives pushed African American males towards work

in a dying industry – manufacturing – or into low-skill, low wage jobs in the service

sector. Likewise, the Reagan Administrations' funding cuts to pre-college programs and

financial aid also limited the participants' access to higher education by 1) decreasing

their opportunities to engage in programs that helped develop the academic and life skills

needed to be successful in higher education and, 2) inhibiting participants' from low-

income backgrounds ability to afford college. As such, the majority of participants came

to view joining the military as a viable career aspiration given their lack of other opportunities.

Theme Three: Dealing with the Criminal Justice System

During the study, each participant was asked to describe their experiences with the criminal justice system during and after high school. A primary goal of the study was to examine the life outcomes of African American males who matriculated through high school during the era of the Reagan Administration and its intensive emphasis on crime and drug control. The interview protocol guided participants towards an open-discussion of their interactions with the criminal justice system. The questions were framed to encourage rich, thick descriptions of their experiences as they pertained to specific crime policies such as the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 and the Omnibus Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988. From data reduction and analysis, the theme *Dealing with the Criminal Justice System* emerged with the subsequent subthemes: Crime Pays: An Alternative Livelihood; Undereducated and Under arrest; and Policies and Procedures: Practice of Mass Incarceration.

Crime Pays: An Alternative Livelihood

Participants' experiences and knowledge of their peers involvement in crime and illegal activity for the purpose of monetary gain was a prevalent issue. Illegal activity resulting in monetary gain included offenses such as drug dealing, robbery, auto-theft and shoplifting. Four participants were arrested and/or convicted for crimes under this category. However, all the participants personally knew someone (friend, brother, etc.) who had participated in criminal activity for financial benefit. Even participants who

expressed that they avoided engaging in criminal activity had direct ties to other African

American males who engaged in dealing drugs and theft.

Deindustrialization and the elimination of job training and education programs

presented African American males with few employment options in a labor market

flooded with low-skill workers. As such, the lure of delinquent activity became an

attractive option. When prompted to reflect on why they or their peers chose to get

involved with illegal activities, the answer was resoundingly – "the money." Tyquan

commented that several of his peers sold marijuana in high school. He noted that his

friends' involvement with drug dealing impacted their abilities to maintain legal

employment. Tyquan stated, "I've seen them make a lot of money and even to this day,

I've got friends that are still in the selling of drugs to provide a living for themselves, and

they're in and out of prison." Tyquan suggested that his friends' lack of education and

transferable skills trapped many of them in a drug culture where the only option out was

minimum wage employment. He credited his U.S. Air Force deployment overseas to

Germany as one of the reasons why he never became involved with the drug craze of the

80s. Tyquan offered the following synopsis on his peers' decision to sell drugs:

> The ones that I'm aware of that are my friends, they never moved out of the
> projects. The projects was their place of employment. They seemed to make more
> money selling drugs in the projects than they could ever make at a job, making
> minimum wage, being that they had high school diplomas and people just weren't
> looking for individuals…

> There was more opportunities for crime that paid much more than working a job,
> and it was a lot easier than working a job. Most of my peers at that time sought
> out easy money as opposed to working hard for a living.… they just stayed out
> there in the streets and took care of their families and loved ones with the
> proceeds from selling drugs out in the street.

Tyquan's ability to avoid the lure of drug dealing suggests that when provided with

viable employment opportunities, African American males have access to options that
decrease their propensity to engage in criminal activity. Unfortunately, the 1980s and the
Reagan Administration marked a departure from federal policy that advocated, promoted
and funded employment initiatives within low-income, minority communities.

Brain connected his peers' adherence to the "crime pays" mantra to a desire for
money and status. Brian asserted, "Most of the guys, that's all they saw when they were
coming up. You were an athlete or a drug dealer, that's how they got their statuses."
Elijah Anderson, (1999) in *Code of the Street*, identified African American males' use of
money, clothes, jewelry and cars as a tool to acquire respect and status from their peers
within their neighborhood. For African American males trying to attain status by this
measure, selling drugs provided them with a quick and plentiful monetary supply. Corban
recognized his peers' acquisition of status symbols – cars, clothes, etc. - as an admission
of their involvement in drug dealing. Corban stated:

> It wasn't in your face, but you knew it was boys from Kingland and the boys from
> those other neighborhoods, from the Hill. They were selling it, and you knew all
> about that. You'd see a nice little car come through there, or a guy had some new
> sneakers on. Those were the things you started seeing a lot more of. Yes, and then
> you started hearing about folks getting shot… You'd hear about a lot of people
> getting shot when I was a freshman [1988]. I was in the tenth grade, when the first
> person got killed, and then it started going from there.

Ricky noted that money and the ease of the process were the main reasons why he sold
crack cocaine. He forwent college in favor of getting a job. When the job no longer
provided the financial means he desired, he joined the military. When the risk of death
outweighed his salary, Ricky left the Army for the civilian sector. Ricky reported that
working a full-time job no longer made sense once he realized he could make more
money selling crack. Ricky recounted, "To average out to what those guys were making,

it made more sense. Why go to a job where somebody's enslaving you and you can get out here hustling and make the same amount of money, or more money, you know?".

Without safeguards to diminish discriminatory hiring practices, African American males' employment options were greatly reduced. As such, the proposition of selling drugs became an attractive alternative for participants in need of financial stability. Ricky stated, "When I came back from Iraq, my son was three weeks old. I forgot, we weren't even making that much money back then. I had a brand-new Nissan truck, and I used to lift this guy from Atlanta. I started selling crack and weed." Ricky explained that the allure of criminal activity outweighed other employment options.

Ricky: But what I did, when I first came home, the government had this job fair, when the soldiers are coming back to combat. A lot of soldiers, they're shipping out and whatever, they're wanting to get out. I turned down jobs for the post office and I turned down a job for Toyota, building that Toyota plant.

Researcher: Why'd you turn that down?

Ricky: I don't know why. I was young and I was dealing and I was worrying about making money. I didn't know nothing about 401(k) and profit sharing and getting yourself set up for retirement. I didn't know nothing about all that. I was just living life and just chilling, it was all good. I ain't have no problems or nothing too much. I ain't never got caught up with it.

The hustling. Right, the hustling is faster. It was real fast. When I was in the South and I got that job from nine to two, shit, they pay me on Thursdays. I was collecting more money from my coworkers that were strung out on crack than my check was. I didn't even look at the check. I was like, "Lord, I did all this and this – and that's all I've got?" I'm getting paid more than my check. I'm getting paid, you know?

Corban acknowledged that while some of his African American male peers began selling drugs for the flash and glitz of it, others did it to survive in a struggling economy. Corban postulated:

Cuts to social services? What do they expect to happen after they cut services to a community? What do you expect to happen? Do you expect them to starve, or were you expecting them to come up with other ways? …They need to make some adjustments to whatever services they were providing, but just cutting them off is ridiculous to me. Friends of mine, they were all on food stamps. Some of my friends had huge families. … It possibly could have had influenced them, or one or more? Yes, because they were surviving. Anybody who lived on the minimum was just trying to survive.

In 1985, Reagan's economic recovery plan called for more than $6 billion in cuts to social welfare programs (CBPP, 1986). AFDC funding was slashed by 30 percent, 22 million people were removed from the food stamp program and funding for low-income housing was virtually eliminated (Katz, 1990; National Urban League, 1989; St. Pierre, 1991). Given the slowdown in the economy, it is probable that African American males, facing a bleak labor market, may have perceived criminal activity as their only alternative to escape poverty.

The data also revealed that other participants in the study became involved with crime for no particular reason besides that they could. Joe, who remarked that his middle-class parents provided monetarily for him throughout much of his twenties, briefly sold crack cocaine because he thought it was easy. Joe commented, "A friend of mine sold… He sold it, so it was convenient, so it didn't seem like it was hard. So I was like, 'Let me try that for a little while.' I didn't like the traffic, dealing with people, people you didn't know." While Joe's short career in drug dealing did not result in incarceration, other participants and their African American peers were not as fortunate. Corban stated, "I started seeing a lot more folks making some bad mistakes right at graduation and after graduation. It was a little depressing. 'Come on, why don't you want to walk?'" He

referenced the situation of one particular friend that he noted as exceptionally bright.

Corban stated:

> For Sam, for me, he was very smart. He was really smart, but I know what his was. He was broke for so long, and he saw other people, and he was smart enough to figure some things out, and he did. He's smart enough to figure things out, but not everything because obviously he's doing thirty years now. He just got caught up and just kept going with it.

The lure of "easy" money during a period of poor economic opportunities for African American males attracted many underserved and unserved African American males to crime. However, the conspicuous nature of drug dealing in low-income communities made African American males prime targets of the Reagan Administration's crime policies (Barak et al., 2007; Barker, 2009; Gray, 2012).

Undereducated and Under arrest

The analyzed interview data revealed a trend in narratives surrounding the phenomenon of lack of education and propensity for incarceration. Participants who did not have a G.E.D. or only had a high school diploma, reported more interactions with the criminal justice system. Charles, who was the only participant to not have at least a high school diploma or educational equivalent, reported multiple interactions with the criminal justice system, which resulted in arrest and convictions. Charles stated:

> I've had lots of those. Actually, a lot of them I had DUIs, drinking and driving under the influence of alcohol, and that was after eighteen. It probably started in my late teens and then went on through my 20s and my 30s. I had a lot of run-ins with the law, pretty much DUIs, driving with a suspended license, possession of narcotics, drug paraphernalia, child support.
>
> Those were pretty much the things that I was into. Usually when I went to jail, it was for non-child support, alcohol and drugs, controlled substances and suspended license and driving with no insurance. Those were the things I was

doing, never murder or robbery or any of those types of things. But most of the things that I went to jail for were the same things over and over again.

Charles' experiences suggested that his lack of educational attainment, which limited his employment opportunities and the recursive nature of the criminal justice system greatly influenced his interactions within that system. Tyquan noted that his African American peers' inability to see the long term benefit of education within their life plan trapped most of them into a cycle of criminal activity and incarceration. Tyquan commented:

> They had a high school diploma and did not have a plan for where they're going to be at in the next four to five years, short term or long term goals. When you sell drugs, weed, your short term goals is not to get caught. Your long term goal is to get rich and not get caught - It doesn't work that way.

Participants' experiences with the criminal justice system suggest that the neoconservative crime policies of the 1980s were neither color-blind nor race neutral, given the implosion of the African American male incarceration rates related to increased surveillance of the African American communities (Tonry, 1995; Wacquant, 2010).

Jalen experienced the criminal justice system from the perspective of those working within the system. He began his career in corrections in 1986, which marked the beginning of the peak years for increased drug arrests in the U.S. Jalen commented:

> Yeah, eight out of ten of them came in for drugs, not just in my rural area, but I'm going to say North Carolina has a hundred towns, and there's a lot of rural areas out of these hundred counties that these guys, number one, *did not get a proper education*, never left out of that environment. So, if they saw one man doing it and having a plethora of cars, nice clothing, the next guy that's uneducated or educated – let me clarify, educated do it as well, but in the rural areas, these are guys who never left their environment, so they want to mimic what they see. They didn't save any of their money for an attorney, they just spent it, you know? That left eight out of ten of them going to jail or prison, that couldn't afford an attorney.

Jalen, Corban, Brian, Tyquan and Charles expressed that their peers' lack of education

about laws and how they apply exacerbated their experiences within the criminal justice

system leading to arrests and higher rates of recidivism. Jalen commented:

> First of all, like I said, believe it or not, people still want to live in the Jim Crow
> era. Number two is, people are not being educated – uneducated people are not
> reading the newspaper, paying attention to the news… trying to learn some of
> these laws and by-laws… I think they want to keep these things on the books
> because we, as black males… are not up and not educated enough.

Alexander (2010) contends that the Reagan Administration's drug and crime policies

overtly targeted African American males for arrest and imprisonment and acted as an

institutional system of oppression by denying them access to economic opportunities and

civil liberties such as the right to vote. As such, policies and procedures associated with

the neoconservative crime legislation perpetuated African American males' interactions

in the criminal justice system and greatly influenced their life outcomes within that

sector.

Policies and Procedures: Practice of Mass Incarceration

Throughout the study, the participants were invited to discuss the influence of

specific crime statues and policies implemented during the Reagan Administration on

their criminal justice system interactions and other life outcomes. The interview protocols

guided participants to discuss their experiences with and understanding of the Anti-Drug

Abuse Act of 1986 and the Omnibus Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988. These legislative acts

established federal mandatory minimum sentencing for drug possession (primarily crack

cocaine and powder cocaine), permitted use of capital punishment for specific charges

related to the distribution of narcotics, precluded convicted felons from receiving

federal/state social services such as food stamps, public housing and Medicaid and

designated convicted felons ineligible to receive federal student financial aid. See Table 1

for a full description of crime policies.

The data indicated that participants viewed the crime policies and procedures

implemented during Reagan's tenure as having a profound influence on the mass

incarceration of African American males during that era. Participants' narratives revealed

common statements that illustrated mandatory sentencing; plea bargaining tactics;

juvenile prosecution; felon exclusion from social services and education; discriminatory

hiring practices against felons; and punitive rather than rehabilitative approaches to

corrections as primary factors that influenced their or their peers' life outcomes.

The majority of participants reported being impacted directly or indirectly by the

differentiated sentencing statue that established longer mandatory minimum sentences for

the possession of crack cocaine than for powder cocaine. The 1986 Anti-Drug Abuse Act

implemented a 100:1 sentencing ratio for crack versus powder cocaine. Ricky

commented on how the severity of sentencing for crack lead to the imprisonment of many

of his peers and prompted him to stop selling drugs. Ricky stated:

> Shit, I've got homeboys still locked up in prison, right now. They've been in there 25, 26, 27 years, 28, 21, 22, and the laws are totally different for the rich and uppity people in America, people that influence people, that had money… When they first passed the law, people weren't really aware of it. That was what's wrong with society now. People don't go to the ballot to check the ballots out, to see what's happening, see what's changing and what's not…I got arrested for fights and whatnot, for fights and stuff like that, shooting at people. I got arrested for it, but yeah, not selling that, no. You know, once you found out the stiffness of the penalties and stuff, then it's retarded to even get yourself caught up with it. You've got to be smarter than that, you know?

Ricky acknowledged that the mandatory minimum sentencing adversely affected Black

men who relied on drug dealing as a form of livelihood. Ricky reflected, "Once they

cracked it up, it was like it was a way of employment for Black men, young Black men. It was their employment, you know? That was the best employment for them, to make money, but then you're killing your people, too, at the same time. You're killing your people." Brian expressed a similar perspective. He expressed that the drug statue unfairly targeted African American males who, historically, avoided challenging White authority figures. Brian commented:

> When Reagan instituted his drug policies, it was more targeted to the Black's drug dealers than it was to Whites because the Whites, they get caught with the same amount of drugs as the Blacks, but the Whites normally use powder cocaine than crack cocaine… It took years for them to realize the difference. Once people started going to jail and looking at the charges they were getting sent down on, how much time they were getting sent down on, compared to the White counterparts that get caught with the same amount of stuff. They'll talk about it amongst themselves in the prison but back then you couldn't really voice your opinion towards the judges and the prosecutors, like, "I'm getting treated unfairly," because they weren't going to hear what you were saying.

The Anti-Drug Abuse Act's difference in the sentence of crack cocaine and powder cocaine resulted in a surge in incarceration rates among African American males – specifically poor, under educated, African American males.

Jalen felt that laws were needed to address the growing drug problem of the 1980s. However, he disagreed with the differentiation of sentencing and argued that it was a ploy to fill the prisons with uneducated, poor African American men. Jalen stated:

> I think they should have had stiff sentences, but if you're going to give stiff sentences, it's got to be across the board. You get a Black guy that had, I'm going to say, one ounce of cocaine, he got a ten-year bid. Mr. Smith's son, which is a White kid that has money, he gets probation or he gets, say, two years' probation… But the Black kid, poor, poverty area, the parents don't have any money to get him out of jail, get him an attorney, whereas Mr. Smith, with his White son, gets him out on bail… Now, that part on the drug scene, crack and the cocaine part, I didn't like the way that the government ran its business of poverty parents vs. middle class and above that can afford an attorney.

Jalen estimated that while working in corrections, 80 to 85 percent of all African

American male prisoners were in prison on drug convictions. He stated, "During that era,

most guys that were coming into prison were coming for two things: drugs and assault.

Killing people, Black on Black crime, as they sold the drugs in the Black community

where they didn't have jobs, uneducated."

Corban stated that his peers' knowledge of the Anti-Drug Abuse influenced their

degree of involvement with drugs. Corban commented:

> He wasn't selling rocks. That's why I said I'm positive about his because he wouldn't sell it. He wouldn't sell rocks. He called that raw, and he never sold raw… he knew. He was a smart kid. He was younger than me. He would be aware of those types of things. He would know about that, but everybody else, I don't think they even knew. I think they were just getting locked up. I don't think they had any idea about that.

The establishment of mandatory sentencing and the probability of serving lengthy

sentences presented prosecutors with additional leverage when trying cases – plea deals

(Alexander, 2010). Brian noted that he plead guilty to attempted assault, a crime which

he maintained that he did not commit, in order to avoid going to trial in a justice system

that did not favor African American men. Brian commented:

> The only thing my lawyer told me to do was to plead not guilty, but plead guilty with an alpha plea, where you plead guilty but they've got [no] evidence. Me, knowing the way they are around here, they'll try to pull something up, get a witness to lie on stand. They do all types of stuff around here, so I opted out for a year for something that I didn't do.

Orlando, who spent 16 years in federal prison, expressed that he never went to

trial for any of his charges. Orlando opted to plead guilty in exchange for lesser

sentences. His first criminal charge as an adult for robbery carried the possibility of a 115

year sentence if found guilty. By pleading guilty, he was only sentenced to six years.

Orlando commented on the plea bargain design as a scare tactic to prevent people from

obtaining their right to justice via a fair trial. Orlando stated:

> Yeah, most definitely, and that's the way the system is set up. If they come to you
> with a plea bargain, whether you have co-defendants or not, if they come to you
> with a plea bargain – and it has a lot to do with the individual. You have to know
> something about the law and know what they're bringing to you, because if you
> don't, they'll tell you whatever.
>
> But if you know something about the law and they bring your plea bargain, if you
> take it, then they'll be lenient on you, when you go to court. If you don't and you
> take them to trial, they're going to give you the maximum for the simple fact that
> you were hardheaded. To them, it's like you slapping them in the face. They're
> going to give you the max, whether you deserve it or not.

The data indicated that neoconservative crime initiatives influenced African

American males' interactions and outcomes with the criminal justice system. Jalen

explained that failure to rehabilitate individuals who were arrested for drug use made the

issue of recidivism and drug-related violence worse for African American men and their

communities. Jalen stated:

> A lot of these guys get on probation and they still fail their probation… Now
> they're hooked on these drugs and they can't get off. What is it in this process that
> are for these people that have been taken away, you know? It puts the person that
> really wants to get off drugs in a bad situation…are they really going to these
> Black communities and asking, "Do you want to be off drugs? This is what you
> need to do. Let us help you put you in this program, to get off these drugs."
> They'd be amazed, the number of Black male and females that would like to get
> off drugs, just if given a fair chance.

Orland expressed that the lack of opportunities for prisoners to develop a trade or skill

perpetuated the cycle of incarceration. He commented:

> They don't offer college courses no more. It's not about that no more. Now, it used
> to be prison was about actually trying to make a better person to go back into
> society. It's not about that anymore. It's about punishment.

The Omnibus Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988 mandated that felons were ineligible to receive public housing, food and nutrition assistance, and financial aid for higher education. Orlando stated, "They can't get a job because they have felonies on their record and different companies won't hire them and they can't find places to live because they have felonies on their records and whatnot. It plays a big factor." However, after serving the majority of his adult life in federal prison, Orlando noted that he would avoid seeking government assistance even if he was eligible for it. Orlando stated, "I haven't went that route. I'm not looking for no handouts from the government. I've got all that I need from the government. The government gave me enough time where I don't want nothing else from the government." Thus the findings from the data indicate that the neoconservative criminal justice policies and procedures implemented during Reagan's administration such as mandatory sentencing, plea bargaining, and extended penalization of felons post-release negatively influenced the educational and life outcomes of participants in the study. In addition, the data indicated that neoconservative policies greatly influenced mindsets as well as life outcomes.

Theme Four: Attitudes and Perspectives on Life Outcomes

The theme *Attitudes and Perspectives* emerged as a central finding from the interview data. This category did not correspond to a specific part of the research question, but the theme contributes to the researcher's understanding of the participants' educational and life outcomes. This study aimed to explore the educational and life outcomes of African American males who attended high school during the era of the Reagan Administration and its neoconservative policies. Like any political theory, neoconservatism is an ideology – a collection of thoughts and beliefs. Therefore,

concepts such as individualism, meritocracy and federalism and their proliferation into

social institutions can influence individuals' attitudes and perspectives. The interview

data illustrated that the beliefs and ideologies associated with neoconservatism influenced

participants' attitudes and perspectives, which then impacted their educational,

employment and criminal justice system experiences and outcomes.

Internal Locus of Control

Locus of control is a behavioral theory that describes how individuals

conceptualize causation (Rotter, 1966). Rotter (1966) contended that a person's locus of

control is either internal or external. Individuals who display a high internal locus of

control believe that their own personal actions are the cause of events and outcomes in

their life. A person who exhibits an external locus of control believes that external factors

beyond their control dictate their life outcomes (Rotter, 1966).

The study aimed to examine African American males' perspectives on how the

Reagan Administration's neoconservative policies influenced their educational and life

outcomes. The nature of the research question implies a presence of an external locus of

control in regards to participants' perceptions. The analyzed data revealed that the

majority of participants expressed that the policies enacted during Reagan's tenure

influenced certain aspects of their life or that of their African American male peers.

However, through further analysis of the data, the concept of *internal locus of control*

emerged from the findings. Participants in this study overwhelmingly expressed that their

own actions or their peers' actions were the cause of events and outcomes in their lives.

The findings illustrated that participants believed in two competing causation

rationales for their life outcomes. I analyzed this occurrence to be a result of lived reality

versus proliferated neoconservative ideology. Participants lived reality as African American males during the 1980s informed their perspectives on how outside factors such as federal policies influenced their conditions. However, political ideologies such as individualism – which suggests that one's individual interest should be prioritized over the collective's needs, and that individuals are solely responsible for what happens in their life, be it positive or negative outcomes – framed their explanation of why certain events happened in their lives.

Joe was unable to provide a reason or influential factor that contributed to his excessive truancy, series of arrests and alcohol addiction at the age of 16. He placed the blame for his actions on "poor decisions." Joe commented, "Yeah, just wrong choices, you know? …– I know I was a wrong person then, too. I know somebody tried to help so I can't – yes, just the attitude." Orlando shared experiences similar to Joe regarding arrests and addiction. Orlando stated that his choices that led him into federal prison were not influenced by the government or school – but by his own internal conflict with authority. Orlando explained, "I guess my biggest problem was just dealing with authority figures." Orlando did not make a connection between dropping out of school and having limited options to his series of criminal arrest. Instead, he viewed his actions as the determinate factor of his life outcomes.

During the 1980s, the high school graduation rate of African American males sharply declined after reaching a point of parity with White males in the 1970s (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Evans et al. (2012) attribute much of African American males' decline in educational attainment to lack of sufficient employment opportunities to rival the perceived financial benefits of the drug trade. This suggestion that the dropout epidemic

of the 1980s was not solely a result of lack of engagement on the part of African

American male students, but a combination of factors including societal conditions such

as poverty, which was exacerbated by neoconservative economic and social welfare

policies implemented during the Reagan era.

However, Orlando failed to see this connection and placed the onus of his fate on

his personal decision to engage in criminal activity. Orlando commented, "

> Well, most of mine was family issues. The reason I dropped out of high school, it was family issues. It didn't have nothing to do with school, didn't have nothing to do with my grades, none of that, just problems at home.

Orlando continued, "Finding a job and things like that didn't play a factor in me going

back to prison. It was just me, the choices that I made, my own decisions, the addictions

that I had. I can't blame it on the system or the government." The data reveals that

participants high locus of control may have derived from their desire to exert control of

their own lives. Participants had no control over how the media depicted young African

American males or public policy decisions. Thus, the ability to take responsibility for

one's own actions provided participants with a sense of autonomy over their lives.

Corban described his peers' negative outcomes as a culmination of bad decisions.

In reference to friends' life outcomes, Corban commented:

> He had enough males around him to make better decisions. He just chose to run with this one man. He chose to run with this one young man. He tried to get me to ride with them. "No, I'm not rolling with James." James was terrible. James had no boundaries at all, and both of them ended up going to jail. James is probably dead. I don't know where James is.

> It was all by choice. Dylan was a choice as well because his brothers and sisters went off and did great things, and he was actually in college, moving a lot of weight – a lot. Now he's doing thirty years, so his was by choice as well. He was in college.

Brian did not let his criminal record inhibit his ability to find a job. Brian asserted that the

decision to work was ultimately an outcome controlled by the individual. He commented:

> Basically, a lot of people use that as a crutch, talking about, "Well, I can't do nothing because I'm a felon and I can't do nothing because I'm Black," and this and that. That's not the case because if you're persistent and you show them that you want the job and you're willing to work, they're going to see that, regardless if you're Black, you've got a felony or what.

> I tell guys all the time, "You can't use that as your defense, just because you can't find no employment because this murderer's getting out of penitentiary and finding a good job. There's drug dealers getting out and finding good jobs. It's about how you want your life to lead up to."

> Charles provided a different causation rational for his life outcomes.

Unknowingly, Charles suggested the *culture of poverty* theory to explain his educational

and criminal justice system experiences and outcomes. The culture of poverty theory

proposes that individuals exposed to poverty for extended periods form a sub-culture that

develops behaviors that lead to perpetual poverty (Moynihan, 1965). Those behaviors

include an aversion to work; welfare dependency; and teen pregnancy. This social theory

was revisited during Reagan's tenure as his administration used the culture of poverty

refrain to justify cuts to social welfare funding. Charles highlighted several culture of

poverty factors as primary influences that contributed to his lack of educational

attainment and criminal justice system experiences. He stated:

> But because my home life wasn't – it was only a one-parent home. My mom didn't work. She had gotten government assistance, so those things kind of reflected my attitude in school. I was rebellious and I cut school and forged my mother's signature and would just do all kinds of mischief in school. I think school is a really good place, it just starts with whatever you have going on at home, you carry that in school.

Charles continued:

> Government assistance is pretty much designed to keep you, I believe, at a level

of mediocrity, you know what I'm saying? If you get caught up in those welfare systems – a lot of people, a lot of my friends, some of them now are getting disability checks, and there's nothing really wrong with them. You really can't blame it all on government. You've got to blame it on some of the people who've got the wrong mentality. Some of those things you may need assistance, food stamps or whatever, to get you from Step A to get you to Step B, but a lot of people are landing on that stuff and they become lazy or whatever, and they're like, "I want to stay here. This is good. I can get some free money, some free assistance for nothing." Now, I did get food stamps, but I knew eventually that's something that I don't want to tap for the rest of my life. I don't want to grow up getting food stamps and trying to get over on the system, so some of those things kind of affected me. But I jumped in and out of them so quick that I didn't stay there.

Orlando referenced the lack of social networks in poverty areas as an influential factor that contributed to his peers' aversion to work. He commented:

There are members of my family to where they didn't have that network. They were living in single-parent homes and they were brought up a different way. They were dependent on the government. They were on welfare and whatnot, and those opportunities was not there for them because the household that they were brought up in didn't allow them those types of experiences. Their minds weren't open to that. They knew one certain type of way of living, and that was it, where I was on the other side of the coin, to where I was privy to both sides.

The participants' adherence to causation theories that ironically align to neoconservative principles suggest that the messages attached to policies can be just as influential as the policies themselves.

Work Ethic

The concept of a *strong work ethic* was a common refrain among participants. Nine of the ten participants explicitly referred to how their work ethic influenced their employment – and in some cases educational – outcomes. Joe was the only participant in the study to jokingly admit that he "really didn't try to work too much." Overall the majority of participants, regardless of their educational background, expressed a strong belief in the value of working diligently. Through data analysis, I connected their

conviction to this principle to the meritocracy ideology.

The concept of meritocracy suggests that individuals are rewarded based on their performance, talents and abilities. It essentially proposes that if you work hard – no matter your life circumstances, you'll be rewarded for your efforts. Meritocracy is the foundation of the *American Dream* catechism. Meritocracy has been promoted by both conservatives and liberals; however, the political philosophy was re-emphasized by the Reagan Administration and neoconservatives as a justification for less need-based initiatives in favor of merit-based programs (Spritzer, 2003).

Nine of the ten participants reported having summer and after-school jobs while in high school. They expressed that working helped them to build character and a work ethic. Brian, Tyquan, Jalen, Jordan, Tony and Charles all had CETA or JTPA summer jobs. These jobs were a part of a federally-funded program designed to give job training and work experience to youth from low-income backgrounds. Funding was significantly cut to youth employment programs during the Reagan Administration via the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1981 (OBRA). Brian commented on his experiences working a CETA job:

> They had summer jobs back then. I did recreation centers in the summertime. I taught art over and do my regulations for the young kids. when I worked at the community center, I taught art, taught kids how to do pottery… Compared to nowadays, you have to have a certain grade point average just to get a job now. Back then, if you were willing to work and you signed up for the program, they'll find you a job.

Jordan used his social network to gain access to summer jobs. Joe stated:

> I worked at the health department, where I basically emptied trash, cleaned out the desks, cleaned windows. What else did I do? Oh, cut grass. Yes. We had to fill out an application, and I think based on – it was based on my mom's income, and I think by her having a low income, I was able to get a job easily and quickly.

Besides, I knew the lady as well.

Tony also leveraged his family's community connections to get involved in the government program. He commented, "I did have CETA summer jobs. My mom made sure I had one every summer. She was on it. She knew people who were in charge of hiring. Yes, she made sure we participated every summer."

When describing the educational and employment outcomes of their peers, participants readily referred to their peers' lack of a work ethic. The following narratives reflect a sample of participants' conceptualization of the influence of a work ethic on life outcomes.

> Jalen - Well, I think it was my upbringing from my parents, where that one door closed, you tried the next door, being persistent about getting a job, showing people your work ethics of being there probably on time, working over if you have to. You've got to have that tenacity in order to make it work because I do have friends that were lazy, you know? They sat back and waited for the job to come to them. I used to tell them, "Ain't nothing free, buddy. You've got to step out and go and get the job." I'll let the people know that I was very interested in the job, and that's what I did. If they said they were going to call me in ten days, I'm calling them in three days, to let them know that I'm persistent and I really want the job. That's where it led me.

> Tyquan - Well, they definitely influenced my peers because they didn't have the same work ethic that I had with making my own money. And being that they don't have those types of work ethics and they don't want to research the employer's background, in order to go in and do a satisfactory interview, then it disabled them.

> Orlando - It didn't really have much to do with my education so much as far as my upbringing, just being taught to work and having a way to work and having different skills, being able to work with my hands, being able to learn and comprehend. It didn't really have much to do with my education… At age nine, I'm out, cutting grass and paper routes and getting out, learning the value of a dollar and different things like that, but that's just my household. For people that didn't grow up in that kind of household, it was something totally different.

The majority of the participants suggested that their belief in a strong work ethic

was instilled in them by their parents and family members. However, the protestant work ethic ideology is advocated in several social institutions such as school and was heavily promoted by the Reagan Administration (Spritzer, 2003). The implicit, hidden message of the work ethic mantra is: if you don't work hard, you won't be successful. This concept denies the influence of race, gender and class on individuals' ability to succeed within social institutions. It implies that society is a leveled field of opportunity rather than a highly racialized stratified structure. Interestingly, participants who expressed having less favorable employment and educational outcomes did explain how their hard work and strong work ethic failed to yield the outcomes they desired.

Summary

This study described and examined the influence of the Reagan Administration's neoconservative public policies on the educational and life outcomes of African American males who attended high school during the Reagan era. The data was analyzed and organized into four themes that corresponded to the research question: 1). Systems of Support vs. Institutional Racism; 2). Post-High School Aspirations: Getting a Job; Joining the Service; or Going to College; 3). Dealing with the Criminal Justice System; 4). Attitudes and Perspectives on Life Outcomes. The next chapter includes a discussion of the themes, implications regarding the findings and recommendations for policy and future research.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

In chapter four, I described the findings from my study. I introduced the four themes that emerged from analysis of the interview data. The four themes identified were: 1). Systems of Support vs. Institutional Racism; 2). Post-High School Aspirations: Getting a Job; Joining the Service; or Going to College; 3). Dealing with the Criminal Justice System; 4). Attitudes and Perspectives on Life Outcomes. In chapter five, I discuss the findings via a critical race theory lens, address implications of the findings, and provide recommendations for future research and policy.

The purpose of this study was to explore the influence of the Reagan Administration's neoconservative public policies on African American males' educational and life outcomes. Intensive attention was given to the participants' experiences as young African American males in the 1980s within the social institutions of the workforce, school, and criminal justice system. Additionally, the study sought to examine the influence of policies grounded in a color-blind ideology on African American males' experiences and life outcomes. Federal public policies implemented during the Reagan Administration were a departure from the race and class conscious legislation introduced in the mid-1950s through the 1970s. According to Grant (2008), between 1981 and 1989, neoconservatives and the Reagan Administration successfully advocated to eliminate and/or defund policy with a race-critical, class-conscious focus. During the 1980s, neoconservatives supported their emphasis on race-neutral policies with the color-blind

framework. From the perspective of neoconservatives, the color-blind ideology promoted a society where race (as well as class status) is never considered in policies – especially those regarding employment and distribution of goods and services (Omni & Winant, 1994). However, failure to recognize the significance of race in the experiences and outcomes of individuals within social institutions downplays the influence and power of real barriers – such as racism and discrimination - that exist within a racially stratified society. The U.S.' racialized structure unremittingly places African American males at risk of adverse outcomes predicated by pervasive societal factors such as public policy.

Critical race theory guided my analysis of the data. CRT allowed me to place race, class and gender at the center of my analysis and interpretations of the findings. Critical race theory contends that individuals' categorical identities interact on multiple and simultaneous levels to create factors that influence one's experiences (Crenshaw, 1989). Through the data analysis, I was able to develop themes related to educational and life outcomes based on the lived experiences of African American males whose realities are largely constructed through the intersectionality of their race, class and gender. Critical race theory presumes that racism and discrimination are pervasive forces that are inextricably woven into the operations of social institutions. As such, policy designed within social institutions is neither color-blind nor neutral in its intent or outcomes and is used as a tool to perpetuate the status quo (Bell, 1992). Therefore, critical race theory provided a paradigm from which I could analyze federal public policies and subsequent influences from a race critical perspective.

Theme One: Systems of Support vs. Institutional Racism

Reagan's primary education public policy was the repeal of the ESEA (1965) and

implementation of ECIA (1981). The most significant part of this legislation to the participants' educational experiences and outcomes in high school was the elimination of Title I funding. Eight of the ten participants attended low-income schools which may have been impacted by the loss of Title I support. In addition, ECIA decreased funding to the school lunch and compensatory education programs, integration initiatives, and linked federal funds to high-stakes testing.

The data analysis revealed that factors related to institutional racism in schools via forms of microaggression and blatant racism greatly influenced the participants' educational experiences in high school. Tyquan expressed that his position as an African American male from the projects impacted how he was treated by White teachers and students who felt like he did not belong in their schools. Tyquan commented, "That was my introduction to discrimination when they integrated schools… It took an adaptation to survive the constant threat of being put out of school o being spat on or being bullied by the Whites." For Tyquan and other participants in the study who experienced institutional racism, school was a system in which the dominant culture via discrimination, policy and procedures exerted power over their educational outcomes.

However, participants in the study who had substantial systems of support were able to mitigate the influence of institutional racism and the lack of compensatory and intervention education programs. Participants who otherwise would have been denied access to enroll in advanced courses and tracked into vocational programs were able to leverage their systems of support to gain educational opportunities. Those participants indicated that their African American teachers cared about them, their well-being and academic success. For some participants, the presence of family members in schools as

teachers and administrators helped to create a positive learning environment and a strong system of support. Jalen stated:

> I had an aunt who was a teacher in town, and she would question it [Corban's status in the gifted program] because she thought I was the smartest kid ever… I think she got into my mom's ear. My mom made a phone call, questioning why I wasn't in there, and I started in seventh grade.

Having a system of support allowed Corban, Jordan, Jalen and Tony to stay on positive life trajectory for a longer period of time than their peers without established support structures in their lives.

Lisa Delpit (2006), Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994) and Jawanza Kunjufu (2006) attribute African American students' system of support in schools to teachers who recognize and promote as a point of knowledge the cultural background of students of color. They assert that teachers who share the cultural background of students or teachers who embrace students' culture are more adept at creating a learning environment that values and promotes students' cultural knowledge as a method to increase academic achievement.

Racial discrimination and stereotyping were primary factors that influenced the participants' experiences and outcomes in high school. Although more than 25 years had passed between *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) and the participants' arrival at high school, they still reported feelings of oppression associated with racial discrimination and stereotyping by peers and teachers. The most common discriminatory practice among participants was exclusion from advanced and college preparatory courses. All the participants stated that their high school had an advanced/college prep curriculum; however, only four participants indicated that they took advanced classes. Two participants were only admitted into advanced programs after their parents questioned

why their son was not enrolled in the gifted classes. Orlando's academic achievement earned him a spot in advanced placement courses, but the school administration used his conduct, not academic performance, as reason for dismissing him from the program. Orlando stated, "When I was in middle school, they placed me in an advanced class. I think I was in the 7th grade… I was talking Algebra II and Pre-Calculus and French classes and stuff like that when I was in the 7th grade. That didn't last too long because of my conduct because of my attitude." Other participants indicated that they were simply not encouraged to take advanced and college prep courses and received minimal college counseling. As such, opportunities to access higher were impeded by the gatekeepers that possessed knowledge of processes within the educational system.

Advanced courses and early preparation for college entrance exams are essential steps for students who aspire to go to a college or university. Participants were not readily exposed to this information and many were pushed into vocational track classes. Brian commented, "I took a vocational trade up. I first was in masonry and then from there, I transferred to Cosmetology to do hair. Back then when you took up Cosmetology that's when they had Barbering and Cosmetology in the same classroom." The unintentional (or intentional) denial of African American males' access to these classes meant that some participants' educational outcomes were heavily influenced by this form of educational oppression. Mickelson (2001) argued that tracking, the practice of relegating groups of students to one curriculum pathway, had been used as a way to re-segregate the student populations in integrated schools and preclude African American students from achieving educational outcomes equal to their White peers. African American males are disproportionately tracked into non-college prep/vocational courses which inhibits their

ability to compete for college admissions (Mickelson, 2001). In this study, participants acknowledged that their lack of advanced course work and/or college preparation limited their education options and impacted their overall educational outcome. However, participants with substantial systems of support were able to mitigate the influence institutional racism and effectively access opportunities for educational advancement.

<div align="center">Theme Two: Post-High School Aspirations</div>

Participants' aspirations post-high school fell within three categories: manufacturing/service sector, joining the service, or going to college. Participants who explained that employment was their primary goal after high school often referred to the concept of a "good job." Regarding his future post-high school, Ricky commented, "The only thing I was thinking about was getting out of school and getting a good job." Jaynes and Williams (1990) found that the African American community's growth in income earnings between the late 1950s and 1970s was attributed to the expansion of the industrial sector. Factory work provided African American men with the opportunity to earn competitive wages and benefits that had previously been denied to them in other occupational fields. Most of the participants' parents and relatives entered the workforce during the boom of the manufacturing era and conveyed to these young men that a good job was stability at a factory or plant. Brian recalled, "If you didn't work in construction, you worked in a place like GE or Ford or something like that, but you either had to know somebody to get in on jobs like that… they wanted somebody that had experience, family members that used to work there that can put in a word for them or stuff like that." Participants' family members' reliance on the manufacturing sector for job stability reflects their reality as African American males in the 1960s and 1970s. It indicates that

career aspirations were greatly influenced by their race and gender. Many of the participants were encouraged to work in factories and other forms of manual work. Family members and teachers' encouragement of these types of positions suggest that African American males were expected to stay in the industrial and service sector. Encouraging participants to pursue jobs in the professional sector would have marked a departure from the status quo.

During the 1980s, the landscape of the labor market shifted. Urban deindustrialization and internationalization led to a steep decline in the availability of "good jobs" for African American men (Wilson, 1997). During this same period, the Reagan Administration approved cuts to job training and youth employment programs via OBRA (1981), ECIA (1981) and ERTA (1981) (Katz, 1990; St. Pierre, 1990). Participants' employment outcomes were influenced by the lack of job opportunities and job training programs. As a result of decreased employment options, several participants sought work in the service industry. A shortage of full-time manufacturing positions also pushed participants and their peers into temporary/contract employment. From a critical race theory perspective, the elimination of federal initiatives designed to improve workforce participation among African American males perpetuated the status quo by maintaining the interest of the dominant culture. Neoconservative economic policies diminished Affirmative Action practices and job training and increased internationalization and laissez- faire practices. These policies exacerbated the conditions of African American males and relegated poor minorities to a state of perpetual poverty.

The data revealed that joining the military was a prime career alternative for participants with limited employment opportunities. Seven participants considered

joining the Armed Forces. Propensity towards military service did not vary based on participants' geographical location or academic achievement record. Even the participants who acknowledged college aspirations expressed ambitions to join a branch of the U.S. military. Jordan commented, "My aspiration was basically going to the Marines. I had no idea, no aspirations to take the SAT, but I took it. I did pretty good." Neal (2008) contends that military service was a prime option for African American men seeking equal opportunities in employment and job training. The meritocratic structure of the Armed Forces (post-integration) presented a more accessible alternative to social mobility for African American men (Armor & Gilroy, 2010).

The majority of the participants had male family members in the Armed Forces. This increased participants' receptiveness to military service. The data suggested that joining the military was perceived as an honorable family tradition rather than an occupation of last resort. Jalen commented, "The military, as my father and brothers say, teaches you a lot of trades, gives you a lot of knowledge on things, and it also get you out to see the world." The presence of a family legacy of service occurred more often with participants from rural backgrounds. This finding suggests that limited availability of employment within small rural areas as a result of neoconservative labor policies and deindustrialization greatly influenced participants' military career aspirations.

The pervasiveness of military aspirations reflect the findings of Elder (1986) and Sampson and Laub (1996). They found that military service offered a life trajectory shift for disadvantaged African American males with low educational attainment (Elder, 1986; Sampson & Laub, 1996). African American males were attracted to the benefits military enlistment offered such as the G.I. Bill. Thus, World War II and the official integration of

the military significantly influenced the life outcomes of African American males by adding a life stage which was previously inaccessible to them. Elder (1986) described African American males propensity to military service as a reaction to the increase need for soldiers during wartime. A similar social transformation occurred with the expansion of public education via the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) ruling. The end of segregation at public institutions made higher education more accessible to African American males and promoted college to a common life stage for African Americans.

Reagan's tenure marked the largest growth in military personnel during peace time. The Reagan Administration's defense initiatives increased military spending by $100 billion annually (Higgs, 1994). A portion of the defense budget was dedicated to amplifying recruitment efforts – particularly recruitment of minorities. Hisnanick (2001) and Teachman and Call (1996) indicate that the military was/is a viable option for African American men with limited education during weak labor market conditions. However, African American men who forgo other career options such as college do not transfer their military experience into sustainable positive outcomes. African American males are more likely to enter into a military service-sector position (transportation, clerical, etc.) and are less likely to make a career of the military (Neal, 2008). Consequently, a large segment of the African American male population returns to the civil sector after military service with low demand, job skills. Of the nine participants who considered military service, three joined. None of the participants who joined a branch of the Armed Forces made a career of military service. These findings suggest that, in many ways, the Armed Forces' recruitment initiatives of the 1980s in combination with African American males' socialization towards military service influenced participants' educational and life

outcomes.

The data revealed that most participants' aspirations to attend college were inextricably tied to their aspiration to play collegiate athletics. Tyquan commented, "I didn't decide that I wanted to attend college until my senior year. Yeah, and that was motivated primarily because of me wanting to play football at the college level." The participants' understanding of education's intrinsic value did not occur to later in their lives. Brian commented that his aspirations to go to college dissipated after he noticed that most scholarships went to football and basketball players. He ran track, and therefore noted that there was no possibility that he would be able to go to college. Brian stated, "Like I said, back then, there weren't really too many scholarships going out for track stars and stuff like that. If it wasn't basketball or football, they weren't really into all the other sports."

This finding illuminates the pervasiveness of sports socialization among African American males. The participants' college aspirations were also mitigated by Reagan's educational public policies that eliminated or significantly decreased funding to compensatory and intervention programs, pre-college programs such as TRIO, and federal financial aid. The Economic Consolidation and Improvement Act of 1981 slashed the education budget and significantly reduced financial aid appropriations. African Americans were then, and still are, the group most likely to utilize federal grants and work study programs. The reduction of federal financial aid greatly impacted African American males' access to higher education. Critical race theory suggests that public policies explicitly and implicitly promote the interests of the dominant culture by maintaining the status quo. As such, education has been used as a status marker to

legitimize the ubiquitous racial stratification that exists within the U.S. An increase in the

level of educational attainment of African American males would disrupt the status quo.

Therefore, it appears that the elimination of college preparatory programs and decrease in

federal financial aid, in many ways, impeded African American males' access to higher

education and successfully preserved the self-interests of the dominant culture.

<div align="center">Theme Three: Dealing with the Criminal Justice System</div>

In this study, six of the ten participants had extensive interactions with the

criminal justice system. The remaining four participants all indicated that they had

limited experiences with the criminal justice system via their peers or family members.

The data indicated that African American males' involvement with or exposure to the

various elements of the criminal justice system was normative. From a critical race theory

perspective, the judicial and penal systems that disproportionately impact the life

trajectories of African American males can be viewed as hegemonic state apparatuses that

act as systems of domination by oppressing the civic and economic liberties of poor

minorities.

The findings indicate that the crime policy and criminal justice procedures

implemented during the Reagan Administration influenced the educational and life

outcomes of participants in the study. The mid-1980s demarked a period of increased

rates of incarceration among African American males (Blumstein & Beck, 1999; Mauer,

1999). Mauer (2009) contends that the racialized focus of the War on Drugs subjected

African American males to higher frequencies of arrests and imprisonment. Jalen noted

the frequency of drug arrests and convictions among African American males in his

community. Jalen stated, "I think 80 percent during that time or 85 percent [were] Black.

It was Blacks that were going to jail or prison for drugs compared to the White guys not going to jail or they're just getting probation." The implementation of the Anti-Drug Abuse Acts of 1986 and 1988 and its accompanying strategies such as "stop and search" increased the propensity of incarceration among African American males. Pettit and Western (2004) contended that as a consequence of hyperincarceration practices imprisonment had become a common life stage for young African American males. Western (2002) found that incarceration was linked to low wage employment, unemployment, and family stability. Only two participants directly referenced family and home life as a contributing factor to their experiences with the criminal justice system.

However, the participants stated their involvement with or their peers' involvement with the criminal justice system stemmed from lack of economic opportunities. Jalen commented, "The thing that was going on then – the job situation was really tough and by them not having those skills, what else was there for them to do…" This finding corresponds to Levitt and Venkatesh (2001) and Venkatesh's (1994) studies that linked limited employment opportunities for low-skilled African American males to criminal activity. Participants noted that they or their peers engaged in crime for a variety of reasons which were all linked to financial gain. Tyquan and Corban commented that their peers used drug dealing to provide for their families. Corban commented, "It [poverty and lack of employment options] possibly could have had influenced them, or one or more. Yes, because they were surviving. Anybody who lived on the minimum was just trying to survive." Ricky expressed that his involvement in the drug trade was tied to his desire to earn money. Ricky added, "The hustling. Right, the hustling is faster. It was real fast… I was collecting more from my coworkers that were

strung out on crack than my check was." Petitt and Western (2004) contend, "If poor Black men were attracted to the illegal drug trade in response to the collapse of low-skill labor markets, the drug war raised the risks that they would be caught, convicted and incarcerated" (p. 154).

The War on Drugs and crime lowered the standard for what behavior constituted imprisonment (Petitt & Western, 2004). Petitt and Wester (2004) contend that individuals did not have to demonstrate extreme deviant behavior to be incarcerated. The intertwinement of crime, race and gender in the 1980s disproportionately affected African American males. Bell (1992) asserted that racism is intricately embedded within social institutions. As such, the policies put forth by these entities are inherently designed to maintain the status quo by perpetuating social inequities among minorities. Life course interruptions experienced by the participants and their peers as a result of incarceration precluded them from pursuing educational opportunities and positions within the workforce.

Participants were impacted by the emergence of the mass incarceration and prison industrial complex phenomenon. The data revealed that the participants' and/or their peers' life trajectories were influenced and impeded by imprisonment. Incarceration prevented African American males from achieving other modal life events such as degree attainment, full-time employment and marriage. However, Jalen, Brian, Tyquan and Jordan noted that the impact of stringent drug and crime policies did not impact their White male peers with the same voracity as it did their African American male cohort. Ricky attributed the incarceration rate disparities to racial and class discrimination. He commented, "The laws are totally different for the rich and uppity people in America,

people that influence people - that had money." Brian echoed this refrain and noted:

> When Reagan instituted his drug policies, it was more targeted to the Black's drug dealers than it was to Whites because the Whites, they get caught with the same amount of drugs as the Blacks, but the Whites normally use powder cocaine than crack cocaine. If you get caught with the same amount of powder cocaine, you're getting less time than if you would if you got caught with crack cocaine. It took years for them to realize the difference.

Wacquant's (2010) study illuminates this occurrence, and he contends that the term "mass incarceration" conceals the racialized and class driven intent of the 1980s and 1990s'crime policies. He suggests that if the statues embedded in the Anti-Drug Abuse Act and other crime legislation were truly color-blind, the effects of the policies would be distributed evenly, indiscriminate of race and class, among the population. Participants' perception of prison as an institution designed to punish rather than rehabilitate reflects the major shift in the penal system to a proprietary institution. The data revealed that the participants and/or their peers' life outcomes post-incarceration were influenced by the lack of job training and/or drug treatment programs available in prison. Failure to address the issues that contributed to their incarceration only perpetuated the cycle of arrests and imprisonment. Orlando commented:

> Now, it used to be prison was about actually trying to make a better person to go back into society. It's not about that anymore. It's about punishment. You're here to do you time, period. We're not going to offer you nothing. If your people don't have no money, you're not going to get no college courses, you're not going to get nothing, period. That's how the prison system is set up now.

Davis (2001) findings indicate that the shift in the penal system from rehabilitative to punitive illustrates economic and political ideologies that aim to commercialize the prison industry. Davis (2001) contends:

> Vast numbers of corporations with global markets rely on prisons as an important
>
> source of profit and thus have acquired clandestine stakes in the continued

expansion of the prison system. Because the overwhelming majority of U.S. prisoners are from racially marginalized communities, corporate stakes in an expanding apparatus of punishment necessarily rely on and promote old as well as new structures of racism… in the era of the disestablishment of social programs that have historically served poor communities, and at a time when affirmative action programs are being dismantled and resources for education and health are declining, imprisonment functions as the default solution…[Yet] the emergence of a prison industrial complex means that whatever rehabilitative potential the prison may have previously possessed (as implied by the bizarre persistence of the term "corrections") is negated. Instead, the contemporary economics of imprisonment privilege the profitability of punishment at the expense of human education and transformation. (p. 3)

This finding highlights the structures of racism embedded within the criminal justice system which Davis (2001) refers to as a mechanism that maintains a large minority prison population. Plea bargains and mandatory minimum sentencing structures influenced participants' life outcomes related to the criminal justice system. The data indicates that the Reagan Administration's neoconservative crime policies greatly influenced the experiences and life outcomes of the participants and their African American male peer cohort.

Theme Four: Attitudes and Perspectives on Life Outcomes

The data revealed that the beliefs and ideologies associated with neoconservatism influenced the participants' attitudes and perspectives toward education, employment and the criminal justice system. Participants demonstrated a high internal locus of control in

regard to their educational and life outcomes. They expressed a strong belief in their ability to control the events in their lives. Individualism and choice were a common theme among narratives. Joe blamed himself for his multiple interactions with the criminal justice system. He commented, "Yeah, just wrong choices, you know?… Now I was a wrong person then, too. I know somebody tried to help so I can't – yes, just the attitude." Ironically, the participants were able to connect how the Reagan Administration's neoconservative policies influenced their peers' educational options and life outcomes. However, the majority of the participants were unable to make an explicit connection between those same policies and their own educational, employment and criminal justice system experiences.

Orlando stated, "Finding a job and things like that didn't play a factor in me going back to prison. It was just me, the choices that I made, my own decisions, the addictions that I had. I can't blame it on the system or the government." I analyzed participants' high internal locus of control and belief in a strong work ethic as a result of the proliferation of neoconservative ideologies within social institutions. Participants, unknowingly, adhered to a dominant culture ideology which when applied to African American males does not yield the same positive outcomes as it may produce for individuals from the dominant culture. Ideologies such as meritocracy and individualism assume that each person is given the same opportunities to fail or to succeed. As such, failure is not a result of government structures, inequities in resource distribution, or racism, but the consequence of poor decisions. During the 1980s, neonconservatives heavily promoted individualism and meritocratic principles to justify the elimination of need-based and race-conscious policies. These ideologies negated the influence of racism and classism and suggested

that poverty, imprisonment and unemployment were choices. Participants' adherence to hegemonic ideologies that advocate the status quo and the interest of the dominant culture illustrates the infiltration of hidden curriculums within social institutions such as schools. From a critical race theory perspective, the promotion of hegemonic ideologies that suggest the existence of equality and equity of opportunities within society can be viewed as a form of domination over minority populations. Meritocracy and individualism promote the internalization of inferiority and self-guilt among individuals who believe that their actions are solely responsible for events in their lives. The data, however, reveal that many of the situations and events experienced by the participants were highly susceptible to outside societal factors (i.e. racism, discrimination) beyond their own self-control (deMarrais & LeCompte, 1999).

<div align="center">Implications</div>

The findings in this study have significant implications for policy makers, educators, and individuals committed to the academic success and positive life outcomes of young African American males. According to critical race theory, the pervasiveness of racism and discrimination with social institutions places African American male students at risk of adverse educational and life outcomes. The processes and policies innate to social institutions maintain the status quo by perpetuating social inequities which disproportionately influence African American males. African American males' social mobility via advancements in education and employment may be impeded by a myriad of factors including limited economic resources and educational access, discriminatory practices in the workforce, and racialized federal/state public policies.

Educators, policy makers, and society at-large must be mindful of the influence

that color-blind federal policies have on the educational and life outcomes of teen and young adult African American males. Federal policies influence the policy decisions that occur at the state level. When the nation's governing body decides to ignore the influence of race and gender in the development of public policy agendas, state and local municipalities follow suite. Public policies built around the color-blind ideology disregard the pervasiveness of racism and discrimination within the workforce, schools and criminal justice system and invalidate the experiences of African American males who incessantly endure those mechanisms of oppression. Policies that relegate African American males to the margins of society not only impact the African American community, but also impede the vitality and productivity of the nation as a whole.

At a cost of $24 billion annually to provide crime and welfare benefits to male dropouts between the ages of 25-34, it would greatly benefit the American society to seriously engage in inquiry to discover what public policies perpetuate the dropout epidemic and what policies may be implemented to thwart this phenomenon (Thorstensen, 2002). African American males constitute the largest percentage of the dropout population. In light of current economic conditions, the possibility to decrease investments in an institution that yields limited returns to society by increasing the educational attainment and employment opportunities for underserved and unserved African American males deserves further exploration. The consequences of neoconservative crime policies that remove African American males from their society have reverberating effects in their community. When 12.5 percent of the young adult African American male population is imprisoned, they leave in their absence large gaps in the labor force, limited number of male role models, and a belief that imprisonment is

a normative life event for African Americans. By acknowledging that policies are neither color-blind nor neutral in their design, intent and outcomes, policy makers and educators can begin to take concerted efforts to ensure that the public policies being put forth provide equitable opportunities for African American males to achieve social mobility and positive life outcomes.

Limitations

As with all research, there were several limitations to this study. The study was limited by a purposive-sampling design. Participants were selected based on a sample criterion which was aligned to the study's research focus. The purposive sampling structure may have excluded potential research participants who may have meaningfully contributed to the study. The study was limited in the number of research participants. Including more participants in the study may have provided a broader variety of perspectives or contributed to the saturation of the data. Participants also matriculated through high school at various points during the Reagan Administration. Therefore, their experiences may not reflect the influence of every social policy focused on in the study as policies were introduced throughout an eight year period [1981-1989]. In addition, the participants in the study represent a select sample of African American males from southeastern and northeastern states, and therefore the study does not represent a national sampling.

The study was also limited by my role as the primary instrument of data collection. As the interviewer and interpreter of the data, there was a risk of researcher bias. In order to delimit the potential of researcher bias, I used member checks, triangulation of the data, and reflexive journaling. This dissertation used a qualitative

research method. As with all qualitative research, the findings from this study are unique to the research participants and not generalizable to all African American males who attended high school during the Reagan Administration era [1981-1989].

Recommendations

The findings from this study reveal the need for policy makers to evaluate the impact of race, class and gender when developing policy agendas. Recommendation for federal, state and local policy makers:

Legislators at federal, state and local level must build and extend their cultural competency to include knowledge of how racism and discrimination influence African American males and other minorities within social institutions. The rampant growth of the wealth gap and the disproportionate rate of college graduation between Whites and minorities, the disproportionate rate of incarceration of African American males, and the higher rates of unemployment among African American males indicate that race and gender are influential factors on life outcomes. However, without a developed cultural competency, legislators are ill-equipped to address societal inequities that are mainly defined by race and class. Therefore, elected officials and individuals directly involved in policy development should be required to engage in on-going culturally responsive training. In education, culturally responsive teaching (CRT) has been implemented in schools across the nation as a proactive measure to address the learning needs of students from varying cultural backgrounds. The CRT pedagogy encourages teachers to utilize students' cultural backgrounds and funds of knowledge to empower students and accelerate academic achievement (Ladson-billings, 1994). However, before teaching from a culturally responsive paradigm, teachers must take the time to learn about their

students' cultural background and experiences. Without this knowledge, teachers would be unable to bridge the gap between students' school and home lives. Likewise, when legislators are unaware of the cultural backgrounds and experiences of their constituencies and how those identities may result in racism and discrimination, the policies developed will lack consideration of those influences. Engaging in on-going culturally responsive training would help legislators develop a cultural competency that extends beyond their own and heighten their sensitivity to the influence of racism and classism within social institutions for which public policy is designed.

Public policies that use a color-blind framework in the name of equality must be amended to address the real and present danger of racism and discrimination in social institutions that oppress minorities. Public policy reform is particularly needed in crime control legislation. Legislators must re-evaluate the purpose and intent of anti-crime policy that results in the imprisonment of 12 percent of the African American male population between the ages of 16 and 24. Local, state and federal public policy advocates must bring to the forefront the discrepancies between who commits crimes and who is arrested. In addition, legislators should reassess the punitive nature of the penal system. The increase in the rate of incarceration among African American males stems from an increase in drug convictions. In North Carolina, it cost $32,000 a year to house one prisoner. The average cost of a residential drug treatment program is $25,000 per year (NCDPS, 2013). Considering that the average drug conviction carries a sentence of two years and that prisoners who receive drug treatment have a lower rate of recidivism, legislators should re-evaluate the societal and economic value associated with a rehabilitative corrections system. In addition, legislatures at every level should consider

the benefits of reinstating or expanding anti-poverty policies from the War on Poverty era. Increasing early childhood education, education enrichment and intervention, and food nutrition programs is the first step to achieving enduring academic achievement and positive life outcomes among African American male students. African American males experienced positive educational and employment outcomes when the nation focused on increasing the welfare and educational opportunities of poor and minority students. Therefore, returning to a policy-agenda that embraces anti-poverty and equity based initiatives will impact the education and life trajectories of African American males as well as low-income students who make up one-third of the nation's public school population.

Recommendations for educators:

The participants in this study demonstrated a lack of critical consciousness as high school students and young adults. What if the participants were taught in school how to critically assess the world around them for themes of race, power and privilege? What if the African American males in this study were encouraged as high school students to analyze and interpret the implicit messages being directed to them by their curriculum? What if these young men were given the opportunity to discuss in an educational setting the War on Drugs beyond "Just Say No" and to evaluate the impact war may have on them and their peers? Freire (1970) contended that the awakening of one's critical consciousness must occur before an individual can begin to change his or her world through informed praxis. In order to shift the educational and life outcomes of African American males, educators must teach African American males how to be critical consumers of their worlds. Too often, African American males learn about issues of

power and privilege from a disadvantaged position. If educators begin to build the critical awareness and consciousness of students through exploration of the curriculum via a critical lens, African American males may be better prepared to navigate around the racialized and gendered barriers present within social institutions.

Local education agencies (LEA) and states' board of education should require courses that awaken the critical consciousness of students. State education curriculums should introduce critical and social theory based classes to students in upper elementary through high school grades. Students' early exposure to concepts such as social inequities, funds of knowledge and critical consciousness is key to building a generation of learners who are capable of advocating for policies that are race-conscious and equity-based. The International Baccalaureate (IB) program's implementation of critical theory based courses is a primary example of how state and local administrators can begin to build a curriculum centered on critical thinking and awareness. In IB programs (an advanced placement education program) across the nation, students as young as ten are learning how to be critical thinkers and readers via Theory of Knowledge and Funds of Knowledge courses. In these courses, they learn to evaluate the role, origin, and nature of knowledge in their own culture and in the cultures of others. Courses such as these should be encouraged and implemented at all schools – especially schools with underserved and unserved students- as tool for students to use to challenge the inequities presented in public policies and in their communities.

The study's findings indicate that the participants lacked access to knowledge about school processes and policies. As a result, their opportunity for educational attainment was limited. These findings present the need for educational advocates who

focus on the advancement and creation of education initiatives and opportunities for African American males. At the school level, teachers and administrators should utilize community partnerships with local businesses, churches and educational non-profits to create academic allies for students who may lack educational advocates. The focus of these partnerships would be to provide academic guidance in the selection of curriculum pathways and college preparation. Possible activities to increase educators, parents and community members' level of advocacy for African American males in the school system include hosting community parent information sessions in which members of local education agencies are invited to discuss school processes that are imperative to students' educational attainment. Session topics could include school-discipline policies, how to gain access to honors and advanced courses, and college preparation and financial aid planning.

Given the lack of literature on African American males and public policies outside of crime policies, it is imperative that future studies explore the influence of policy on the life course of this subgroup. This retrospective study examined the influence of the Reagan Administration's neoconservative and color-blind public policies on African American males' educational and life outcomes. The research focus was grounded in policies implemented between 1981 and 1989. Future studies should expand the investigation of public policies to include periods prior to 1981 and after 1989 in order to illustrate a cohesive picture of the influence of public policy on African American males.

There is also a need to examine the influence of public policy on the educational and life experiences of African American males from a quantitative research approach. A

quantitative study may be useful to policy makers and educators as it allows for generalizability of the findings. The demographic make-up of the participants in this study was primarily contained to African American males from southern and northeastern states. Future studies that recreate the design and research focus of this dissertation should consider broadening the sample's diversity by including participants from other geographical regions. Participants from other regions such as the West and Mid-west may provide key findings regarding the ways in which geographical locations (and their unique labor markets, economic resources, educational institutions, etc.) impact the influence of public policy on African American males. Lastly, this study was retrospective in that it investigated the past experiences and outcomes of African American males as teens in the 1980s. Future studies should examine the influence of color-blind, neoconservative policies on the educational and life outcomes of African American males in today's educational institutions.

Summary

This study explored the Reagan Administration's neoconservative, color-blind public policies influence on African American males' educational and life outcomes. Through interviews with African American males who attended high school during the Reagan era [1981-1989], the data collected revealed that their educational experiences, educational and career aspirations and interactions with the criminal justice system were influenced by a variety factors including limited educational access to college preparatory programs, systems of support in education, urban deindustrialization, lack of job training and economic initiatives, limited financial aid for higher education, heightened military recruitment initiatives, punitive crime and drug policies, and the proliferation of

neoconservative ideologies. The findings of this study are not indicative of the experiences and life outcomes of all African American, high school-aged males during the 1980s. However, the study offers a qualitative analysis of the influence of federal public policy on a select sample of African American males and adds the voices of those most impacted by policies that dictate access and mobility to the conversation.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL A

Background

1. Where did you grow up?
2. Describe what your neighborhood was like growing up.
3. What did you like about your environment? What did you not like about your environment?
4. Describe your family life during your school-age years.

Educational Outcomes

1. Where did you go to school (secondary school)?
2. Describe what it was like in the schools you attended.
3. What aspects of school did you enjoy? What aspects did you not enjoy?

Potential Probing Questions

- Where you in any specialized classes at school? School programs?
- Did you find school useful or valuable?
- How did you feel about taking standardized tests and graduation exit exams?
- At any point in your schooling career, did you have an experience that made you dislike/avoid school?
- Did you have a job while in school?

4. Describe your family's role in your education.
5. Did you have aspirations to attend college?

Potential Probing Questions

- Were you encouraged to pursue post-high education>
- Were there any issues (finances, family, children, health, legal, grades) that prevented you from post-high school education?
- Did participate in any alternative education programs? i.e. JobCorp, CETA

6. What were your thoughts on the military as a career option?
7. Reflecting on your educational experience during the 1980s,

how do you think issues of the time such as cuts to summer programs and job training, recessions, unemployment and crime impacted your education choices/outcomes?

Employment Outcomes

1. Describe your work experience post-high school?

    Potential Probing Questions

    -   Has finding employment ever been difficult for you?
    -   How has your level of educational attainment influenced your employment options?
    -   What barriers did you experience or witnessed of others to obtaining employment?

2. Reflecting on your past employment history (while in secondary and post-high school), what are your thoughts on how issues such as the recession, high unemployment, and cuts to youth job training programs impacted your employment opportunities/options?

Criminal Justice System Outcomes

1. Did you see crime in your neighborhood or surrounding areas?
2. What was your understanding of the war on drugs? How was it publicized in your community?
3. Describe your experiences (or the experiences of those close to you) as an adolescent/teen with the criminal justice system?
4. Describe your post-high school experiences with the criminal justice system?

    Potential Probing Questions

    -   What is your understanding of the "crack laws" which were outlined in the anti-drug abuse act of 1986 and omnibus drug abuse act?
    -   Have you ever been incarcerated (sentenced to serve time in state or federal prison)?
    -   Describe your experiences after being released from prison?
    -   Did you experience any difficulties in finding employment; earning a significant wage; finding housing; meeting family obligations (child support laws)?

5. Reflecting on your experiences with the criminal justice system,

what are your thoughts on how high unemployment, cuts to social services, and the introduction of stringent drug laws influenced your interactions with the criminal justice system?

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL B

1. In our initial interview, you discussed your aspirations and plans post-high school. Can you further discuss what situations or factors may have impeded or assisted you in achieving those plans?

2. In our initial interview, you discussed your experiences within the criminal justice system. Can you further describe how those experiences have impacted your life in regards to education and employment?

3. What is your overall perspective of your educational experience in the 1980s? Do you recall one aspect of education being promoted over others? i.e. standardized testing, character building, science and math education.

4. As an adult aware of the presence of public policies, can you reflect on how you feel the education and public policies of the Reagan Administration or 1980s impacted your life?

5. What recommendations do you have pertaining to public policy that you feel, if implemented, would positively influence the educational and life outcomes of African American males?