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Re-entry African American male high school dropouts through the lens of critical race theory with content analysis of the case studies

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RE-ENTRY AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUTS
THROUGH THE LENS OF CRITICAL RACE THEORY WITH
CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE CASE STUDIES

by

Bob Walker
Bachelor of Business Administration
University of Cincinnati
1969

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the

Master of Science Degree in Educational Psychology
Department of Educational Psychology
College of Education

Graduate College
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May 2010
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Robert Paul Walker

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Re-Entry African American Male High School Dropouts through the Lens of Critical Race Theory with Content Analysis of the Case Studies

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May 2010
ABSTRACT

Re-Entry African American Male High School Dropouts Through The Lens of Critical Race Theory with Content Analysis of the Cases

by

Robert Walker

Dr. Christine Clark & Dr. Paul Jones, Examination Committee Co-Chairs
Professors of Education
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

This is a multi-case study, utilizing in-depth interviews, of three African American male high school dropouts who are reentering an alternative high school program in Southern Nevada. The participants tell of their life experiences, broadly considered, in relationship to school, family, peers, and discrimination. Hearing their story in their own voices gives a forceful dimension to the statistics of the group many call the “endangered species.” The in-depth interviews reveal the challenging experiences that many young African American men must rise above in order to survive, including the daily incidents of racism—both institutional and individual—that all African Americans endure.

The research questions asked of each young man were:

1. What were the general lived experiences, family life influences, peer relationships, and/or other factors that led you to leave school early?
2. Was racial discrimination a factor in your dropping out?
3. What motivated you to return to school to get a diploma or GED?

The findings of this study reveal data consistent with that in the current literature on African American male high school dropouts. In particular, these findings show that the participants felt that racism and discrimination were key factors in their leaving school.
early, and that their decision to reenter high school was their attempt to fight back against these negative influences and take control of their lives.
DEDICATION

This paper is dedicated to my mother, Dear, and my brother Roy.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to thank GOD for my health, my family, and my friends. I want to thank Sharon Burgess-Walker, my wife, for her inspiration and support. I would like to thank Dr. Cliff McClain, Dr. William Cross, and co-chairs Dr. Paul Jones, and Dr. Christine Clark for their contributions.
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CHAPTER 1
THE PROBLEM AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

Opening

This chapter, Chapter 1, provides an overview of the study and discusses the researcher’s personal connection to it. Chapter 2 reviews the literature related to the study. Chapter 3 delineates the study method. Chapter 4 documents the study findings. Finally, Chapter 5 discusses the study in sum, draws conclusions, and offers recommendations.

Overview

There are many theories about why the dropout rate among African American males is so high. These theories generally fall into two main themes: “push” effects and “pull” effects (Rumberger, 1987; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986). Push effects are factors located within the school itself, for example, poor grades leading to low self-esteem, skipping classes, and absenteeism (Finn, 1989; Kaplan, 1992). Pull effects are external factors in a student’s extracurricular life, for example, low socio-economic status (SES), which some researchers believe cause high dropout rates especially among minorities because many minority students’ parents did not graduate from high school, thus, education is not perceived to be something they prioritize for their children (Sum, et. al., 2003). A theory that has both push and pull effects for African American male students in particular argues that these students disengage from high school because to do well in school means they have given up their racial identity and are “acting white” (Fryer & Torelli, 2005).

African American males are called an “endangered species” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, IV, 1995) due not only to the disproportionate numbers of them who are high school
dropouts, but also because they experience excessive unemployment rates, skyrocketing rates of incarceration, as well as high mortality rates. For this study, it was important to find out what in both mainstream and white American culture and African American culture creates such negative outcomes for this population. Critical race theorists have indicated that institutionalized racism in the American school system could be a factor in African American male and other minorities’ problems in school (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Racism is defined in *Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary* as “a belief that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race (1988, p. 969). Institutionalized exclusionary racism occurs when the dominant white society excludes African American males from receiving an equal education:

In schooling, the absolute right to exclude was demonstrated initially by denying African Americans access to schooling altogether. Later, it was demonstrated by the creation and maintenance of separate schools. More recently it has been demonstrated by white flight and the growing insistence on vouchers, public funding of private schools, and schools of choice. Within schools, absolute right to exclude is demonstrated by resegregation via tracking (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 60).

These practices disproportionately negatively impact African American male students (Stack, 1974; Kluger, 1976), evidenced by their lower standardized test scores, higher suspension and expulsion rates, higher dropout rates, and higher incarceration rates.

In this study, I attempted to understand the lived experiences of three African American male high school dropouts who decided to re-enter school to get a diploma or qualify for a GED. The case study approach was chosen in an effort to augment the paucity of data in which African American males provide their own views on the societal situations in which they find themselves. More specifically, the study examined the
participant’s narratives to determine the ways in which the dynamics of the larger society, which often negatively impacted their lives in general, were also played out in the educational system and, therefore, also undermined their academic success (Johns-Bailey & Cervero, 1996). The study extracted the factors that motivated these participants to dropout of high school and to re-enter the adult high school system.

**Personal Connection to the Study**

Porter-Hayes elementary school in Cincinnati, Ohio was my first conscious experience with racism. I was about eight or nine when I started in a new elementary school right across the street from our tenement building. It was a beautiful new school, but the teachers were not welcoming. Most of the teachers were white and most of the students were African American. The teachers referred to the students as “those people,” “you people,” and “you little monkeys.” This was particularly disconcerting for me because mother looked White so I was accustomed to being around “white” people without being insulted. My grades suffered in response to the teachers’ attitudes, and eventually I was on their “trouble” list. I was held back in the third grade, identified as “a modified general student,” which was a euphemism for “retarded.”

In the seventh grade, I was sent to a junior high school program in Cincinnati’s Central High School. It was a vocational program for so-called “hard cases.” While the teachers in elementary school were mean, the teachers at Central ran the school like a prison. Surprisingly, the Central student population was mostly White, from Cumminsville, until we, the African American students from “the West End projects,” showed up. The transition to Central was pretty tough at first with the teachers calling me names, and white kids trying to jump me either because I was African American, new, or
both—I was never sure which. But these white kids soon learned that we African American kids were used to fighting bullies in the projects so we were not afraid of them. As for the vocational education I received, most of my days at Central were spent in shop classes where I only saw the teacher at the beginning of the class to take roll and five minutes before the bell rang. By eighth grade, Central had “enough” of me and threw me out.

From Central, Cincinnati school district officials sent me to the junior high school equivalent of San Quentin prison: Samuel Ach. Ach was where the “hardest core” or “problem” African American students were sent from across the entire city. For the first time in my life, I was scared for my safety as gangs terrorized the campus. I heard stories of kids beaten so badly that they were hospitalized, but no one was ever punished. I could hold my own in a fight with one or two guys, but three, four, or five may be more than I could handle.

When I finally finished junior high, Cincinnati’s school desegregation efforts led to my being transferred from Central’s junior high school program to the aesthetically very nice, suburban, and predominantly white, Withrow High School. Withrow kids were not fighters, but they were name callers. I do not remember ever being called a “nigger” at Central High, but at Withrow I got called “nigger” so many times a day I thought my name had been changed to this word. Fortunately, after I bloodied a few noses and knocked a few kids to the ground the name-calling stopped. But the teachers were also condescending to me, saying that I was only capable of doing manual labor and, therefore refusing to give me a reference to even a technical college. Unfortunately, I couldn’t change the teachers’ behavior the same way I changed the white students’. Over time,
more African Americans came to Withrow. Despite the changing demographics, Withrow remained “segregated” (except of course for the sports teams).

After having been a student at Withrow for three years, I finally had enough credits to graduate high school in the Cincinnati Public School (CPS) system. In me, CPS had produced another African American so-called high school graduate who was as ill-prepared for college as for the professional workforce. Try as I did, I could not get a job as a trainee in any business in Cincinnati. The only job I could get was as a janitor cleaning thirteen toilets a day on the overnight shift—a job for which my diploma was superfluous.

I decided to attend college, but was told that I did not have enough history, English, foreign language, or math credits to qualify for admission. I had to take high school courses at a night school for a year and a half in order to get enough credits to get into junior college. And I had to spend two years in junior college before I could qualify for acceptance to the University of Cincinnati.

Once at the University of Cincinnati, the professors wasted no time in letting me know that I was not welcome on campus. One incident in particular stands out in my memory. My English professor pointed out in front of the entire class my overuse of the term “beautiful.” He told my classmates that my overuse of this term showed that I had a limited vocabulary.

These and a myriad of other similar school experiences motivated me to undertake this study.
Closing

This chapter, Chapter 1, provided an overview of the study and discussed the researcher’s personal connection to it. Chapter 2 reviews the literature related to the study. Chapter 3 delineates the study method. Chapter 4 documents the study findings. Finally, Chapter 5 discusses the study in sum, draws conclusions, and offers recommendations.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Opening

Chapter 1 provided an overview of the study and discussed the researcher’s personal connection to it. In this chapter, Chapter 2, the literature related to the study is reviewed.

Theoretical Framework

This study was informed by a critical theoretical perspective. According to Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, and Crenshaw (1993). There are six key themes that define critical race theory:

1. Critical race theory recognizes that racism is endemic to American life;
2. Critical race theory expresses skepticism toward dominant legal claims of neutrality, objectivity, colorblindness, and meritocracy;
3. Critical race theory challenges a historicism and insists on a contextual/historical analysis of the law…Critical race theorists…adopt a stance that presumes that racism has contributed to all contemporary manifestations of group advantage and disadvantage;
4. Critical theory insists on recognition of the experiential knowledge of people of color and our communities of origin in analyzing law and society;
5. Critical race theory is interdisciplinary;
6. Critical race theory works toward the end of eliminating racial oppression as part of the broader goal of ending all forms of oppression (p. 6).

Critical theorists believe that research is not only not neutral and/or unbiased, but rather an “ethical and political act” (Roman & Apple, 1993) that always benefits a specific group, typically those who hold the power in society, whether or not that power or the research benefit is acknowledged. Accordingly, critical theorists affirmatively choose to have their research benefit those who are marginalized in society. More specifically, critical theorists argue that research informed by critical theory should
“empower the powerless and transform existing social inequalities and injustices” (McLaren, 1994, p.168). The participants in this study were easily identifiable as marginalized in society.

Among the broad range of marginalized populations, “Critical theorists who do qualitative research are interested in issues of gender, race and class because they consider these the prime means for differentiating power in this society” (Duncan, 2002, p. 7). As male, African American, and working class, the participants in this study offer the unique opportunity to use critical theory to examine the intersections of gender, race, and class.

In their 1995 Teacher’s College Record article, “Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education,” Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate assert that “race remains a significant factor in American society in general and education in particular” (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005, p. 7). Duncan (2002) goes one step further in commenting that, “Critical race theory has contributed to framing the research on urban schools and the experience of African American students” (p. 7) in particular. Accordingly, critical theory provides additional support in examining the participants’ school experiences.

**Review of the Relevant Literature**

**Racism in Schools**

Compared with other groups, African American males have higher infant mortality rates, lower standardized test scores, and higher suspension and expulsion rates. African American males also have higher dropout rates, the highest incarceration rates, and the shortest life expectancy (Gibbs, 1988). Based on these grim realities, the view that the larger social system, and in particular the educational system, is undermining the
personal and education achievement of racial and ethnic minority groups through institutionalized exclusionary racism has validity. Indeed, American public schools have utilized institutionalized forms of exclusion, deprivation, and punishment as part and parcel of their internal operations based on a person’s skin color, religion, or national origin (Stack, 1974; Kluger, 1976). “Some scholars believe that school tracking is an example of racism because African American and Latino students are disproportionately placed into the lowest tracks and afforded fewer educational opportunities as a result” (Oakes, 1995, p. 689). Other scholars have indicated that African American middle school students in particular have more negative experiences with school climate than other students, especially their white counterparts (Kuperminc, et. al., 1997). As an African American male, my own experience with public education in the 1950s and early 1960s was distasteful at best, and discriminatory and oppressive at worst.

Thus, there is a growing body of research that studies societally and educationally disenfranchised groups and, in so doing, that documents that high school dropouts not only hurt the dropouts, but society as a whole through lost wages (thus corresponding revenues and income taxes) and increased welfare dependency, crime, and substance abuse. But, there is a dearth of data that comes directly from the people many researchers, based on the afore-referenced studies, characterize as “an endangered species:” African American males. That is, there is research about them, but not largely from them. It is for this reason that this study used a case study design to “talk to” a few of these people to find out what they thought and felt about their school experience. This small study seeks to fill this gap in this body of literature.
Dropout Data by Ethnicity and Socioeconomic Status (SES)

Ethnicity and socioeconomic status are highly correlated to school dropout rates. In this section, this correlation is examined.

Ethnicity.

A CPS study showed that there were 3.8 million 16 through 24 year olds who were not in high school and who lacked a high school credential in 2001 (see Appendix C, Table 1). This group of 3.8 million young adults is referred to as the status dropout group, and their proportion to their total age group of 35.2 million is called the status dropout rate (Kaufman, et. al., 2004; see also Appendix D, Figure 1):

- Whites represented 65.1 percent of the 16 to 24 year old population, and 7.3 percent were status dropouts;
- Hispanics represented 15.2 percent of the 16 to 24 year old population, and 38.2 percent of the status dropouts;
- African Americans represented 14.5 percent of the 16 to 24 year old population, and 10.9 percent of the status dropout group;
- Asians/Pacific Islanders represented 4.2 percent of the total 16 to 24 years of age population, and had a status dropout rate of 3.6 percent.

The definition of graduation rate used in this study was the same as the status completion rate, which represents the percentage of the 18 through 24 years of age who have left high school and earned a high school diploma or the equivalent, including a General Educational Development (GED) credential (Kaufman, et. al., 2004; see also Appendix C, Table 2; Appendix D, Figures 2 & 3):
• White students 18 through 24 years of age have graduated in the 86.0-91.8 percent range from 1972 through 2001;

• African American students aged 18 through 24 over that same 30 year period had graduation rates that rose from 72.1 percent in 1972 to 85.6 percent in 2001;

• Hispanic students 18 through 24 years of age had a graduation rate of 56.2 percent in 1972 and 65.7 percent by 2001 (it is important to note that the graduation rate for Hispanic students born outside the U.S. hovers around 50.3 percent (due, in large measure, to the lack of adequate first and second language educational supports) which impacts the overall graduation rate for all Hispanic students);

• Asians/Pacific Islanders 18 through 24 years of age graduated at a 96.1 percent rate in 2001 (the highest for all racial groups; prior to 2001 data on this group was incidental given population demographics).

Socioeconomic status.

Research has shown low socioeconomic status is strongly related to low academic performance and dropping out, and, further, that poverty is the single biggest factor in dropout rates across ethnic lines (Cairns, Cairns, & Neckerman, 1989; Connell, Spencer, & Aber, 1994). National statistics indicate that the dropout rate for students from low SES families is ten times that of students from higher SES backgrounds (Ripple, 1995). In the NCES data, families are divided into three groups: the lowest 20 percent of all family incomes, the middle 60 percent, and the highest 20 percent. In October 2001, the Current Population Survey (CPS) (ages 16-24 for all ethnic groups) indicated that 11
percent of the students from low-income families (the lowest 20 percent) dropped out of high school, whereas only 5 percent did from the middle 60 percent, and only 2 percent did from the top 20 percent (NCES, 2003).

Interestingly, African American and white youths from families at the lowest income levels are at almost identical increased risk of not completing high school (about 19 percent of Whites and 20 percent of African Americans are status dropouts); but Hispanic youth from families with low and middle incomes are even more likely to drop out than their White or African American counterparts (Kaufman et al., 2001).

Rumberger, as cited by Wehlage and Rutter (1986), found additional support for previous findings that family background is a “powerful predictor of dropout behavior” (p. 205). His simulations show that low socio-economic background has a strong effect in predicting dropout. While dropout rates vary by race, with minorities significantly higher, the simulations reveal that when minorities are assumed to have the same family background as whites, the predicted dropout rate for minorities is about the same or even slightly less than whites (p. 16).

Social Costs

One early estimate of costs in social service, crime prevention, and lost income related to dropouts was $6 billion per year (Levin & Bachman, 1972). Catterall (1987) suggested that for each school class, e.g., class of 1980, approximately $228 billion in lifetime earnings was lost because of students dropping out of high school. Cohen (1998) broke it down further (see Appendix C, Table 5). He estimated, based on the mean monthly earnings by age for high school graduates versus non graduates, the total lifetime wage differential between dropout and graduate to be $300,000 with an additional loss of $75,000 in fringe benefits such as paid vacations and sick leave. The data indicate that
dropouts also experience more unemployment and have less secure and satisfying work than graduates (Levin, 1985; U.S. Department of Education, 1988).

In a survey of jail and prison inmates, 80 percent of 18 to 25 year olds had failed to graduate from high school with a regular diploma (Sum, et. al., 2003). Cohen (1998) estimates that juvenile delinquency between the ages 14 and 17 imposes $83,000 to $335,000 in external cost per person, while adult career criminals add an additional $1.4 million. The total external costs of a life of crime are estimated to range from approximately $1.5 to $1.8 million (Cohen, 1998) (See Appendix C, Tables 6 & 7).

Core Educational Themes

All students, especially African American students, need to reconnect with the public education system. In an effort to improve credibility with students a study done by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (1996) suggested that there are several core themes that should underlie all efforts to improve student relations:

1. High school is, above all else, a learning community and each school must commit itself to expecting demonstrated academic achievement for every student in accord with standards that can stand up to national scrutiny;
2. High school must function as a transitional experience, getting each student ready for the next stage of life, whatever it may be for that individual, with the understanding that ultimately each person needs to earn a living;
3. High school must be the gateway to multiple options;
4. High school must prepare each student to be a lifelong learner;
5. High school must provide an underpinning for good citizenship and for full participation in the life of a democracy;
6. High school must play a role in the personal development of young people as social beings having needs beyond those that are strictly academic;
7. High school must lay a foundation for students to be able to participate comfortably in an increasingly technological society;
8. High school must equip young people for life in a country and a world in which interdependency will link their destiny to that of others, however different those others may be from them;
9. High school must be an institution that unabashedly advocates on behalf of young people (p. 57).

It is particularly important to African American males to feel that they are accepted for whom they are, and that the school culture does not view them through stereotypical lenses and expose them to discrimination.

**African American Male Self-Efficacy**

There are as many approaches to improving student self-efficacy as there are school communities in the United States. Many of these approaches may be effective, but many are not, losing precious time, money, and students. There is a need to establish the most successful “best practices” in each area of challenge with students that takes into account students’ particularly needs on the basis of cultural and other identity dimensions, this is particularly important for African American male students’ self-efficacy and cultural identity development. Recent data show that there is a growing problem with African American males’ self-efficacy, identity, and academic success (Constantine, Erickson, Banks, & Timberlake, 1998).

“Perceived self-efficacy is defined as people’s judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances. It is concerned not with the skills one has but with the judgments of what one can do with whatever skills one possesses” (Bandura, 1986, p.391). Individuals with high self-efficacy are able to follow through with their goals and pursuits despite negative school and societal experiences, while those with low self-efficacy tend to avoid activities in which success is not guaranteed and to give up easily in the face of obstacles.
(Bandura, 1982, p. 127-128). Unfortunately, many African American males hear, directly and indirectly, from teachers that they are not good students and begin to act out a self-fulfilling prophecy by disengaging from school.

The four primary means by which efficacy expectations are thought to develop are: prior performance accomplishments (i.e., having actually performed the behavior); vicarious experiences, such as observational learning; verbal persuasion; and, input from the individual’s physiological state (Bandura, 1986; Hackett & Betz, 1981). Of these, the most influential is the interpreted results of one’s performance or mastery experience:

Outcomes interpreted as successful raise self-efficacy; those interpreted as failures lower it. The second source of self-efficacy information is the vicarious experience individuals undergo when they observe others performing tasks. Part of one’s vicarious experience involves the social comparisons made with other individuals. These comparisons, along with peer modeling, can be powerful influences on developing self-perceptions of competence. Individuals also develop self-efficacy as a result of the verbal messages and social persuasions they receive from others. Positive persuasions may work to encourage and empower; negative persuasions can work to defeat and weaken self-beliefs (Bandura, 1982, p.126-127).

For African American males, the disproportional impact of myriad social problems on them as previously discussed limits their access to situations where the opportunity to test behaviors and assess results curtail their ability to develop self-efficacy in this most important way.

**African American Male Identity Crisis**

It has been noted that African American youth suffer an identity crisis due to their estrangement from the dominant society (Erikson, 1968). Erickson conceptualized the most important modern day task of the African American as one of taking back an identity that was surrendered due to their sociohistorical and psychosocial experiences in
the United States. Identity development for African Americans is often hampered by a widespread and deep-seeded inhibition against taking advantage of “equal access” even where it is granted, because the experience of being enslaved offered little incentive for independent ambition (Erikson, 1968).

African American males have the dual problem of going through the typical identity crises of any adolescent while at the same time trying to understand their own racial identity. The most prominent theories in the literature on African American racial identity are the nigrescence theories (Banks, 1981; Cross, 1971; Thomas, 1971). Nigrescence theories identify aspects of African American identity that occur in response to racial oppression, and those aspects that occur as a part of the self-actualization process (Gardner-Kitt, 2005). The most frequently cited nigrescence theory describes five stages of identity development: Pre-encounter, Encounter, Immersion/Emersion, Internalization, and Internalization/Commitment (Cross, 1971). The original model assumed that all Pre-encounter attitudes were indicative of African American self-hatred and poor psychological functioning. The revised model acknowledged that individuals could have high self-esteem even though they use whites as their reference group (Cross, 1971).

Early research on African American male dropouts described them as “misfits” suffering from poor social adjustment, as evidenced by low self-esteem (Beck & Muia, 1980; Cervantes, 1965; Schreiber, 1964). In a more recent study, there was no significant difference in the self-esteem of dropouts compared to graduates (McCaul, et. al., 1992). This latter study found that, given the generally strong societal sanctions against dropping out and the stereotypical view of a dropout as a “loser,” it was surprising that there were
no significant differences in self-esteem. Nevertheless, the finding is consistent with a
good deal of previous research (Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock, 1986; Wehlage &
Rutter, 1986) (see Appendix C, Table 9). Some researchers theorize that for students,
like many African American male students, who cannot or who chose not to conform to
the mainstream educational system culture, dropping out of school may afford them
greater psychological health than staying in (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Wehlage and Rutter (1986) describe a major longitudinal study of high school
dropouts by Bachman, Green, and Wirtanen (1971) that provides data on a series of self-
perceived themes involving self-esteem, aspirations, locus of control, trust, aggression
and delinquency. Wehlage and Rutter (1986) found that the dominant pattern for these
various measures is one of stability rather than change. In other words, the characteristics
that distinguish dropouts from stay-ins at the beginning of the study (tenth grade) persist
over the three years of the study. In some cases where change occurs, it is toward a slight
reduction of the differences between dropouts and graduates. This suggests that whatever
factors are responsible for dropping out exist prior to the tenth grade, and the subsequent
act of dropping out does not exacerbate any of the measured self-perceptions of these
adolescent males.

There is no evidence that dropping out is perceived as a negative action by the
dropouts during the first three years. The fact that the slight upward trend in self-esteem
continues after dropping out provides some evidence that this action may be a positive
step in the eyes of these adolescent males (Wehlage & Rutter, 1986, p.12-13). This is also
consistent with the theory that the dropout disengages from high school gradually and,
therefore, has already established a self-perception that is at odds with the institution of
education and its teachers (Kaplan, Peck, & Kaplan, 1997). Over time, the dropout no longer identifies with mainstream thinking about the value of graduating from high school, but now identifies with counter culture peers who have disengaged from high school (Kaplan, Peck, & Kaplan, 1997).

So, while self-esteem is not a problem for dropouts in general, self-efficacy is a problem for African American male dropouts because racism experienced or witnessed by them contributes to their formation of self-efficacy expectations (Kutsick & Jackson, 1988), which limits the options, especially educational and employment ones, they will be inclined to take advantage of after dropping out.

**To GED or Not to GED**

Best practices for intervening with high school dropouts include programs that teach basic skills, life skills, or job skills (Greene, 2002). Successful programs also offer individual instruction and, especially for African American males, take into account their social needs (in particular, to not be isolated as tokens). Many educational researchers feel that early intervention (birth to five years) is needed to enhance brain development (Smink & Reimer, 2005) leading to better learning capabilities.

“Interventions attempt to keep students in high school, but many times the effort fails, especially with regard to African American students. Research shows a GED holder to be statistically indistinguishable from high school dropouts; GED holders are not significantly more likely to land a job or to have higher hourly wages” (Greene, 2002, p 1). Further, “Almost three-quarters of GED holders who enroll in community colleges fail to finish their degrees, compared with 44 percent of high school graduates. In a four year college, 95 percent of GED holders do not finish, compared with 25 percent of high
school grads. On the Armed Forces Qualifying Test, which measures both academic knowledge and cognitive ability, the average GED recipient gets a grade of 65, compared with the average high school graduate’s 76 and the average high school dropout’s 46. The armed forces have stopped treating the GED as equivalent to a regular high school diploma because 37 percent of GED holders drop out of the military” (Greene, 2002, p. 3). Studies show that the only GED holders who benefit are the students who had low skill levels when they dropped out of high school. “A GED provides no additional economic benefit to dropouts with higher skills” (Tyler, 2002, p.3). Finally, it is important to emphasize that even the few benefits from the GED that do come, do not come immediately; it takes 4 to 5 years for any noticeable improvement in income to appear. 25 percent of GEDs received by African American males are earned in prison, and there is no economic payoff for a “prison GED” (Tyler, 2002).

Summary and Critique

Too many students are leaving school early without getting a high school diploma. A recent report compiled for the Gates Foundation called the dropout problem The Silent Epidemic (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006). It is a silent epidemic because we are allowing far too many of our young people to be infected by a lack of motivation, learned helplessness, and anti-social behavior. This is particularly the case for African American males.

The current literature on African American male dropouts suggests that there is a tremendous need for data on them that comes from their point of view, as opposed to from the point of view of the researchers who study them. In some ways, this oversight in the literature is consistent with the critical race theory perspective that argues that the
system is undermining African American students’ achievement and expectations through institutionalized exclusionary racism (Stack, 1974; Kluger, 1976). This study will begin to fill that gap in the literature in a small way, but much more research needs to be done to find out what African American males think and feel about their situation, and what forces, internal and external, to the educational system play a part in their decision to leave school early.

At any given time in the U.S., there are 3.5 to 3.8 million young people ages 16 through 25 without a high school diploma, who have dropped out of high school (Sum, et. al., 2003). Data from the 1996 Survey of Jail Inmates and the 1997 Surveys of Federal and State Prison Inmates revealed that there were 372,665 jail and prison inmates under the age of 25. Of this group, 298,700 or 80 percent lacked a regular high school diploma, (see table 11). The CPS does not include the homeless or military in their survey, but other data suggest that these two themes may offset each other, in that a 2001 survey of the military found that of the 589,000 active personnel under 25, only 46,530 or 7.9 percent did not have a high school diploma. A 1996 survey (typical week estimate) of the roughly 101,040 homeless people in the United States, found 45,470 or 45.0 percent of them were without a high school diploma. If the homeless population number is underestimated, that would also understate the dropout rate and overstate the graduation rate (United States Census Bureau, 2001).

Finally, the CPS household survey suffers from under-coverage of young adult groups that are larger for men than for women and are especially large for black men 20-29 years old. The under-coverage rates for all 20-24 year old men in 1999 was reported by the U.S. Census Bureau to be 19 percent versus 14 percent for women and nearly 30
percent among young African American men. This, too, has the effect of understating the dropout rate and overstating the graduation rate from the Department of Education (Sum, et. al., 2003). Another weakness of the CPS is that it is a self-report on dropout and graduation in each family without an audit trail to check the veracity of the answers.

Sum and Harrington (2003) analyzed existing CPS data from 1997-1999 on the number of 18-29 year olds who lacked a high school diploma. “During this period, there were 4.5 to 4.8 million men 18-29 without a high school diploma giving rise to an average dropout rate of 22.1 percent and that is in contrast to the 16-24 year old male rate of 12.2 percent that was reported in 2001 by the CPS” (Sum, et. al., 2003, p. 17). These discrepancies need to be corrected. State governors should agree on a single definition high school dropout rate that includes jail and prison inmates, the homeless, better coverage of men and young African American males, and the data should come from the schools rather than self report. GED students should not be included in the graduation rate as high school graduates because to do so even further overstates the graduation rate and understates the dropout rate.

Without first person data, and more accurate and comprehensive secondary data on dropouts, especially African American male dropouts, we can not craft interventions to curtail the problem that are likely to work. We must really understand the problem before we will be able to develop truly viable solutions for eradicating it.

**Purpose of the Study Linked to the Literature Review**

This study sought to elucidate the experiences of three African American males that led to their becoming high school dropouts, as well as to their returning to school. In particular, this study examined these experiences from the participants’ points of view,
and analyzed the personal and societal dynamics that influenced their decision-making as they moved through these experiences.

From a review of the literature, it is clear that there is little data that expressly details the African American male high school dropout experience from the perspective of these students themselves; there is no such data from African American male dropouts in Southern Nevada or Las Vegas. With this in mind, the review of the literature most relevant to this study suggested reasons for why African American males may begin to disengage from high school, as well for why disengaged African American males may drop out of high school and later return to adult school for a diploma or GED. It also suggested correlations between the African American male dropout rate and: a) lost income and benefits to these dropouts; as well as, b) criminal activity in society as a whole. Finally, this review suggested potentially successful interventions for reducing the African American male high school dropout rate in a variety of school and community contexts.

**Research Questions**

This study sought to understand the lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994) and decision-making processes of three African American male dropouts from in the Las Vegas, Nevada community. In particular, this study examined the impact of these experiences and processes on the participants’ schooling in general, and related to their leaving school. Using a case study approach, the following questions were formulated to guide the research:
1. What were the general lived experiences, family life influences, peer relationships, and/or other factors that led the study participants to leave school early?

2. Was racial discrimination a factor in these African American males dropping out?

3. What motivated these students to return to school to get a diploma or GED?

**Closing**

Chapter 1 provided an overview of the study and discussed the researcher’s personal connection to it. In this chapter, Chapter 2, the literature related to the study was reviewed. Chapter 3 delineates the study method. Chapter 4 documents the study findings. Finally, Chapter 5 discusses the study in sum, draws conclusions, and offers recommendations.
CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Opening

Chapter 1 provided an overview of the study and discussed the researcher’s personal connection to it. Chapter 2 reviewed the literature related to the study. This chapter, Chapter 3, delineates the study method.

Case Study Approach

“A case study is a detailed examination of one setting, a single subject, a single depository of documents, or one particular event. A case study could focus on a bounded system, a unit around which there are boundaries. The case then could be a student; a teacher, a principal, a program; a group such as a class, a school, a community; or a specific policy” (Merriam, 1998, p. 27). This study is a multi-case study design using in-depth interviewing to explore, through an historical analysis, the educational careers (time in school) of African American male dropouts. This analysis is undertaken in relationship to the participants’ personal narratives of their lived experiences before, during, and since their time in school. “This type of study (multi-case) requires collecting and analyzing data from several cases and can be distinguished from the single case study that may have subunits or subcases embedded within (such as students within a school)” (Merriam, 1998, p. 40).

This study also seeks to begin to fill a gap in both the case-study/multi-case study and other literature by focusing on cases of African males. In so doing, this study provides these participants the opportunity to tell their own stories, thereby augmenting the voice of African American males in the literature base in general, and in the literature that
focuses attention on this population in particular. Further, it provides a counternarrative or “other side of the story” perspective to the characterization of African American males as only “an endangered species” (no matter how well intentioned this characterization might be), illustrating that, perhaps, despite being “hunted to the brink of extinction,” African American males not only survive and endure, they show tremendous resiliency. In short, this study offers greater insight into how African American males perceive and negotiate their lived experiences in schools and society, as well as what can be done to improve their academic achievement.

**Site and Participant Selection**

As introduced in chapter 2, this study was guided by three research questions:

1. What are the general lived experiences, family life influences, peer relationships, and/or other factors that lead African American males to leave school early?

2. Is racial discrimination a factor in these males dropping out?

3. What motivates these males to return to school to get a diploma or GED?

With these questions in mind, I looked for a research site that would facilitate me in finding three African American males who had left high school before graduating, but who had since made the decision to return to an educational setting complete a diploma or GED, and who would also be open to speaking about issues of especially racial discrimination.

In my attempt to identify appropriate participants for this study, I initially contacted several ministers of African American churches in Las Vegas and with administrative
staff at Clark County high schools for recommendations of students that did not complete their graduation. This approach proved unsuccessful.

Around the same time I was making these initial contacts, I came across some literature in which the researcher had gone to an adult school to secure high school dropouts for her study. That same day I searched for Las Vegas adult schools. My search led me to contact information and a descriptive overview for five local adult schools. I guessed that I would be find African American male dropouts at these adult schools given that the African American dropout rate in Las Vegas at that time was 11.5% (Clark County School District, 2003).

City Adult School and Costar Adult School were programs offered by the Adult Education Division of the Clark County School District. The other three programs were offered through the Community College of Southern Nevada, the federal government Job Corps initiative, and the local independent private enterprise, Nevada Partners, Inc. (whose adult education classes are also sponsored by the Adult Education Division of the Clark County School District).

I called the Costar Adult School first because I liked their program description the best, but all I got was an answering machine. My next call was to City Adult School. To my surprise, the principal, Dr. Sam, answered the phone. Dr. Sam immediately understood the type of participants that I was looking to secure for my study and indicated there were several who fit my participant profile at City. She also indicated that she would like to help me with my study in any way she could. As a result of the principal’s general accessibility and specific interest in and support for my study, I chose City Adult School as the site at which I would engage participants for this study.
City Adult School is located in Central Las Vegas; its students are dropouts from traditional Clark County high schools who want to earn a diploma or to prepare for the GED exam. The school student population of almost 4,000 is predominately African American and Hispanic. City Adult School graduates over 400 students a year with fully accredited high school diplomas, and fully prepares another 400 plus per year for the GED exam.

Dr. Sam arranged for Ms. Farr, a City Adult School counselor, to be my primary liaison at the school for the study. On my behalf, Ms. Farr solicited three volunteers that met the specific criteria for my study participants: 1) African American; 2) male; 3) high school dropout; and, 4) 18-26 years of age, from among the pool of students she counseled.

I met with each of the students Ms. Farr identified individually to explain the study as a whole and the importance of them providing “the dropout’s point of view” in particular, and, once they agreed to participate, to give them the Informed Consent form. Each participant was paid $25.00 per one-hour interview to provide incentive for him to show up for each and all three interviews. At the end of the first interview, I set tentative dates and times with each participant for the remaining two interviews. I asked each student to bring with him to the interviews as much documentation from his traditional high school days (e.g., report cards, portfolios, class notes, homework assignments, etc.) as he could find. This documentation helped me to develop a more detailed portrait of each student than the interview data alone afforded; it also deepened my understanding of the interview data. Unfortunately, because each of the participants’ families had moved their
residences so many times, their parents had lost track of or inadvertently thrown away their prior schooling materials.

**Participants**

As described in the previous section, a criterion based selection process (LeCompte, Preissle, & Tesch, 1993) was used to secure the participants for this study. In criterion-based selection the researcher “creates a list of attributes essential” to the study and then “proceed(s) to find or locate a unit matching the list” (p.70). The criteria used for meaningful sampling must closely relate to the purpose of the study especially so that data-robust participants are secured (LeCompte, Preissle, & Tesch, 1993). Once again, the attribute criteria for this study were:

1. African American male;
2. Age 18 to 26;
3. Dropped out of a traditional high school without diploma; and,
4. Entered adult high school.

These criteria clearly directly relate to the purpose of this study, which, once again, was to explore the life, especially the school life, experiences of African American males, aged 18-26, who had left secondary education before graduation, but had since returned to an educational setting to finish high school or a GED. The age criterion was employed to ensure that the study participants were still “close” to their school experiences to facilitate their recent recall of these experiences.

**Participant Counselor**

In addition to the participant interviews, an in-depth interview with the participants’ counselor, Ms. Farr, was also undertaken. I had hoped that this additional interview would afford me the opportunity to triangulate the data collected from the participants,
from Ms. Farr, and, through Ms. Farr, also from school records since the participants’ families no longer had their copies of these records. Concerns relating to the confidentiality of student records prevented me from accessing these records. But, the interview with Ms. Farr did provide some data for triangulation. As a result, the findings of this study, discussed in Chapter 4, have greater internal credibility and reliability.

“Internal validity deals with the question of how research findings match reality. How congruent are the findings with reality? Do the findings capture what is really there? Reliability refers to the extent to which research findings can be replicated. In other words, if the study is repeated will it yield the same results” (Merriam, 1998, p. 205)? Specifically, I set up a single interview with Ms. Farr, during which I asked her a series of pre-established questions (See Appendix B) designed to elicit areas of convergence and divergence in her perceptions of each participant’s school career with the participant’s self perception (See Appendix E). As I did with the participant interviews (discussed in greater detail later in this chapter), I tape recorded Mr. Farr’s interview and also took hand written notes during the interview on the interview question sheet. After the interview, the interview tape was transcribed and archived with my notes.

**Procedure**

As previously discussed, this study used a multi-case study design. The focus of inquiry was African American male high school dropouts who had re-entered an adult education school to complete a high school diploma or a GED. The main source of data collection was in-depth interviewing, or “a conversation with a purpose” (Kahn & Cannell, 1957, p.149). Each participant was interviewed three times. All nine interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. The first interview was a structured interview
punctuated by a series of pre-established questions (see Appendix A). The second interview was a somewhat less structured interview in which themes that emerged in the first interview were revisited to clarify facts, deepen understanding, and augment knowledge production. The third interview was even somewhat less structured than the second, becoming more conversational as the participants and I become more comfortable with each other, and, again, was guided by the data that had already been collected in the previous two interviews that warranted some additional and closing attention. The questions asked in all three interviews were largely open-ended to elicit the most rich and, therefore, the most interesting data.

The participants were told that the interviews were for a master’s thesis on African American male high school dropouts. I paid the participants $25.00 a piece for each 60-minute interview. The interviews were held, by appointment, according to participant availability, on the school site for their convenience. The first interview focused on the participant’s life history, the second on his “career” in high school, and the third addressed both life and school experiences. Interviews were conducted over a consecutive three-week period.

The goal of these interviews was find out as much as possible about each student’s life experiences, especially, establishing as a baseline, his early educational and professional aspirations in order to assess these in relationship the factors that led to his dropping out of high school. Most important was recording each participant’s experiences as he saw them and then described them in his own words in order to carefully assess the internal and/or external factors that he believed caused him to leave high school before getting a diploma.
Pseudonyms were developed and used at all times for all three participants, school personnel, and the school itself to maintain confidentiality.

**First Interview**

All three participants were on time for their first interview. At the outset of each of the first interviews I sought to put the participants at ease engaging in “small talk” and also sharing some of my life and school experiences as an African American male. I felt that it was especially important that the participants know that I had had negative experiences in my life that might be similar to theirs so that they would not be embarrassed or ashamed to share these kinds of experiences with me. I answered any questions that each participant had about me, my experiences, and/or the study. Then I begin with the formal interview.

During the first interview, each participant was asked the same pre-established set of structured questions (see Appendix A). In addition to the audiotaping, I took notes on the interview question sheet that I had prepared for each participant. “The written account of the observation constitutes field notes, which are analogous to the interview transcript” (Merriam, 1998, p. 104). At the end of each of the first interview sessions, the participant and I made an appointment for our second and third interviews. Each of the first interviews took nearly the entire allotted time of 60 minutes.

My handwritten notes from the first interview were used to develop codes for the data from each participant’s first interview. From these codes, I developed more specific data themes. The themes led me pre-establish a few additional structured questions for each participant’s second interview. “Coding is nothing more than assigning some sort of shorthand designation to various aspects of your data so that you can easily retrieve
specific pieces of the data” (Merriam, 1998, p. 164). I handwrote these new questions for each participant’s second interview on the back of the question sheet from his first interview, in part to keep all the data for each participant together, and in part so that what I brought with me to each interview stayed the same and/or was transparent as a non-verbal way to reassure the participants that we were simply picking up the conversation where we left off previously, and that I was not hiding anything from them.

**Second Interview**

All three participants were on time to their second interview. Before the second interview with each participant, I listened to the audiotape of, and reviewed my notes from, his first interview twice.

At the outset of the second interview, it was clear the participants and I were developing a level of comfort with one another. I began each of the second interviews by revisiting participant responses to the questions from the first interview to clarify questions that had emerged for me in reviewing the audiotapes and my notes. Then I moved on to the additional structured questions. As previously mentioned, second interview questions were hand written on the back page of the original structured questions sheet. During the second interviews, I ran out of room to note codes on theses question sheets, so I began using a new blank piece of paper to make additional code notations for each participant (See Appendix F).

As additional codes emerged from these second interviews, I also determined additional data themes. After the conclusion of the second interviews, I began comparing codes and themes across participant interviews to try to begin indentifying common
patterns. The process led me to develop additional structured questions to pose to study participants at the outset of their third interviews.

**Third Interview**

All three participants were on time to their third interview. As I did after the first interview and before the second, I listened to the audiotape of, and reviewed my notes from, his first and second interviews twice.

By the time of the third interviews, the participants and I were well at ease with one another. I began each of the third interviews as I had the second ones, by revisiting participant responses to the questions from the first and second interviews to clarify questions that had emerged for me in reviewing the audiotapes and my notes. Then I moved on to the additional structured questions. Once again, these questions were handwritten on my question/note sheets for each participant. I also continued to make notes on each participant’s sheets as these third and final interviews came to an end.

Before concluding the final interview, I asked each participant if there was any subject that they wanted to discuss that my questions did not provide them the opportunity to raise. All of the participants felt that they were adequately “talked out.” I thanked the participants for their involvement in the study.

At the conclusion of the data collection period, I also thanked the Dr. Sam and Ms. Farr for inviting me in, supporting my study, facilitating my participant identification, and providing me a space in which to conduct the counselor and participant interviews. Somewhat to my surprise, Dr. Sam hired me as a school success monitor for fourteen months.
Again, as additional codes emerged from these third interviews, I also determined additional data themes. At the end of the third interviews, I continued comparing codes and themes across participant interviews to augment my identification of common patterns. I established a final list of codes and themes that are consistent across all three participants (See Table 10 in Appendix C). The codes emerged from responses by the participants across all three interviews from all three participants. Repeated coded responses were counted. Codes that had at least six responses combined across the three participants then became themes. An example of the coding and theme creation relates to “Grades.” Grades were discussed by the participants a total of 15 times; Jay had six responses that included mention of grades, Tim had six, and Vinnie had three.

At the conclusion of the third interviews, all the interview audiotapes were transcribed and, along with the interview questions sheets and my field notes, were put into a large three ring binder.

**Analysis**

“Data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure, and interpretation to the mass of collected data” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 150). In addition to the order, structure, and interpretation of the data already noted, after the interviews were transcribed, I reviewed each of them again (this time in written form), and was able to identify more codes and themes. Some of those that emerged at this stage of the data review process were drugs, fights, retention, and jail (See Table 10 in Appendix C for the complete list of code and themes).

It is important to note that data reliability can not be established in qualitative research in the same manners that it is in experimental research because human behavior
and consciousness are not only not fixed, they are continuously fluid (Merriam, 1998). As a result, while this study can be replicated, the responses from the subjects cannot be. In this study, African American male high school dropouts talked about their life experiences and related these to the factors that led them to drop out of high school and to return to an education setting later to complete high school or secure a GED. Internal validity in this study was achieved in developing an understanding of the participant experiences in these regards. External validity in this study was developed through the formation of the codes and themes around which these experiences were organized and discussed. The researcher was the only one the code the data for analysis.

**Closing**

Chapter 1 provided an overview of the study and discussed the researcher’s personal connection to it. Chapter 2 reviewed the literature related to the study. This chapter, Chapter 3, delineated the study method. Chapter 4 documents the study findings. Finally, Chapter 5 discusses the study in sum, draws conclusions, and offers recommendations.
CHAPTER 4

THE FINDINGS

Opening

Chapter 1 provided an overview of the study and discussed the researcher’s personal connection to it. Chapter 2 reviewed the literature related to the study. Chapter 3 delineated the study method. This chapter, Chapter 4, documents the study findings.

Reiteration of the Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to present the life stories of three African American male high school dropouts from the Las Vegas area that are currently attempting to reenter and complete high school. This study explores dropping out from the standpoint of those who have experienced it first hand.

The three questions driving this study were:

1. What were the general lived experiences, family life influences, peer relationships, and/or other factors that led the study participants to leave school early?

2. Was racial discrimination a factor in these African American males dropping out?

3. What motivated these students to return to school to get a diploma or GED?

The findings in this chapter, derived from nine in-depth interviews with the participants, show how complicated life can be for African American males and how resilient they can be in their quest to survive and make a life for themselves.
Brief Review of Study Site: Clark County School District

As touched upon in Chapter 3, the Clark County School District (CCSD) is located in Southern Nevada and is the nation’s fifth largest public school district (Clark County School District, 2007). CCSD has an enrollment of approximately 254,000 students (Clark County School District, 2007), 13,956 of whom attend adult school. The site of the study, City Adult School serves 4,200 students (Clark County Department of Adult Education, 2007).

Brief Review of Specific Study Site: City Adult School

Also touched on in Chapter 3, the City Adult School was a church that has been converted into a high school, and the location within the school where the interviews were done was, at one time, the church rectory. It is very beautiful with arching beams on the ceilings of highly polished oak wood. From the outside, City Adult School still looks like a church, which is, perhaps, symbolically significant since all of its students are public school dropouts.

The student population at City Adult School was 4,200 students with 467 of those students graduating with diplomas and another 400 preparing to take the GED exam each year (Clark County Department of Adult Education, 2007). The data were collected at City Adult School because it is located in central Las Vegas and it had a large population of African American male students. The main school building contains administrative offices, a lunchroom, a library, and a small auditorium. Most of the classrooms are in bungalows in the church parking lot, 16 in total. Inside the lobby is a large conference table in the far right corner that I used as a work area while waiting for my participants to arrive. After some time I noticed that all of the students were in the school’s mandated
dress code. This is the result of the principal, Dr. Sam, having every new student sit through a 15 minute orientation video explaining the rules of acceptable behavior at the school, including the dress code. The school exudes a high level of discipline, which is reinforced by a staff that includes counselors and two safety officers. The chief enforcer is the assistant principal, Ms. “Jill,” who is stern and direct.

Three students, in various stages of reentry, were solicited for this project through Ms. Farr, the guidance counselor. Each of the three participants was interviewed individually on three separate occasions. I created a brief biographical portrait of each participant, and then explored the life experiences that led them to drop out of high school.

Results

“A case study is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single, bounded unit” (Merriam, 1998, p. 21). The results section begins with a portrait of each participant followed by themes that emerged from the coding process described in chapter three.

“Codes are units of data—bits of information—that are sorted into groupings, called themes; that have something in common” (Merriam, 1998, p. 179). The themes in this study are defined as six or more coded responses by at least two of the participants because there is something in common. Also, comments from the counselor, Ms. Farr, are included in an attempt to triangulate as much of the data as possible. All participants are referred to using pseudonyms.

Portrait One: Jay

Jay is 21 years old, and is originally from Kansas City, Missouri. When I first met Jay, he had a ragged appearance. Jay’s shorts hung below his waist, he wore a basketball
jersey that hung off of his shoulders, and he smelled of marijuana and alcohol although it was morning. This was how he showed up to register for classes at City Adult School on his first day. For his second and third interviews he was better groomed, his hair was braided neatly, and he was in a polo shirt and pressed khakis. Jay and his wife, who also attends City Adult School, are expecting a baby in a few months. When he talked, he was articulate, and thoughtful in his responses, and did not use a lot of slang.

In elementary school, he was a good student living at home with his mom and dad. When he entered the sixth grade his dad was sent to jail and he was sent to live with his grandmother. Jay dropped out of school in the ninth grade.

**Portrait Two: Tim**

The second participant is Tim, a 19 year old. He too, is originally from Kansas City, Missouri. Tim is a big football player. He was expelled for fighting during his senior year in Kansas City. When he was in elementary school, he lived at home with his mom, dad, brother, and two sisters. His dad, a policeman, was shot and killed in a gunfight in Kansas City. After his father’s death his mother, a teacher, started using drugs, and eventually abandoned the children. An aunt and uncle moved the children out of the house; it was months before Tim and his siblings knew what had happened to their mom. She was later sent to prison for ten years.

**Portrait Three: Vinnie**

The third participant is Vinnie, a 19 year old originally from McKeesport, Pennsylvania. Vinnie is only about 5’2, weighing 160lbs, but he is also a football player and a tough guy by his own account. Vinnie has been at home with both parents for his entire school career. By his own admission he has a problem with authority, including his
parents. He thought that his elementary school years were some of the best of his life. He was popular during that time but has never really recaptured that feeling of stature. Vinnie dropped out of high school in the tenth grade.

Data Analysis Process

The data analysis process was drawn from Sharan B. Merriam’s *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education, 1998*

The interview process consisted of a structured first interview with prepared questions. A second interview was used to expand on the participants answers in the first interview as code words and themes started to emerge; and a third interview was used to clarify previous answers and to give each participant the opportunity to cover any subject that he thought we had missed. Two of the participants said that they had enjoyed the process and were thankful that they had the opportunity to have some of their feelings and opinions heard.

The interviews, transcribed, produced 60 pages of data. Data analysis began with the first interview. Some codes and themes that emerged from these initial readings, including drug use, violence, and discrimination, seemed significant. I read each interview three times. The next step in the process was to examine how the data fit the existing domain (lived experiences) and to further evaluate what codes would emerge. The themes were developed from content analysis of the frequency with which the codes were mentioned by the participants as defined earlier in this chapter (See Table 10, Appendix C). The participant’s narratives were coded line-by-line and categorized to analyze the narratives by participant and then to analyze the narratives across participants to establish continuity of the themes. As I read each transcript, I coded terms/words I
thought were significant. I picketed fenced codes for frequency, and codes that had six responses or more, I used as an arbitrary cut-off to create categories or themes.

“Categories should reflect the purpose of the research” (Merriam, 1998, p.183).

**Research Question #1**

What were the general lived experiences, family life influences, peer relationships, and/or other factors that led the study participants to leave school early?

Discussion in this section focuses on participant school experiences at the elementary, secondary, and high school level in general and related to six emergent themes, as well as participant family dysfunction, the role of peers in the participants lives, and participant motivations to leave school early.

**School Experiences**

The participants spoke at length about their experiences in elementary, middle, and high school. They spoke about school alienation, attendance problems, being retained in school, and grades.

**Elementary school years.**

The three participants had fond memories of elementary school. Each one said that elementary school was either fun or it was cool to be there. They felt they belonged in school. Jay and Vinnie, in particular, did not mind schoolwork at this time because they excelled at it. Here is what they said about the experience.

Jay: Grade school memories good and bad; attended three different schools; different teachers with different attitudes. I was kind of ADD, I would finish my work quickly and needed to move or do something. I was bored and needed something to do, I would not do anything to anyone but I would get in trouble as if I did something inappropriate in class and my mom did not play that. Elementary school was good and Mr. Freeman was
a farmer and he lived on the outskirts on Kansas City, came to teach in the city; most of the schools in Kansas City are mostly predominately black.

Tim: We lived in the ghetto; we had to be home at a certain time. Or you was going to get, a lot of drug dealers and everything, we had to be home at a certain time. I played sports; I went to practice and stuff. I couldn’t run around. I didn’t have time for homework, we had chores. That’s when everybody was together, like the whole family. And we lived in the city. It was alright, I liked it, and it was fun.

Vinnie: It started off rocky; I did not want to go home. Kindergarten was the best experience, naptime, coloring, learning your ABC’s and meeting new people. I always loved being the center of attention; it was cool for me to be there; experience with these kids of the same age and stuff. The best was my 5th grade year; all of a sudden you transition from a kindergartener to top dog 5th grader. I was at the top of the food chain, everybody else was below me. It was a time when everyone knew me and they thought I was cool.

Middle school difficulty.

It seems that the transition from elementary school to middle school was difficult for the African American males in this study even under the best circumstances. Each participant spoke of a troubled transition to middle school and the realization that middle school would present different challenges. All three participants went to predominately African American middle schools in the ghetto. Now in middle school, the participants were no longer concerned about painting, ABC’s, and taking naps. They were faced with the early struggle for survival. They no longer felt that they had a locus of control; their school environment was out of control. In just a year they had gone from the serenity of elementary school to fist fights, drugs on campus, and boredom in the classroom. This poor transition is influenced by poverty and race where African American males are concerned (Kaufman et. al., 2001).

Jay: You had to fight everyday; I did not do the gang, I’m not a follower; I’m a leader. Going to that school you had to be in the in-crowd and being
in the in-crowd made me bad. You had to be bad and you had to be ready to fight the kid. Every time I was faced with a challenge I stepped up to the plate. You could lose your life and I met each challenge head on. In doing so I set myself back along with my attendance so I had to repeat the sixth grade again, because they said I was not there and I did not learn anything so I had to go back. By this time I was introduced to selling dope and I had all the book knowledge I need and they was teaching the same thing over and over again; it was just review after review and I was just tired of it all.

Tim: Sixth grade, I guess that was kind of like the best year. I wasn’t ditching. I was going everyday, I was just being myself just being a comedian. I couldn’t believe it, I was out of elementary. I was living in the ghetto. That’s when the ghetto was cool. I was like, I live in the ghetto, this is tight, a whole bunch of black people together. It was fun then, so then different stuff happened all the time. That’s when we was skatin’, stealing and stuff like that. And now there were all these white people. I [had] never been called the “N” word before; I mean you know how brothers we like to say that. Got called the “N” word, I was just like, I didn’t know what to do, I was just like I didn’t believe it.

Vinnie: Scary, I had to start all over again; at the bottom. I was trying to be popular like in the 5th grade, but no one wanted to hear that; I tried out for the basketball team; I tried to make a name for myself in middle school. For me being so short it was hard for me to play basketball; I was never good at it. I could ball but not as good as the other kids. Yeah, it was a disappointment because I was use to accomplishing things and excelling in football. It was weird for me, I started to doubt my confidence; at this time people were getting more violent and I started acting out with my fist; cursing out my teachers and walking out of class.

**High school problems.**

By the time each participant was in high school they had already begun the disengagement process. Middle and high school had turned the three participants so much against school that they did not even want to go. Ditching was a refuge from the violence in school. One cannot help but wonder if more African American teachers in the classroom would make a difference for African American boys at this difficult stage.

These boys needed role models from their own race to look up to.
Here is what they had to say about some high school experiences.

Jay: I went to Central High school, back in Kansas City, Missouri. It is the worst inner city school; it is the high school section of the middle school that I went to in the 7th grade. Even with metal detectors there are still guns inside the school. In order to survive there you need to be hard because people be taking your change, shoes, jacket or whatever they want. They would walk up on you and like say take that off I like that and I want it take it off. You could not be a punk because you would get beat up everyday. Going to that school was an eye opener. I was out of control. I barely went to school and when I was there I barely paid attention.

Tim: I went to Lee-Summit high school; the freshman coach was racist. My junior year wasn’t the best year. I had to go to summer school. But it was good for football. All I was thinking about was football.

Vinnie: Desert Pines High School, it started out great; I was back on track basically due to football. I kept my grades up so that I could play football. After football season was over, I felt that there was nothing else to do why I should keep my grades up, it was over. I met friends that were in theatre; they ditched a lot, so okay I just thought it might be fun; the thrill of ditching became a habit. I did not know I had English in the second period until I got my report card. April 20th was ditch day, so everybody partied that day, everything got out of hand. I planned on going back to school to get my grades back up so that the next year I could play football. Things did not work out that way, I failed everything.

Summary of Elementary, Middle, and High School Experiences

The participants started elementary school ready to learn and felt a part of the school. They said that they actually enjoyed school while in elementary school and did not feel the pressure of racial differences at this time. The participants said that they also had good grades during their early school years, but all that changed when they entered middle school. Each participant had a difficult transition to middle school, in some cases because of family hardship, and in one case because he had a tough time dealing with his loss of stature among his middle school classmates. In middle school they were introduced to school violence, racial differences, and racial hatred (Steele, 1997).
school environment was no longer friendly to these African American young men because it represented their realization of the negative image society had of them. The N-word was thrown at them as a slur for the first time in their young lives, and they did not understand why. They became Afro-centric in self-defense to deal with the physical and the societal dangers that were suddenly coming their way.

The participants’ disengagement from school began in middle school and was only reinforced in high school. In each case, the participant had a dysfunctional family life, including not having a stable residence, loss of interest in school except for sports, and high school teachers and counselors who were more aggressive in their negative attitudes. Given these pressures, the participants gravitated toward an interest in sports in high school because they received positive reinforcement on the playing field.

**Additional Findings Related to School Experiences**

The preceding themes were derived from the coding of data related to the research questions, but additional coded themes emerged from the data also associated with the school experience but more specifically pertaining to participant experiences with: alienation, teachers, counselors; drugs and selling drugs; attendance and truancy (“ditching”); retention and suspension; grades; and sports.

**Alienation, teachers, and counselors.**

The following excerpts show the anger their experience created in these participants. Tim even says that if he saw some of his teachers on the street today he would fight them. Vinnie was actually suspended for pushing one of his teachers and was charged with assault. These participants are a microcosm of the larger population of African American male students who are turned off by school. Hale-Benson (1989) suggested that “Black
children do not enter schools disadvantaged, but they emerge from the school disadvantaged” (p. 84).

Jay: The parents did not seem to care, the teachers didn’t care, so why should I care. ...I was in the sixth grade and I still made appearances at school, but I sold candy and I gambled. Teachers did not care, so why should we care.

Vinnie: During elementary school they cared, middle school was mediocre; some teachers cared and some didn’t. High school I don’t think they give a damn.

Tim: Just different teachers. The principal never said nothing to me. The other principal I had was a lady, she was cool. But the teachers, I hated them. There was nothing too far where I could report it. But there’s some if I saw them on the street, I’d probably give them a piece of my mind. Especially a couple of them, if I saw them at Wal-Mart I would probably fight them.

This theme evolved by combining the coding responses of the three participants to get their perspective on feeling a part of the schools that they attended. See Table10 in Appendix C for details. There were three responses for alienation, ten for white teachers/counselors, five for black teachers/counselors, and seven for racial comments in school for a total of 25 negative responses to the school environment. African American males feel unwelcome and disrespected in the public school system (Kunjufu, 1986).

The only time that the participants felt they were a part of the traditional school program was when they were involved in sports or in elementary school.

**Using and selling drugs.**

Two of the participants, Tim and Vinnie, said that they had never used drugs because of what it did to the people in their lives who were users. Jay admitted he used drugs and smelled of marijuana smoke at his first interview. The parents were modeling drug and alcohol use in the home. Children who are already at a disadvantage for being poor and
Black now have the additional hurdle of trying to overcome the poor role modeling of the parents they love.

Vinnie: My father was addicted to marijuana and he is still in a battle with the addiction. I saw how he acted when he was doing it and I did not want to act like that.

Jay: It’s predominately black; you have metal detectors to detect metal and every thing else is in the school, drugs in school. Kids are strung out at school. Drug deals are big time in school, kids are doing everything in the school. I thought about what was happening and although it was easy money, I did not want to bring down another black child; I had my fill of it. The guns are outside but there is everything you would want in the school.

Tim: And she (mother) started doing drugs and now she’s in jail, down in Houston. So I’ve been living with my uncle and auntie since I was twelve.

All three participants had to deal with drugs in their lives, but only Jay said that he had used drugs. Tim and Vinnie had problems with drug use by family members that caused problems for the family either with relationships or with the law. There were a total of seven responses for drug use from the participants, and three more from Jay and one from Tim related to selling drugs for a total of eleven. Two parents went to jail because of drugs, Jay’s dad and Tim’s mother.

**Attendance and truancy.**

One of the first signs of disengagement from school is poor attendance. Jay, Tim, and Vinnie said they skipped school so that they would not have to deal with teachers and administrators who were giving them a hard time. The participants stated that they were not interested in school because school had become boring to them and it did not seem relevant to what they were going through. The only interest that Tim and Vinnie related
to school was football, because in their frame of reference football is relevant and academics are not.

Jay: I went to Northeastern. I failed the ninth grade at Central because of my attendance, the four absence rule was in effect, so I’m again a grade behind when I enter Northeastern High School. At this time I am not interested in school, I have the brains, I’m smart and I can do the work but I went because the person that I’m living with wanted to make me go to school. I have always done other things to keep me busy, so if I did not want to go to school I had to sneak to skip school, before I could just stay at home.

Tim: That’s when I wanted to drop out; I wanted to go back to the ghetto school. I wanted to go back so bad. And then I kind of lost faith, I stopped going to church. That’s when I started getting my permit, and I started working. So during track season I didn’t run. I ditched a lot. My freshman year was probably my worst year. That’s what got me down.

Vinnie: After football season was over, I felt that there was nothing else to do why I should keep my grades up, it was over. I met friends that were in theatre; they ditched a lot, so okay I just thought it might be fun; the thrill of ditching became a habit. I did not know I had English in the second period until I got my report card. April 20th was ditch day, so everybody partied that day, everything got out of hand. I planned on going back to school to get my grades back up so that the next year I could play football. Things did not work out that way, I failed everything.

It was not surprising that there were 13 responses to attendance and ditching. In the interview, they revealed that they felt alienated from the educational process, so why go and be hassled by people who didn’t want them there anyway? Jay had eleven of the thirteen responses that might mean that he really wanted to go or stay away, but his dysfunctional lifestyle precluded regular attendance. Attendance for Tim and Vinnie was directly related to sports activity; if there were no sports they did not attend school.

Retention, suspension, and expulsion.

Fifty years ago when I was in school, getting suspended or expelled was proof that you were tough and did not “give a shit” about the teachers or the administrators. Many
black boys feel the same way today, as shown by the participants and their attitude toward being suspended. In these excerpts, they felt that the teachers’ taunts and disrespect justified their oppositional behavior. Tim talks about being the “class clown,” Jay talks about being the “baddest dude,” and Vinnie plays by his own rules while in school. Schools are developing programs that give teachers the skills to be more sensitive to the needs of minority students through such programs as Maryland’s Montgomery County Public Schools diversity and training development called Team Diversity. Team Diversity holds seven classes covering racial issues that teachers should be able to understand while teaching a diverse student body (Montgomery County Public Schools, 2007).

Jay: Yes, from every school. I have a record a mile long. I got suspended for gambling smoking and inciting a riot in the cafeteria. It was a food fight, I threw a milk carton, and they pinned the whole thing on me.

Tim: So every now and then, I would get suspended for a couple days a couple detentions, standing up for myself. You know you have a bad mood? Don’t want to hear it from nobody, just go do your work and go home? Every now and then they make it hell for you. “What’s wrong Tim? What’s wrong? You smoke weed today?” …He touched my little sister, my baby sister. You all know what I went through with my family. And they still expelled me. He was feeling on my sister.

Vinnie: I was suspended lots of times but I do know how many times I was suspended from elementary school; 91 times. I would say about 20 times from middle school and about 7 times in high school.

The combined themes accounted for 18 responses; Vinnie was 12 of those responses. Tim was never held back in school, but he was suspended a number of times and then ultimately expelled from the Kansas City School system in his senior year. Jay had a total of three responses between the two themes, but much less than one might think given the number of times that he was suspended and his difficulty at school.
Grades.

The participants were proud of their good grades in elementary school. All three talk of getting A’s in early grades, and Jay even got a scholastic award that made him feel special.

Jay: Yes, in grade school I received mostly all A’s. I was a good student. Received an award for maintaining a perfect grade point average after graduating elementary school; big ceremony and I felt really good when I walked on to the stage to accept it. My grades would have been good if I had gone to school. My grade point averaged tanked from a 4.0 to 1.0; in order to remain in the school I had to maintain a 3.25 average but my attendance was so bad that nothing would help me to stay.

Tim: It would be always barely passing. …So I got A’s in that year. So then that year, that’s when stuff used to happen, like you got A’s you can do anything you want; that’s what my auntie said. And that’s how we all was. My brother went to a ghetto school his junior year, he got A’s. Had a 3.0 average GPA, he was getting looked at from schools, ’cause he goes to a ghetto school. And when we went back, that killed us. Cause his senior year that killed him, ‘cause he ended up getting like a 2.8. And it killed me because I was going to freshman year of high school. I’ve been doing stuff I was doing in the seventh grade, and then going back to high school. In the suburbs, that killed me. So my first year wasn’t that good. The first year I didn’t play football because then I played soccer.

Vinnie: Ninth grade started out pretty good. I got A’s at Opportunity school. They decided to let me out.

Grades were mentioned fifteen times by the participants. Jay had six responses, Tim had six responses, and Vinnie had three responses. I found it interesting that students who were so disengaged from the educational process would be so aware of the importance of good grades, yet could not improve their own grade point average in high school. In the interviews, each participant seemed to want the same feeling they enjoyed in elementary school. However, time had changed both the school environment and their relationship to the school.
Sports.

Tim and Vinnie said many times that their only interest in going to school was to play football. They wanted to excel at sports in order to be popular at school and hopefully to get a scholarship to college to play football. From there, they would go on to the NFL and a career in professional sports. The participants were willing to put many hours into football, but not the time necessary to make good grades.

Tim: I want to prove myself. I want to play for a D1 college, and say: “Ain’t no one playing for this college but me, I’m the only one from my school, except my brother.” Nobody plays D1 from your school, and they still suck. My brother, I call him every now and again, he gives me a lot of motivation. …I was at average in junior high, because I played football, and I had to keep my grades up. And my coach, he wasn’t like the coach at the ghetto school or Pop Warner because he didn’t care what your grades was. He just cared when the next fish fry was. This guy was like, I remember his name was coach Long, he was on it. So I had and B’s and stuff in the eight grade.

Vinnie: Football. I went to watch my brother play at Eldorado High School; just listening to the cheers and the crowds. …I planned on going back to school to get my grades back up so that the next year I could play football. Things did not work out that way, I failed.

Sports got the most responses of any theme with thirty-one total responses. Tim had twenty responses himself and Vinnie had eleven. Jay did not respond to sports at all. This indicates the participant’s sense of self-efficacy. Tim and Vinnie feel that they can excel on the playing feel and are accepted for their talents. The sports responses also show that the participants’ disengagement is not total. If African American male students could have the same self-efficacy in academics as they have in school sports, that alone would help bridge the gap between dropout and graduation rates.

Summary of Additional Findings Related to School Experiences
Discussion in this sub-section focused on participant school experiences related to alienation, teachers, and counselors; using and selling drugs; attendance and truancy; retention, suspension, and expulsion; grades; and, sports. While the theme of sports had thirty-one total positive responses, it represents the participants’ only interest in returning to school. However, these positive responses are not enough to overcome the overall negative school environment described in the participants twenty-five negative responses on the theme related to alienation, teachers, and counselors, the thirteen negative responses on the theme related to attendance and truancy, and the eighteen negative responses on the theme related to retention, suspension, and expulsion. Overall, the participants viewed the school as a wholly negative environment.

**Family Dysfunction**

Jay, Tim, and Vinnie might have fared better in school if they had consistent nurturing at home. Instead, their parents always seem to have something else to do. The participants were forced to raise themselves and their siblings, forgoing their childhoods and creating tension for them. Going to school at this stage of their lives is not the priority that it should be. The participants said that they wished their parents had been better parents.

Jay: It was also the worse year of my life; my dad went to jail, I was no longer living with my mother (we lost the house) and had to move in with my grandmother. With my mother up until my daddy went to jail, our house was like the church. All this stuff started happening and I felt that god was punishing me. Everything that could go wrong went wrong. There was a big difference from living with my mom, and my grandmother’s house. I was exposed to everything at my grandmother’s house; there was nothing I didn’t see there. So it made that year impossible to go to school that year; in a typical week I would attend school maybe twice in a week. Growing up always on welfare motivated me to do some of the things that I did in my life. I was interviewed a
million times by case workers, child protective services and everything like that. In Kansas City, they would come to the house, knock on the door and would conduct sit down interviews. There were a couple of close calls of being removed from my mother’s house. Only because it was not in order, the house was always clean, but high maintenance; if you weren’t dealing with the rats and roaches, you were dealing with something that had to be fixed. Something was always out and needed to be fixed, or you were dealing with living in the projects. My mom was a drug addict; she had other things to do.

Jay was very straightforward and candid about his family and their problems. He stated that he still loves both of his parents, but he wishes that they could have done a better job. Tim’s family situation was different, but with some of the same results.

Tim: When my dad got shot, at first I didn’t believe it. When he got shot, I remember when he got shot; I remember it like it was yesterday. We all just got back from basketball practice, and my mom was just sitting in the living room like dazed. I was like “What’s wrong with her?” She must have had a bad day at school so, we went upstairs. And then my aunties come in the house and she’s screaming and my momma comes in the house screaming. So we were like: “What’s wrong with y’all?” So they tell us, my momma knew already. And so, then my older brother and my older sister, they was crying. They came to my room, came in my brother’s room, and they was crying. I had never seen my brother cry. It was like OK, what’s wrong?

Vinnie: Okay, my mom was never home, although from kindergarten to the third grade she was home everyday when I got home from school. Then she started working more and trying to get a college education, so she was not at home as much especially as I got older; I guess she thought I could take care of myself. My father was running around doing what he does; he would always get work but when he didn’t he was in the streets with his friends and my uncles. So, my sisters and brothers; we had to take care of ourselves; wash our clothes, cook our food, make sure our homework was done and our little brother was in bed by nine. We would leave our homework on the table because my mother would check our work when she would come home late at night. In the morning we would see little notes on our papers to point out what was wrong such as misspelling and things like that. That was pretty much our life for awhile.
Summary of Family Dysfunction

This theme had eight responses total: three from Jay, three from Tim, and two from Vinnie. The responses were fairly evenly divided even though Jay and Tim had much more disruption in their lives than Vinnie. Vinnie also had both parents at home, but it did not make a difference in his family life because they had interests other than the children. They tell stories of parental drug abuse, child neglect, welfare dependence, parental incarceration, constant moving, and being raised by relatives. As Jay said, “How are you supposed to think about school when you have all of this stuff going on?” Four parents were on drugs, two parents went to jail, two mothers deserted their sons, one dad went to jail and one dad was running the streets. One participant went to stay with a grandmother who was dealing drugs and running a house of prostitution. A pattern of bad judgment was displayed by the parents. An example is when Tim’s dad was killed and his mom deserted the kids to go and stay with her brother, an ex-con, and they both ended up going to jail for drugs. Each participant tells of having to take care of siblings because the parents are neglecting their basic duties to feed and nurture their children. In some cases they had to leave home to stay with a relative, just to have shelter. Counter stories (stories from the groups that are stereotyped) are needed so that we may understand what many African American male children go through so that we may begin to understand the root cause of their anti-social behavior.

Role of Peers

Unfortunately, peer relationships tend to be negative, in that, these friends are usually themselves disengaging from school or have already dropped out. Spending time with
this group of peers reinforces the feelings of disengagement from school and makes it more difficult for participants to catch up on homework and classes.

Jay: …you had to fight everyday; I did not do the gang, I’m not a follower; I’m a leader. Going to that school you had to be in the in-crowd and being in the in-crowd made me bad. You had to be bad and you had to be ready to fight the kid.

Tim: Sixth grade, I guess that was kind of like the best year. ‘Cause that’s when I had, I met my fab five; I had a whole bunch of friends. That’s when I like, split apart from my brothers. And I had my own little group. I broke away from the house; I would spend the night at my friend’s house all the time. That’s when we all broke loose; we all had our own friends.

Vinnie: I met friends that were in theatre; they ditched a lot, so okay I just thought it might be fun; the thrill of ditching became a habit. I did not know I had English in the second period until I got my report card. April 20th was ditch day, so everybody partied that day, everything got out of hand. I planned on going back to school to get my grades back up so that the next year I could play football. Things did not work out that way, I failed.

Summary of Role of Peers

Peer relationships had ten responses, five from Tim, two from Jay, and three from Vinnie. All three participants talked in glowing terms about their friendships in school and around their neighborhoods. In some cases, the friends became so close that the participants would go stay with his friends because they enjoyed being with them so much. In some ways, the friendships replaced their dysfunctional families, but not with positive outcomes. Jay went to stay with his girlfriend and now she is pregnant, Vinnie also went to stay with his girl so that he could work and not go to school, and Tim preferred to hang out with his friends to going home with his family. Vinnie developed a friendship with a group of students who ditched school frequently which resulted in his failing all of his courses that semester. Jay ran with a group of friends who were in the
“in crowd.” To show how tough they were, they fought and sold drugs at school. The friendships the participants developed were consistent with their personal disengagement from school because no one was there to say, “What about class today?” or, “What about our homework?” Each group had its own symbiosis that sustained the groups’ disengagement from school, and eventually lead to their dropping out of high school.

**Additional Key Finding Area**

**Motivations to leave school early.**

Reading the data, I found that the participants did not seem to need motivations to leave school early; rather they did not have an incentive to stay, other than sports. School had become a negative experience for the participants due to fights, drugs, getting behind in homework, and run-ins with teachers and administrators. The primary motivation was to avoid a continuing negative experience.

Jay: The schools that I attended had teachers to tell students “you ain’t gonna be nothing boy you; ain’t gonna be shit. Teachers are supposed to be motivators, right?

Tim: The first day of practice, this white boy started looking at my little sister, she’s a freshman now at the new school. And I noticed, I don’t see my sister no more. So then I turn and “He touched your sister.” So, I beat him up. First he lied to me, and his friends told me he did it, so I beat him up. And then he told the coach. I got kicked off the team, I could have transferred back to the other school. I didn’t want to go back to the city school, I really didn’t. They think I was a traitor because I went out to the suburbs, so I might get killed.

Vinnie: It was just like the eleventh grade; I did not do anything; my friends were getting ready to graduate, but it did not bother me. My parents thought that it was kind of weird that I wasn’t motivated to do my work. I didn’t really care; it was you guys go ahead and graduate. Before graduation came up I decided to stop going to school. I figure why I should still be in school if I’m not going to graduate. I just stopped going and kept on working.
I was not able to develop a separate theme for motivations to leave school early because the motivations to leave school early for Jay, Tim, and Vinnie had been building up over their experiences in school. Even though Tim was slowly becoming disenchanted with high school, his desire to have a football career at the college level kept him from dropping out on his own. He did not like the atmosphere at his school or the coaches because he felt they were unfair and racist in the way they made their decisions about how to treat student athletes. The way Tim was summarily expelled from school for defending his sister is consistent with his view that the school administration was racist, and instead of getting a hearing, he was found guilty of beating up a white student and expelled by white coaches and administrators without any representation for his defense. Fairness is always an issue where African American males are concerned because they are viewed so negatively (Stack, 1974; Kluger, 1975). Jay and Vinnie are typical cases of African American males’ disengagement from school as a result of a constellation of negative environmental situations and events, yet not any one dramatic event such as happened with Tim (Kuperminc, et. al., 1997). Over time Tim, Jay and Vinnie developed a negative feeling towards school partly in order to protect their self-esteem and racial identity. All three felt a need to protect themselves and sometimes their siblings from racial incidents.

Tim: I would get suspended for different things, fighting for my brother and my sister. It wouldn’t even be at my school sometimes, it would be at junior high. I would be a sophomore and my sister would be in seventh grade, somebody would call her a nigger b-word. So I had to go there and defend her me and my brother. Then the boy had a brother, so then the brother would beat me up. So every now and then, I would get suspended for a couple days a couple detentions, standing up for myself.
The participants’ motivations to leave school early were fueled by their reactions to the negative environment of high school and dropping out became a defense mechanism to protect their self-esteem and racial identity.

**Summary of Additional Key Finding Area**

The dominant theme in this sub-section is that leaving school early is, perhaps, the best way for the participants to deal with the negative school environment—to escape it. Unfortunately, it is common for African-American males to feel that leaving school is their *only* option for responding to a negative school environment, which contributes to their dropping out of school.

**Summary of Research Question #1**

Unfortunately, the participants’ life experiences led them to leave school early because they were dealing with situations that were not conducive to a stable school career. As life got more difficult, the question of staying in or leaving school became an easier decision to make.

**Research Question #2**

Was racial discrimination a factor in these African American males dropping out?

**Discrimination in School**

Reading the excerpts below, one gets the feeling the participants felt that they were being treated differently from the other students in their classes, and in the school. When schools create a hostile atmosphere for their students, the result will always be students who drop out so that they do not have to deal with the hostile environment. A hostile school environment has an accumulative effect that makes a student tense as the student approaches school, and by the time the student gets to his first class he is ready to
explode; and that’s when teachers say that he has a chip on his shoulder. Those were my feelings fifty years ago, and the participants voiced similar feelings in the following excerpts.

Jay: When you are already dealing with stuff at home, you don’t want to be disrespected at school especially a child that should not be dealing with things for an adult. You don’t want to go to school to be disrespected. In the 7th grade I had a teacher who was always mean, a big black guy, a rugby player who thought he could say anything to you, and he acted as if he did not want to be there, so why be a teacher if you don’t like or respect kids? I told him he could not talk to me that way; that is one of the reasons that I did not go to school, no one needs to take crap off anyone, especially at school. One teacher called the class niggers; students turned out the classroom, it was the start of riot in school because of one class; chairs were flying, desks, books everything was tossed about.

Tim: Yes. Everyday I felt like, is this 1940? I used to watch, during Black History Month in February, we used to watch those Martin Luther King tapes. I watched the Emmet Till tapes. We didn’t watch none of that stuff in February; they didn’t give a dang about Black History Month. It wasn’t like a hick town, it was a suburb, it had a nice little nightlife, but they didn’t say nothing. Nothing (discrimination) too far where I could report it. But there’s some if I saw them on the street, I’d probably give them a piece of my mind. Especially a couple of them, if I saw them at Wal-Mart I would probably fight them.

Vinnie: Administrators, I felt discriminated against anyone who wasn’t white. At Desert Pines, my dean was Mexican and I think that he didn’t like black people. He was a no nonsense kind of guy and I felt he just wanted to get rid of me. He would say things like “you kids” or something to the effect, “kids like you always want to be class clown, always want to cut up and act so stupid that’s why most of you don’t graduate.” I thought he was talking mostly about African Americans.

**Summary of Research Question #2**

Jay, Tim, and Vinnie perceived that they were going to schools that discriminated against their race in general and, in some cases, them in particular. The atmosphere created by allowing African American male students to feel disconnected and disenfranchised aided in the disengagement of participants from school. It is a self-
fulfilling prophecy, in that, if teachers treat students in a negative way, teachers are going to get negative outcomes and vice versa (Oakes, 1995). Some scholars call the effect that teachers have on at-risk students the Pygmalion Effect.

Rosenthal and Jacobson, in their book *Pygmalion in the classroom: Teacher expectation and pupils’ intellectual development* describe an experiment in which they told a group of elementary school teachers that an intelligence test had identified some their students as “late bloomers.” The teachers were told to expect that these students would blossom in the coming year. In actuality, the children labeled as late bloomers were chosen at random. At the end of the year, the intelligence test was readministered to the students. While the late bloomers and the control students had the same average score at the beginning of the year, the late bloomers’ average score was significantly higher than that of the control group at the second administration of the test. The teachers were unaware of having treated the experimental and control subjects differently (as cited in White & Locke, 2000).

Some studies reported that White female students were found to be most favorable in terms of their classroom behavior among White teachers (Byers & Byers, 1972; Irvine, 1990). Other studies reported that the highest expectations were reserved for the White male students who were called on more frequently and given more attention in the classroom (Hall & Sandler, 1984; Sadker & Sadker, 1984; M. K. Smith, 1988). A few argued that poor, minority, and male students were more likely to be labeled and assigned to remedial and special education classes (Oakes, 1985). L. Grant (1984) and M. K. Smith (1988) found that teachers held consistently lower expectations of lower class Black students and the lowest expectation of Black male students (as cited in White &
Locke, 2000). Additionally, Simpson and Erickson (1983) observed teachers’ verbal and nonverbal behaviors for the predictor variables of student race, student sex, and teacher sex. The results indicated that white teachers directed more verbal praise, criticism, and nonverbal praise toward boys than toward girls. However, black boys received more nonverbal criticism than did black girls, white girls, or white boys. Aaron and Powell’s (1982) study supported these findings. They concluded that black pupils receive more negative academic and behavioral feedback than do white pupils (Irvine, 1986). Marx (2001, p. 5) believes that “White pre-service teachers with which she has worked are negatively affected by the racism and ethnocentrism that are interwoven into their own White racial identity, that is, their Whiteness.” While these negative effects remain invisible to most Whites, they nevertheless become clear when Whites discuss their low expectations, resentment, and even antipathy for the “different” ways and habits of people of color. Marx has heard these kinds of comments from numerous White teachers and pre-service teachers over the years, nearly always prefaced by the comment, “I’m not racist, but…” Examining this phenomenon through the Critical Race Theory perspective that all Whites in a White-dominated society are “privileged” by their skin color, and using Tatum’s definition of racism as a system of advantage based on race (Tatum, 1999, p. 7) Marx has come to the conclusion that comments such as those above are indicators of the ways in which racism influences White teachers of children of color. Thus, they are indicators of White racism, the racism that Whites both benefit from and perpetuate by maintaining the status quo.

The participants did not want to go to school because they knew they would be subjected to unfair differential treatment. School could have become a refuge from the
dysfunctional home lives, but instead was seen by the participants as just another negative experience over which they had no control. Any time the participants feel that they are being treated differently from other students, especially white students, is discrimination in the participants’ minds. Being treated differently leads to student disengagement from school (Stack, 1974; Kluger, 1975). The participants believed that discrimination was a factor in their decision to leave school early.

**Research Question #3**

What motivated these students to return to school to get a diploma or GED?

**Back-to-School Motivation**

It seems that the participants decided to come back to school because they found that they needed a diploma to achieve their current goals. While they may have had these goals all along, they now understand the importance of an education.

Jay: I always wanted to do it, get it over and done with; try to get in to college for a better job. I cannot get into a dead end job; I want to be able to make a decent living and be proud of my job; feel good about going to work; there are people out there making $23.00 an hour, I don’t see why I can’t get in to something like that. You never know I may end up at a community college.

Tim: My mother, and my auntie. And out here all these folks crying like you’d better not give up. They was like: “If you do, you could stay with us.” “But I don’t want you to be like your uncle.” My uncle’s in jail and my momma’s in jail. And then just thinking about my daddy. I could drop out and just get a job, there’s a lot of opportunity in ways that I could just make it on my own. But I’ll think about it, I’ll watch some football tapes and be like OK, I want to do that. …I thought about it a lot. When you’re sixteen you can drop out. “Man I should just drop out, get the GED. 10 years into my education? That’s what motivated me, and my little sister.

Vinnie: Football motivated me to back to school. I went to watch my brother play at Eldorado High School; just listening to the cheers and the crowds. I’m going to try to be a walk on at Michigan.
Summary of Research Question #3

Jay, Tim, and Vinnie had very different reasons for going back to school. Tim’s reasons were, again, motivated by his desire to play college football with the thought of eventually getting into the NFL. Vinnie was motivated by his desire to be seen, to become a star as he put it. I was actually surprised that Jay was the only one who said he was motivated to get his diploma to better himself. In each case it seemed almost an afterthought that the participant had ended up back in high school. I did not get the impression that the participants had well thought out reasons for coming back to school. They seemed to be reacting to what was going on around them rather than planning for the future. The data was weakest on this research question.

Triangulation

As discussed in Chapter 3, in an attempt to triangulate the preceding findings by using an additional data source, I interviewed City Adult School counselor, Ms. Jane Farr. Through the information I derived about the study participants from my interview with Ms. Farr, I corroborate the data gleaned from the study participants themselves to give my study findings greater validity. The following are Ms. Farr’s study-relevant comments about each of the participants.

Comments About Tim

Ms. Farr: I don’t know what the incident was; I just know he had to leave Kansas City and moved here. I’ve only seen him twice: I did not notice anything out of line or anything like that; but as you know the students we get here mainly are people who have had issues; so you kind of keep your eye out; but I did not see anything unsettling about him. I saw someone who was anxious to go to school; maybe the situation back there had been some sort of lesson for him, a change for him. Yes, he’s been here since September 13, 2006 let’s see here, he has not completed a class yet. That’s 3 weeks times 5 days equal 45 hours and he is in the ballpark of
completing a class but he has only 42 hours of journalism and 34 hours of math application. He has not accomplished very much yet...as you probably noticed this school is very ethnic centered; there are more Hispanics and African Americans then there are whites. The reasons there are so many minority students; 1) neighborhood; and 2) because of the low graduation rate among African Americans and Hispanics. It's their background, time to get moving, time to make some sort of peace with what you have to do in order to survive. I think what happens is a lot of our students haven’t figured that out yet. High school students figure it out in their sophomore year, our students figure it out when they walk through the door, maybe; but he will be 19 in February and it is time.

He has not been a problem, I usually hear about things going on in the school, his name was never mentioned. He might have a parole officer and was told he was on probation and one of the conditions was to be enrolled in school. Good percentage of our students if they get any kind of federal money, been engaged with the law in anyway or behavioral school usually have some sort of condition on them; they will attend school to avoid incarceration; collect insurance money, Medicare coverage; etc., etc., etc. There is an attachment to keep them motivated. I don’t know about him; but I would think an external motivation is attached. He has two classes in journalism and math, well his attendance is sporadic.

Comments About Vinnie

Ms. Farr: I have no idea who that is. Let me pull his folder to see what counselor has worked with him. He’s half way; 9 1/2 credits to go. Doing this way back since January, 2006; so far he has been with us for 9 months or so. His attendance is sporadic; yesterday he was in class for one hour day before those two hours.

This is adult school. We technically should not have a school full of 17 year olds, but in fact it changed the whole atmosphere of our school. Drifting accountability of regular schools; telling that they are not going to graduate, so might as well go to adult education; so they come here. Before the guidance was to keep students in regular schools for four years, now it has drifted to three maybe three and half years. These 17 year olds were not successful in their own school; no one intervene or guidance, no hiatus for them. They haven’t had time to figure out what’s important; they go from their school to here, and someone told them they must go to school or their mother will lose their benefits; they can’t get a driver’s license, on and on. So they find out and they come just often enough. The situation is that they should be in regular school their
4th year because they are not mature enough to take responsibility to be here.

You are right he is 18; however he was at Odyssey; left in January and came right over here. He did not have time to think school was important to him. He was at Odyssey for two semesters (2004-2005). Let’s see he was at Jeffery for Behavior. Attended three semesters at Desert Pines; 3 classes at Canyon Spring (summer school). Just looking at this, the student hasn’t learned the value of an education and it shows in his attendance. This is a problem we are having at this adult school since “no child left behind”; I don’t mean to generalize; but that’s when accountability changed; we got 19, 20 year olds and older who have been out of school and figured out a diploma was necessary; so it is a change in atmosphere and attitude.

I can tell you is that his GPA is 1.289; he his not attending regularly and another issue is that this is his fifth school; that is really tough on the student. Just by the nature of the statistics on this kid, he’s troubled. I don’t know why he has had trouble other than the 8th grade. No discipline from Odyssey.

**Comments About Jay**

Ms. Farr: He did not register, he did not pay, and he did not complete his enrollment. He may have filled out a folder but he did not pursue it.

**Summary of Participant Counselor Comments**

Interviewing the counselor from City Adult School was an attempt to triangulate some of the data gathered from the nine interviews of the participants. In Tim’s case she verified that he had come to Las Vegas because he had to leave Kansas City for some serious reason. She did not disclose the details in his records, but Tim had given me the details earlier that seem to fit with what the counselor was saying. She also concurred that Tim was not that far from graduation, but that he was not applying himself, and as she put it; “he is going to class sporadically.” She also shared that he was not a problem at the school because his name was not mentioned in association with any issues at the school.
The counselor did not know Vinnie personally, but did look up his school records for the interview. She found Vinnie had been to five schools before coming to City Adult School, which is consistent with what Vinnie said in his interviews. She also indicated that Vinnie is a troubled young man who does not understand the importance of an education. This was also consistent with Vinnie’s interview because he admitted that he did not take school seriously, and that was the reason he was failing. She indicated that he had behavioral issues in school, which again, is consistent with Vinnie’s interviews in which he described the problem with authority that had gotten him in trouble at school.

The counselor brought Jay to me after he had registered on his first day at the school. He showed up on time for all of the interviews, but never completed his enrollment, and never attended any classes. Unfortunately, it is common for dropouts to change their minds about completing their enrollment.

The counselor validated some of the themes of this study such as dysfunctional family, because of the students moving so often and going to as many as five different schools. The counselor also validated the theme of school behavioral problems with the participants. She also pointed out that they were not attending class regularly even now, which was consistent with the high school ditching from the interviews. She alludes to the fact that these students are immature, which relates to the theme of acting up in school.

The counselor could not comment on discrimination because there was nothing in the file that related to how the students felt about their school experiences, and whether they felt that at any point they had been discriminated against.
Analysis

These counter stories from African American males present a picture of their lives by hearing the stories in their own voices. These voices need to be heard in larger numbers so that society and researchers can understand the pain that these young men live through everyday. The pain in many cases is not because of something they did, but because of parental neglect. The participant’s stories produced many themes. I distilled them into six main themes: elementary school success, dysfunctional family, middle school difficulty, high school problems, discrimination in school, and back to school motivation. These themes encompassed the educational life experiences of the participants, and showed that early on these African American males actually enjoyed school. Remember Jay who said: “I was a good student. Received an award for maintaining a perfect grade point average after graduating elementary school; big ceremony and I felt really good when I walked on to the stage to accept it.” Imagine if hundreds of thousands of African American males felt that way about going up to receive their diploma. More research needs to be done to understand why after elementary school, so many African American males lose their way or are thrown off track and never graduate from high school or become a part of mainstream society. Researchers will have to listen to their stories in order to really understand their point of view, their pain, and their dreams.

After nine interviews, a theme emerged from the participants that showed they had not given up on their dreams of success. But the dreams seem delusional compared with the reality of their lives. Vinnie says “I’m going to try to be a walk-on at Michigan,” but he does not show up for the classes that he needs in order graduate with his “second chance.” Vinnie and Tim voice dreams of being a “star” at college and the NFL,
knowing that to get there you have to graduate from high school, but as the counselor points out, they are skipping classes and not earning the credits they need to graduate. Jay’s dreams seemed in touch with reality: “I always wanted to do it, get it over and done with; try to get in to college for a better job. I cannot get into a dead end job; I want to be able to make a decent living.” But Jay never completed his registration at City Adult School, though he showed up on time for each interview. Jay, Tim, and Vinnie are the tip of the iceberg of research that sociologist and educators need to partake in to understand and correct the thinking of so many young African American males.

The participants were the victims of poor parenting and dysfunctional families before any other external environmental forces were involved. Each case is different, but the net result is a child who is not prepared to function as a productive citizen. In Tim’s case, it is very sad that his dad, a policeman, was shot and killed. I feel the same about what Jay has gone through. He is also the victim because his dad did not take into consideration what effect his illegal behavior would have on his family if he ever went to jail, which he did. Jay’s mom also could not cope with the situation and left her children, Jay and his younger sister. Both mothers turned to drugs to deal with adversity rather than protecting their children from the emotional scars. In Vinnie’s situation both parents were always there, they were just more involved in their personal lives rather than lives of their children. Vinnie’s dad was a parent on drugs that spent no time on nurturing his son and helping with direction and discipline.

Dysfunctional parenting was the reason the participants did not take school seriously. Their parents did not make education important. The participants did not exhibit personal discipline because there was no one at home to set the structure of a consistent and stable
family life with boundaries. The bad grades, the ditching school, drugs, fights, early sexual behavior, and dropping out of school is a result of the parents not establishing a stable and disciplined home environment.

Closing

Chapter 1 provided an overview of the study and discussed the researcher’s personal connection to it. Chapter 2 reviewed the literature related to the study. Chapter 3 delineated the study method. This chapter, Chapter 4, documented the study findings. Chapter 5 discusses the study in sum, draws conclusions, and offers recommendations.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Opening

Chapter 1 provided an overview of the study and discussed the researcher’s personal connection to it. Chapter 2 reviewed the literature related to the study. Chapter 3 delineated the study method. Chapter 4 documented the study findings. This chapter, Chapter 5, discusses the study in sum, draws conclusions, and offers recommendations.

Revisitation of the Research Questions

Building on the discussion in Chapters 2, 3, and 4, this chapter provides a discussion of the data derived primarily from the nine participant interviews. I examine the themes that emerged in direct response to the three initial research questions (reframed as they were asked to the participants), as well the additional themes that emerged more indirectly.

Research Question #1

What were the general lived experiences, family life influences, peer relationships, and/or other factors that led you to leave school early?

Three primary themes emerged directly related to this research question. These were: school experience, dysfunctional family, and role of peers. With respect to school experience, six additional sub-themes emerged that will also be discussed.

Discussion of School Experiences

All three participants enjoyed their elementary school years, but had problems from middle school through high school. The data show a fairly bleak school experience for these three African American males after elementary school.
According to the literature, African American middle school students have a more negative perception of the school climate than their white counterparts (Kuperminc, et al., 1997). “While black boys generally held negative attitudes toward their current educational experience, they nonetheless indicated across methods positive attitudes toward education or learning” (Payne, Starks, & Gibson, 2009, p. 43). Each participant became disenchanted with school by the sixth grade, ultimately becoming entirely disengaged from his studies. At the sixth grade level, attendance and retention are high predictors of dropout rates (Lloyd, 1974). Boykin (2001) suggested that racism may have a role in the school system:

In the American public education system, schooling is more than the confluence of reading, writing, and arithmetic... in short; there is a profound socialization agenda in schools, a cultural socialization agenda. Thus schools are not about reading, writing, and arithmetic per se. Schools are about the business of conveying such activities as they relate to certain cultural vantage points and as they are embedded in particular cultural substrates” (p.192). For Boykin “public schools were never conceived to be culturally neutral sites, and schooling was never conceived to be a culturally neutral exercise (p. 192).

If this is true, then the failure of African American students, and African American males in particular, is not accidental, rather it is subliminally intentional (Basden, 2006).

According to Garibaldi (1992):

Teachers have a pivotal role to play in reversing the negative academic and social behaviors of African American males; but they, too, are susceptible to internalizing and projecting the negative stereotypes and myths that are unfairly used to describe African American males as a monolithic group with little hopes of surviving and being successful. Teachers who ascribe to such beliefs must, therefore, change their subjective attitudes about Black boys’ ability to succeed. The fact that many African American males do succeed makes this issue even more important (p. 8).
Burton (1996) said there does appear to be a correlation between teacher attitude and the academic performance of African American males. This view is consistent with what the participants experienced in school; all three had at least one teacher that they felt cared for and respected them.

“Research has consistently documented that teacher expectations influence the academic performance of students. These expectations are communicated via specific classroom behaviors and practices that differ greatly for high versus low expectation students” (Williams, 2003, p. 52).

Expectations are a personal belief system influenced by experience with diverse students, teachers’ role definition, knowledge of appropriate strategies and techniques, and support services available. In urban schools, where there are large numbers of underachieving students, these factors interact to determine whether or not students receive instruction necessary to improve their low academic achievement levels (Winfield, 1986, p. 253).

Critical race theorists would consider this an example of institutional racism. The teachers’ actions do not allow the African American male to be himself and therefore the student loses the culture battle.

**Discussion of Additional Findings Related to School Experiences**

Six sub-themes emerged in relationship to the participants’ discussion of their school experiences. These were alienation, teachers, counselors; drugs and selling drugs; attendance and truancy (“ditching”); retention and suspension; grades; and sports.

**Discussion of alienation, teachers, and counselors.**

The study participants all expressed some degree of alienation from school. They said that they did not feel a part of the school after elementary school because of the way they were treated by teachers and counselors, both black and white. The literature reveals that
this is the way many African American males feel in schools today. The African American male has been perceived as a threat by the European American male from the inception of slavery to the present day (Kunjufu, 1984). This misunderstanding of cultures could create an environment where the dominant white society alienates young black males from school. Gold (1969) differentiated among three kinds of feelings of alienation:

1. Feelings of powerlessness, of not being able to influence his environment, arising from lack of participation and control;
2. Feelings of meaninglessness and social isolation, influenced by being excluded from systems, social or supernatural, which give structure and meaning to life; and,
3. Self-estrangement, the worker cannot fulfill himself in his work thus denying himself (p. 121-131).

According to Fromm (1955), the self-estranged individual has an insatiable desire for fun, feels little worth in his work and would therefore rather not work, and has a desire for immediate gratification. The American power structure has initiated various social and economic actions that have resulted in the subordination of the African American male and the elimination of his masculine advantage in the larger society by an oppressive job market, lengthy incarceration periods, and by making drugs prevalent in lower income neighborhoods (Staples, 1978; Taylor, 1977). The facts clearly show how African American males are frequently the victims of negative attitudes and lowered expectations from teachers, counselors, and administrators. This situation (negative attitudes) shows a lack of dignity accorded to African American males in the classroom (Wells-Wilbon, 1994).

McNeil (1986) “describes schools in which teachers do not care if students learn; they only care if students are compliant and tractable. McNeil calls this “defensive teaching,” a process by which teachers and students
mutually agree to accept minimal effort from each other. Teachers simplify the academic discipline in order to reduce discussions that take up time and might introduce topics that cannot be resolved in a forty-minute class period. Students accept this mystification of the curriculum because they do not have to work hard. Students agree to comply with classroom rules of order and quiet, especially by not asking the instructor difficult questions. “These concepts are important to research because they reflect a fundamental understanding that emerged from the students that a caring teacher helps students learn the academic material” (p. 41).

Critical race theorists would say that these are examples of the dominant society excluding the African American males from being a productive part of the educational system. Schools create an environment that is oppressive, unfriendly, and unfair. No matter what the African American male does if it is not in line with middle class Anglo-Saxon values and mores it is not acceptable, thus robbing the student of a chance to evolve and develop his own identity. This perpetuates a negative self-image of African American males with disastrous results for them and society. The Urban League report pointed out that the negative self-image internalized by many African American males, negative attitudes of authority figures toward African American males, increases in violence and drug abuse have resulted in a disproportionate involvement of African American with the criminal justice system (Williams, 2004). In 1998, African American males accounted for 47.5% of all persons incarcerated in state or prisons. This percentage is quite telling given African American males make up only 6% of the United States population (United States Census Bureau, 2004). “As a result of changes in first incarceration and mortality rates between 1974 and 2001, black males experienced a greater increase in the chances of going to prison over the course of a lifetime than any other group (from 13.4% in 1974 to 32.2% in 2001) (United States Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2003). Also, between 1930 and 1988, 50% of the prisoners
executed under civil authority in the United States were African American males, and in 2006 40% of prisoners executed were black males (United States Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1994, 2007). African American males account for 40% of the prisoners under sentence in the United States. In 2005 it was estimated that African-American male inmates represented 40 percent of all prisoner sentences of more than 1 year, whereas white inmates accounted for 35 percent. African-American males (547,200) also outnumbered white males (459,700) with a sentence of more than 1 year. Indeed, recent cohorts of African-American men are more likely to have been in prison (22.4 percent) than in the military (17.4 percent) or in college; 12.5 percent have a bachelor’s degree (Pettit & Western, 2004, p. 512; U.S. Department of Justice, 1994). The rate of incarceration of African American males is also a function of racism in the courts. In 2001, the chances of going to prison were highest among African American males (32.2%) and Hispanic males (17.2%) and lowest among white males (5.9%) (United States Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2001).

Disproportional numbers of African American males are incarcerated as compared to other racial groups. Blacks as a group are incarcerated six times more than whites, and in the age group 25-29 Blacks are incarcerated eight times more than whites.

- U.S. incarceration rates by race, June 30, 2004:
  - Whites 393 per 100,000
  - Latinos 957 per 100,000
  - Blacks 2,531 per 100,000

- U.S. incarceration rates of males by race aged 25-29, June 30, 2004:
  - Whites 1,666 per 100,000
- Latinos 3,606 per 100,000
- Blacks 12,603 per 100,000 (United States Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2004).

To add insult to injury here, in 2003, the unemployment rate for African American males over 20 years of age was 10.3\% versus 5.0\% for white males, and 6.4\% for Hispanic males the same age (United States Census Bureau, 2006). A clear connection can be drawn between the school experiences and achievement gap for African American males, the lack of employment available to them, and their rate of incarceration. What other options do they have? Research on the prison industrial complex, a multi-billion dollar a year industry, suggests that the choice is made for them through school and societal policies and practices, because they are more valuable to the U.S. economy as prisoners than they are as productive citizens (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Perhaps not surprisingly then, the Black-on-Black murder rate is consistent with African American male coping strategy to maintain his status and his sanity without starting an all out race war against the white man. It is a sort of modern day Darwinian survival of the fittest, in the hood, and natural selection. “Young African American men die at a rate that is at least 1.5 times the rate of young white and Hispanic men, and almost three times the rate of young Asian men. While the death rate drops for men ages 25 to 29 for most groups, it continues to rise among African Americans” (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2006, p. 2). In the year 2003 black males age 15-29 had a mortality rate of 616 deaths per 100,000, compare to 465 deaths per 100,000 for Hispanic males, and 331 deaths per 100,000 for white males. Asian male in this age group had the lowest mortality wit 162 deaths per 100,000 (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2006).
With all of the disadvantages that I have outlined, some researchers (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) say that this makes the African American male an “endangered species.” I say it does just the opposite, it makes him stronger and sharpens his survival instinct in every arena. Black men have become adept at taking a negative and turning it into a positive, the same as the participants have done. They dropped out of school and found out that they really needed a diploma and decided that they would get that diploma and succeed.

Since slavery, African American males have taken adversity and turned it into some creative force. That is where the Delta Blues comes from, then later Jazz, still later Rhythm and Blues, and finally Hip Hop. Hip Hop is the supreme example of the African American males’ coping mechanism. It tells the story of the hood and the day-to-day fight for survival. African American young people love Hip Hop because it represents their story now.

The participants showed me their survival instincts in their interviews. No matter how rough things were, they feel that they have an answer for it; it may not be the right answer but it is their answer and that is what keeps them going; the belief in themselves. These data show that dropping out of high school early is not only an economic and social issue, but is a life or death issue for African American males. The progression of getting in with the wrong peer group, dropping out of high school, and eventually getting involved in a life of crime can lead to incarceration and possibly capital punishment.
Discussion of using and selling drugs.

All three participants talked about drug use either by their parents or, in Jay’s case, his own drug use. This study was consistent with the literature that drug use is a predictor of high school dropout.

Friedman, Glickman, and Utada (1985) showed that “a highly significant relationship was found between drug use and school failure” (p. 358). Approximately 25% of the K-12 population in the United States has alcoholic parents. These children are at-risk of developing dependency by the time they reach young adulthood. Statistically, approximately 50% of the children of alcoholics become alcoholics or chemically dependent themselves (Russian, 1992). Glynn (1981) wrote that the most powerful factor that influences initiation of drug use is the modeling of specific drugs, whether by parents, best friends or peers. Using a longitudinal design, Kandel, Kessler, and Marguilies (1979) have suggested the following stages of adolescent drug use: 1) use of a legal substance (cigarettes or alcohol), 2) use of marijuana, and 3) use of additional illicit drugs. A study by Mensch and Kandel (1988) explored the relationship between dropping out and substance use in a National Longitudinal survey of 19 to 27 year olds. High school dropouts used illegal drugs more than graduates. The researchers indicated that the early use of drugs had increased the likelihood of dropping out. They assert that “preventing or at least delaying the initiation of drug use will reduce the incidence of dropping out from nation’s high school” (p. 95). These findings posit the causal relationship from drug use to dropping out and do not view drug use as a consequence of dropping out.
Discussion of attendance and truancy.

Jay said that he stayed out of school to avoid both the fighting and the punishment from the school administrators. In a study of 250 inmates, Gavin (1996) found that 78% had truancy as the first entry on their arrest record. This is consistent with data that showed, in a recent survey of jail and prison inmates, 80 percent ages 18 through 25 failed to graduate from high school with a regular diploma (Sum, et. al., 2003). The three participants do not see their lack of attendance as indicative of their lack of motivation towards school.

Jay, Tim, and Vinnie have all become disconnected from their original family and are searching for a new connectedness, and unfortunately they do not feel that connection with their school. The National Invitational Conference on the Health Futures of Adolescents with support from the Maternal and Child Health Bureau commissioned a study called the Adolescent Health Database Project. A survey was administered to 60,000 adolescents nationally for the purpose of developing a comprehensive adolescent health database. The survey found that the importance of school connectedness as a protective factor against high-risk behaviors strengthens the argument that there must be closer collaboration between the health and education sectors. Caring and connectedness surpassed demographic variables, e.g., two parents vs. single parent families, as protective factors against high-risk behaviors. Connectedness is seen as a new concept in adolescent risk behavior. School connectedness is an adolescent’s experience of caring at school and a sense of closeness to school personnel and environment (Resnick, Harris & Blum, 1993). What could Jay’s school have done to create a sense of connectedness for a student who is now on the streets, trying to survive by selling dope and living with a
girlfriend, now expecting a child? What could Tim’s school have done when a student loses interest in school because his coach will not allow him to play because of his race? What could Vince’s school have done to create a better sense of connectedness for a student who has both parents at home; a mother who is working and going to school, but doesn’t have time for her children, and a dad addicted to marijuana and on the streets all of the time? Another study (Ennis, et. al., 1997) reported that student identification with school is positively related to attendance, preparedness for class, disciplined behavior, and attentiveness in class. Truancy, absenteeism, and eventual withdrawal from school have been found to be associated with a lack of belonging to school. At-risk students demonstrate behaviors that include low valuation of schoolwork, lack of participation, effort, motivation and expectations for success.

**Discussion of retention, suspension, and expulsion.**

Tim was the only participant who was not held back a grade, Jay was retained in the 6th grade and Vince was retained twice in the 10th grade. Jay was nonchalant about it. “So I had to repeat the sixth grade again, because they said I was not there and I did not learn anything, so I had to go back.” Vince never seemed to have a handle on what grade he was in, saying, “I was a junior with sophomore credits or I count it as my senior year, basically my third tenth grade year. It was just like the eleventh grade, I did not do anything.”

Shepard and Smith (1989) pointed out that no accurate national data exists on the number of students retained in a grade each year. Despite its salience as an educational issue, rates of retention and promotion are not consistently kept by government agencies (Shepard & Smith, 1989). Instead, retention rates must be inferred from the proportion of
pupils of a given age who are not in the appropriate grade; this statistic is referred to as modal age. Educators were concerned when they analyzed the data provided by the census bureau in 1982. At the age of 13, 23 percent of whites were enrolled below modal grade compared to 38 percent of blacks (Penna, 2002). A Rutgers University Center for Policy Research in Education Report (1990) published the following data on grade retention in America:

1. Five to seven percent of public school children; about two children of every of thirty-student classroom are retained annually;
2. The total number of students retained each year totals 2.4 million;
3. Nearly $10 billion is spent annually on retention in public schools at a cost of $4,051 per pupil;
4. By the ninth grade, approximately 50 percent of all students have been held at least one grade;
5. Dropouts are five times more likely to have repeated a grade than high school graduates;
6. Students who repeat one grade have a 35 percent probability of dropping out;
7. Students who repeat two or more grades have a probability of nearly 100 percent; and,
8. The percentage of overage retained students is higher for African American and Hispanic students than for whites. For male students, 29 percent for whites were retained as compared to 42 percent of African American and 39 for Hispanics (p. 17-18).

In a recent report from the National Center for Education Statistics on the percentage of public school students in kindergarten through 12th grade who had repeated a grade, 22.6 percent of black males had repeated a grade compared to 10.0 percent of white male students (NCES, 2007).

Critical Race Theorists say that the disparity between white and African American students’ retention rate is another example of institutionalized exclusionary racism, a form of resegregation (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).
Discussion of grades.

The participants’ second most coded responses were about grades in school. Their comments revolved around the fact that they could do better, but they just did not have a desire to apply themselves to get better grades. The participants in this study exhibit classic underachievement behavior which is also consistent with the literature on African American male students’ underachievement. There is evidence to suggest that African American students, boys in particular, have lower levels of identification with academics than other students (Osborne, 1995). Using data from the National Educational Longitudinal survey of 1988 (NCES, 1992), a large sampling representative of the U.S. student population, Osborne (1995, 1997) tested the assertion that students of color should show lower levels of identification (disidentification) with academics than do white students. He asserted instead that this gap is developmental and not a necessary state of existence for students of color. All eight grade students in Osborne’s study were significantly identified with academics (with correlations ranging from .22 to .27, p < .001). By the 10th grade, the correlations for African Americans had dropped dramatically and significantly to r = .07, while the other groups remained substantially the same. By twelfth grade, the correlations for African American boys had dropped to r = - .02, while the correlations for the other groups again remained significantly identified with academics. There is also evidence to suggest that this identification gap has not always existed. Osborne’s (1999) study of high school seniors from classes of 1972, 1982, and 1992 found that identification with academics decreased progressively among African American boys from 1972, when appreciable racial differences were not apparent, to 1992, when such differences were significant and substantial.
Jay, Tim, and Vinnie also had a gradual disidentification with school which was consistent with Osborne’s study. In the Osborne study, African American boys started to disidentify with school in the tenth grade, but in this study the participants started to run into trouble and started to disidentify or disengage around the sixth grade.

**Discussion of sports.**

Sports were the number one coded response with 31 responses, and those were just from Tim with 20, and Vinnie with 11. Jay did not bring up sports at all, whether at school or at home with friends. With Tim and Vinnie sports was their only motivation to go to school, including going back to adult school. Sports are a way for the participants to maintain an acceptable self-esteem and self-concept level, and this also is consistent with the literature on African American male students. “Self-concept refers to the complex of beliefs one has about oneself; one aspect of self-concept, usually called self-esteem, is the value or sense of worth one perceives about oneself” (Holland & Andre, 1987, p. 4).

Phillips (1969) investigated the relationship between participation and self-esteem in athletics, clubs, and music at a predominately (80%) black high school. For boys, across all activities, a significant positive relationship existed between extracurricular participation and self-esteem scores. Male first-string athletes had higher average self-esteem scores than second-string athletes and non-athletes. For many African American males, who make up 34% of college players, sports have added import. A survey by the Center for the Study of Sports in Society found that two-thirds of black males 13 to 18 years of age believe that they can earn a living playing professional sports (more than double the proportion of young whites). Sports have become the most realistic chance of social and economic mobility (Zirin, 2006). The statistics on the number of athletes who
survive the screening from high school to college to the pros is staggering. It is estimated that 700,000 boys play basketball in high school and over one million play football. At the varsity level at NCAA institutions these numbers are reduced to 15,000 in basketball and 4,100 in football (Underwood, 1980). In the NFL, about 320 college-draft choices come to camp each year; roughly 150 make it. About 4,000 players complete their college basketball careers each year; approximately 200 get drafted by NBA teams; around 50 actually make the team (Gaston, 1986).

The black male frequently finds himself lacking the skills necessary to propel himself into the flow of mainstream America. This isolation from American mainstream severely restricts the black male’s ability to develop in self-concept and in economic potential for success (Gaston, 1986). "The probability of one of the half-million high schoolers playing ball this year will land a professional contract is less than that of being struck by lightning (Barlow, 2004, p.64).” Well, do the math. Less than 1% of the half-million will get scholarships to Division I schools. Of those who do, only 1% will make it to the NBA. Add to that the fact that most of the half-million are in schools better them the ghetto schools. "The myth of upward mobility through basketball is a cancer on the black inner city. The cliché about basketball offering 'a ticket out of the ghetto'—through college scholarships and professional contracts—traps black boys into framing their lives around the sport while abandoning studies that would actually prepare them for reachable careers” (Barlow, 2004, p. 64).

Discussion of Family Dysfunction

The family became so dysfunctional that the participant had to leave his parents’ home. Parental drug use led each participant to find his own way without parental
guidance. Jay, Tim, and Vince each started with a full nuclear family, but events and circumstances caused the families to fall apart because they were unable to cope with family issues as a unit. When Jay’s father was sent to prison, his mother sent him to live with his grandmother, in a house that had friends and patrons coming and going at will. From that point on, Jay was on welfare, and stopped attending school regularly, which increased his disengagement from school.

We discussed in Chapter 2 that young adults from poor families whose income fell in the lowest 20% of all family incomes were six times more likely to become high school dropouts than their peers from families in the top 20% (United States Department of Commerce, 2000). All three participants were poor and had few positive role models.

Several studies have pointed to the lack of positive role models for young boys, especially among African Americans (Franklin, Boyd & Franklin, 2000; Spencer, Dornbusch, & Mont-Reynaud, 1990; Garbarino, 1993). The emergence of Mentoring and Rights of Passage Programs that provide these young men with role models and leaders is therefore crucial for African American development (Franklin, Boyd & Franklin, 2000; Watts & Jagers, 1997).

In Tim’s case the turning point came when his father, a police officer, was shot and killed in an on-duty incident. Tim’s mom turned to drugs, abandoned the children, and later went to prison. The parents and other family members seemed overwhelmed by the circumstances of their lives. Vince’s family has always been together, but is dysfunctional because of maternal neglect and because of a father addicted to marijuana who was seldom at home with his children.
Many African American children are able to construct a positive model of
education within their families; others come from families where no such models exist.

Barker and Hill (1996) suggest a mirroring link between a parent’s
dysfunctional behavior and the child’s response to dysfunctional behavior. The children’s perception, understanding and sense of self are a reflection of their parenting person and will mirror the parenting person’s
dysfunctional behavioral patterns. The parent’s own orientation to inadequate parenting, lack of nurture, structure, and enculturation is the root of his or her own dysfunctional behavior as a parent (p. 3).

Teachers, school counselors, assistant principals, and principals wonder why the participants are losing interest in school. In fact, the student is developing a coping strategy to survive the confusion of his life. Although Jay, Tim, and Vince each said that they would rather have stayed in school and graduated. What happened instead was that school officials viewed these three students, who are part of the 414,200 dropouts discussed in Chapter 2, as being disengaged from school. It is tough to think about homework when you do not know where you are going to eat or sleep at night. It is tough to get a good night’s sleep when your grandmother is running a house of prostitution in the next room all night long with people coming and going at all hours. More research needs to be done with African American males to find out what kind of living conditions are causing them to drop out of school. With more of their life stories, researchers can develop interventions to help parents.

I am not advocating an Orwellian society where children tell the state on their parents’ drug use and behavior, but these children need to be heard while there is time to help them become high school graduates and good citizens. At the other end of the spectrum is the school system, in which teachers are mainly White middle class women who, according to Critical Race Theorists, treat African American male students as
unruly and unmanageable rather than as children in need of nurturing and guidance (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). African American male students have to feel that they are wanted in the school system before they feel they are a part of the school system. This could be done with improved sensitivity/diversity training of teachers and administrators. From this data, it is safe to say that the participants did not feel a part of the school system.

**Discussion of Role of Peers**

The participants had friends who were not interested in school and who influenced Jay, Tim, and Vinnie to not do their homework or attend school. This is very consistent with the literature on African American peer pressure to not do well in school for fear of “acting white.”

Ogbu (1978) said in the case of black Americans we suggested that the disproportionately high rate of low school performance is a kind of adaptation to their limited social and economic opportunities in adult life. That is, the low school performance is an adaptive response to the requirements of cultural imperatives within their ecological structure (p. 178).

This problem arose partly because white Americans have traditionally refused to acknowledge that black Americans are capable of intellectual achievement, black Americans began to doubt their own intellectual ability and to see academic success as white people’s prerogative and to discourage their peers, perhaps unconsciously, from emulating white people in academic striving, i.e., from “acting white” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986, p. 177).

That ecological structure combines substandard schooling with a job ceiling, so that even those with excellent educational credentials were not necessarily given access to jobs, wages, and other benefits commensurate with their academic accomplishments (Hunter, 1980; Ogbu, 1974). Finally, the experience of slavery with its “compulsory ignorance,”
has meant that black Americans have been limited in their development of an academic tradition (Hunter 1980, Ogbu, 1974). This has created an oppositional collective or social identity and an oppositional cultural frame of reference (Fordham, 1981, 1982; Ogbu, 1980, 1981, 1984). The oppositional identity of black Americans evolves because they perceive and experience the treatment by whites as a collective and enduring oppression (Green, 1981).

The participants spoke of protecting their race from attack, whether verbal or physical. Fordham (1981, 1985) found that the concept of fictive kinship conveys the meaning of the oppositional collective and oppositional cultural frame of reference for black Americans. In anthropology, fictive kinship is a kinship-like relationship between persons not related by blood or marriage, who nevertheless have some reciprocal social or economic relationship. This sense of collective social identity of “peoplehood” is evident in the numerous kinship and pseudo kinship terms such as soul brother, soul sister, blood, members, (Folb, 1980; Liebow, 1967; Sargent, 1985; Stack, 1974). The participants’ fictive kinship with their peers and their oppositional collective attitudes create a climate in which to excel in school would be “acting white,” an act of treason against the “brothers.”

**Research Question # 2**

Was racial discrimination a factor in your dropping out?

**Discussion of Discrimination in School**

African American males in inner city schools are taught by predominantly White female middle class teaching staff which tends to live in the suburbs and to have been exposed to negative cultural messages about African American males. Part of the
problem is that there are not enough African American teachers in the public school systems. The number of African American teachers declined from 12% in 1970 to a low of 6.9% in 1999 (Gay, 2001). In 2000 there were 2,742,000 teachers in public schools within the United States. From this total 2,303,000 were White and 214,000 were African American. Additionally 2,042,000 public school teachers were female while the remaining 700,000 were male (United States Department of Education, 2003). What are the consequences for educators who are culturally out of sync with their students? This is of central significance to African American males given the fact that most teachers are White, female, and culturally Eurocentric, and their teacher preparation is grounded in a Eurocentric framework (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1999).

Before they can engage in an equitable, non-hostile educational experience, black males must contend with racism at all levels: individually, culturally, and institutionally (Lester, 2004). “The unfortunate positive association between low teacher expectations and low student outcomes has become a familiar pattern for African American youth” (Donelan, Neal, & Jones, 1994, p. 382). It is vital to recognize that when considering the population of African Americans, there are several contextual conditions, experiences, processes, and movements that may have interactive effects with the major set of variables being considered. For example, a major contextual condition is the historical and contemporary role of racism, at the individual, family, and community levels. Many members of this population feel compelled to disengage or disidentify with educational systems in response to their harsh, racially influenced treatment (Johnson, 1992). For generations, African Americans who worked to acquire academic success were nonetheless denied opportunities for career advancement; out of reach, these societal
inequities contributed to a lack of value in the education domain for African Americans (Ogbu, 1987). Inadequate preparation in unequal schools and continued racial prejudice have trapped more than a third of African Americans in a cycle of poverty with a quality of life comparable to Third World countries (Hopkins, 1997). The racism that African American males experience in schools and the societal barriers they face every day affect their ability to perform at high levels. They are aware of the barriers and recognize they are being treated unfairly because of their racial heritage. These cumulative experiences influence their perceptions of education and thus of academic achievement (Lester, 2004).

The participants described how they felt when they were discriminated against and treated unfairly as African American.

Tim’s stories of racism revolve around his being sent to a suburban school where there were few African American students or faculty. African American males are often forced to adapt to hostile educational environments. Many educational systems send a message to African American male students: We really do not want you here, but since you are here, you must leave your culture at the door, conform to our cultural modes of teaching and endure the racism (Lester, 2004). Even with these negative racial experiences at school each participant realized that they would need a diploma either to get a better job or to go on to college.
Research Question # 3

What motivated you to return to school to get a diploma or GED?

Discussion of Back-to-School Motivation

Jay said he was going back to get a better job, but at the time of this writing he has not completed his admissions application to school. Vince and Tim feel accepted on the playing field, but not in the classroom. Like many athletic African American males, their only motivation in returning to school was football. When I asked the participants what motivated them to go back to school to get their diploma or GED, none of them said that they missed the school environment, the students or the teachers. All of the participants hoped that the alternative school would be a better environment than their traditional high schools.

Public school officials, in an effort to meet certain student’s individual needs, developed the Alternative Education Program (AEP). AEPs provided different learning environments for students who were unsuccessful in traditional school settings. Alternative schools have been found to improve school performance, attitudes toward school, school attendance, and self-esteem, while decreasing delinquency (Gottfredson, Gottfredson & Hybl, 1990). Students who can benefit from an alternative education setting are those at-risk of dropping out of high school for behavioral reasons prior to high school graduation. Educational practitioners believe that successful schools for at-risk youth are those in which teachers are empowered to the degree that they have the confidence to overcome any and all students’ dysfunctions. Such teachers are certain they can successfully assist students in making academic progress. Many students in alternative schools must be in control of their own learning. The faculty and staff in these
schools are most effective when they understand that influence is preferable to control (Anderson & Darenwald, 1979). In fact, influence is synonymous with teaching, informing, and enlightening. When someone is controlled he or she may be restricted, punished, or regimented. The synonyms for influence are experiences usually considered pleasant. The practice of controlling another person may be unpleasant for both parties.

The students at an adult school are primarily voluntary learners. They enroll in courses to meet a need or to fill some gap in their lives; they are not mandated by law to attend. As a result, they withdraw from classes that do not meet their needs and expectations. Those programs which serve the undereducated adult population, that is, Adult Basic Education (ABE) and General Educational Development (GED), experience dropout rates that are four times greater than those of other adult education programs (Anderson & Darkenwald, 1979).

**Conclusion**

The three participants’ school experiences were not much different from my own in the 1950’s and 1960’s. My experiences included having to put up with students and sometimes teachers calling me names, including “nigger;” having to physically fight people for name calling or just to protect myself; and listening to teachers, school counselors, and principals tell me “You ain’t going to be shit” (that particular comment came from a black teacher). My experiences included racial slurs being hurled at me and teachers, school counselors, and principals telling me that I would not amount to anything. There is not one specific identifiable event of racism that is driving African American males away from high school, but years of racial inertia in an educational system that continuously tells them they are different, their culture is different, and they
are dangerous. African American male disengagement is a coping strategy to deal with societal and educational rejection. The reason Vince and Tim wanted to be successful in sports is because they feel accepted there. Fifty years ago, I did not think about becoming a businessman or a scholar because it was drummed into me that “you people” are good only for physical labor, not for any job that involves thinking. This leads African American males to think that they are deficient, and now society, scholars and the educational establishment are all aghast that African American males are not graduating at the same rate as White males. African Americans were in slavery until January 1, 1863 when Abraham Lincoln and William H. Seward, Secretary of State, issued the Emancipation Proclamation to free the slaves. It was only 142 years ago or a little over two African American male life spans of 68 years (United States Census Bureau, 2000) that African Americans were freed. Grandparents and great-grandparents have passed down the stories of oppression; not being allowed to vote; not being able to go to good, white schools; only being able to get menial work; children torn from the parents; mothers raped and fathers lynched if they protested too much. After the Emancipation Proclamation was passed, a white resistance group called the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) was established in Pulaski, Tennessee, in May, 1866. During the next two years Klansmen wearing masks, white cardboard hats and draped in white sheets, tortured black Americans and sympathetic whites (Kennedy, 1990). The main objective of the KKK was to maintain white supremacy in the South, which they felt, was under threat after their defeat in the Civil War. In 1930, Dr. Arthur Raper was commissioned to produce a report on lynching. He discovered that 3,724 people were lynched in the United States from 1889 through 1930. Over four-fifths of these were Negroes, less than one-sixth of
whom were accused of rape. Practically all of the lynchers were whites. The fact that a number of the victims were tortured, mutilated, dragged, or burned suggests the presence of sadistic tendencies among the lynchers. Of the tens of thousands of lynchers and onlookers, 49 were indicted and only 4 have been sentenced (Kennedy, 1990). In my own family, when I was a child my oldest brother told me about the lynching of one of our cousins because he looked at a white woman in Hazard, Kentucky. He was the last black lynched in Kentucky on January 24, 1934, his name was Rex Scott and he was just 20 years old (Lexington Herald-Leader, 2005).

Stories like these seem extreme, but they are what are embedded in the African American male psyche when he is trying to cope with everyday occurrences such as going to school. He is aware that although racism exists in a more subtle form, it does exist, and still is a barrier to his individual success and fulfillment. I have read the literature that states that African American males are an “endangered species” because of low graduation rates, high incarceration rates, high unemployment rates, and high murder rate. Granted the graduation rate for African American males is not on par with white males, but consider, even with all the handicaps, including the threat of death, from 1967, the first year that race and gender were disaggregated by the Census Bureau, the African American male dropout rate was 30.6 per cent. In 2007 the African American male dropout rate had improved to 8.0 percent; that was a 74 percent decrease in dropouts in just 40 years. That compares favorably with the white male who had a dropout rate of 14.7 percent in 1967, improved to 6 percent in 2007, for a 59 percent improvement (NCES, 2008). Keep in mind that the 1967 starting point is just 104 years after African American males were freed from slavery, about 30 years after lynching was outlawed, 14
years after Brown versus the Board of Education was to declare “separate but equal” segregation illegal. So, in 40 years (1967-2007) with all of the previously mentioned handicaps, African American males have better than halved their dropout rate. Even though the dropout rate is high compared to whites, each year incrementally more African American males are graduating than the previous year because of their coping strategies, which for graduates is not total disengagement, just enough to survive. There may be some glimmer of hope on the horizon, as the data show incremental improvement in the African American Male Dropout Rate from 2000, when it was 15.3%, to 2007, when it was 8% (NCES, 2008)

**Limitations of the Study**

There are several limitations presented by this study method that affect the generalizability of the results (Mishler, 1986):

1. Small purposive sample (N=3) of African American males is not generalizable to a larger population;
2. The case study method which allowed the participants to tell their story with past recollections of events is subject to potential biases and lie within the participants own subjectivity;
3. Participants were not able to supply any documents from their traditional schools because of moving frequently; and,
4. The personal school experiences of the researcher (p. 23-27).

The exploratory research design offers a way to gather information about how the participants define their identity as they transition into manhood where there is limited research. It also provides and confirms ways in which to capture the narrative experiences and realities of each participant answering questions and a new way to examine problems in a more in-depth way while unfolding new insights (Mishler, 1986). Although many
limitations are noted, according to the research on this type of research methodology they do not diminish the knowledge gained from this study (Mishler, 1986).

**Recommendations for Further Research**

In reviewing the literature, there is a real dearth of qualitative research of African American males and their stories of life experiences leading them to drop out of high school. There also needs to be more research into how institutionalized racism affects African American males’ view of the educational process. Lastly, more research is needed to find the effects of having African American teachers teach African American children.

**Implications for Policy**

Based on the knowledge gained from this study, policy makers could promote the following kinds of education-related initiatives to improve the African American males’ graduation rates:

- Create a mandatory teacher diversity and sensitivity program to promote better cultural understanding among mostly White female teachers.
- Develop a program to increase the number of African American teachers in schools across America, especially African American males. Look into creative ways to use retired African American college graduates and former teachers in at-risk schools.
- Create a district, state, and federal administrators office with responsibility for all dropouts in their respective jurisdictions.
- Develop and have state and federal authorities adopt a single workable definition of what constitutes a high school dropout to help standardize the data.

- Hire, at each at-risk school, a dropout counselor to keep track of potential dropouts, monitoring attendance, grades, family problems, school problems, and career opportunities.

- Offer, at-risk schools, Afrocentric cultural classes for students and teachers to improve students’ racial self-conception and also to make the teachers aware of this (and other) cultures.

- Create, in school districts with large concentrations of minorities, a central ombudsperson to handle complaints about racism in the schools; education is a service industry and should be held accountable for poor customer service, including bigotry.

These case studies have given a voice to three African American male dropouts who reentered the educational system. Their narratives tell their side of the story as to what life experiences motivated them to choose the paths that they have chosen, right or wrong. When you listen to their stories about family hardship or school discrimination, you might ask yourself "Would I have made better choices if it were me"? These were not statistics, these are living and breathing young men who want better lives, but because of circumstances and a lack of good, solid role models in their families they have made some decisions that led them to disengage from school; bad decisions that can be overcome with proper guidance and support to these participants on the road to future success.
Closing

Chapter 1 provided an overview of the study and discussed the researcher’s personal connection to it. Chapter 2 reviewed the literature related to the study. Chapter 3 delineated the study method. Chapter 4 documented the study findings. Finally, this chapter, Chapter 5, discussed the study in sum, draws conclusions, and offers recommendations.
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APPENDIX 1

SUPPLEMENTARY DATA
PARTICIPANT QUESTIONS

1. When you were a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?

2. When you were a child were your heroes the people that you looked up to?

3. What were your early school years like (i.e., classmates, teachers, sports, grades, problems, etc.)?

4. Describe your life at home with your family: father, mother, brother and sisters.

5. How many in your immediate family graduated from high school?

6. Which school experience did you enjoy the most: elementary, middle school, or high school? Why?

7. What was your parent’s involvement in your school experience? (i.e. helping you with homework, going to PTA meetings, going to parents night, going to school events, and parent-teacher conferences.)

8. What kind of student did you consider yourself? Explain.

9. In high school, did you feel that you were a part of the school? Why?

10. Who was your biggest support during your high school years?

11. Describe any problems you had in high school.

12. When did you first know that you were not going to graduate? Explain.

13. What motivated you to go back to school to get your diploma or GED?

14. Has dropping out of high school affected your ability to get a job?
PARTICIPANT COUNSELOR QUESTIONS

1. What information do you have about the student’s family life?

2. Can you describe the personality or specific characteristics of the student?

3. What information can you share about the student’s academic background?

4. Has there been any improvement in the process for the student since returning to school?

5. How would you gauge the student’s feelings about his race?

6. Does the student have a chip on his shoulder?

7. How would you gauge the student’s motivation, internal or external?

8. Why do you think the student dropped out of traditional high school?

9. What incidents has this student been involved in?

10. Do you consider this student conscientious and trustworthy?

11. Why do you think this student re-entered into the education system?

12. What is the student’s discipline in terms of attendance and tardiness?

13. Do you consider this student loyal to the school?
Table 1

Status dropout rates and number and distribution of dropouts of 16- through 24-year-olds, by background characteristics: October 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Status dropout rate (percent)</th>
<th>Number of status Dropouts (thousands)</th>
<th>Population (thousands)</th>
<th>Percent of all dropouts</th>
<th>Percent of population</th>
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<tr>
<td>Born outside the 50 states and District of Columbia</td>
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<td>6,133</td>
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<td>17.4</td>
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<td>12,527</td>
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<td>872</td>
<td>8,248</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>23.4</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

^{1} Due to small sample sizes, American Indians/Alaska Natives are included in the total but are not shown separately.

^{2} Individuals defined as “first generation” were born in the 50 states or the District of Columbia, and one or both of their parents were born outside the 50 states or the District of Columbia.

^{3} Individuals defined as “second generation or more” were born in the 50 states or the District of Columbia, as were both of their parents.

NOTE: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

Table 2A

Status completion rates, and number and distribution of completers ages 18-24 not currently enrolled in high school or below, by selected background characteristics: October 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Completion rate</th>
<th>Population (thousands)</th>
<th>Number of completers (thousands)</th>
<th>Percent of all completers</th>
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</thead>
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<td>25,543</td>
<td>22,084</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>84.6</td>
<td>12,556</td>
<td>10,617</td>
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<td>12,988</td>
<td>11,467</td>
<td>51.9</td>
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<td>91.0</td>
<td>16,677</td>
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<tr>
<td>18-19</td>
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<td>6,802</td>
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<td>22-24</td>
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<td><strong>Recency of immigration</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Born outside the 50 states and District of Columbia</td>
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<td>7,598</td>
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<td>6,113</td>
<td>5,318</td>
<td>24.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4 Due to small sample size, American Indians/Alaska Natives are included in the total but are not shown separately.
5 Individuals defined as “first generation” were born in the 50 states of the District of Columbia, and one or both of their parents were born outside the 50 states or the District of Columbia. Individuals defined as “second generation or more” were born in the 50 states or the District of Columbia, as were both of their parents.
Table 2B

*Status dropout rates of 16-through 24-year olds, by race/ethnicity: October 1972 through October 2001.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total (percent)</th>
<th>White, non-Hispanic</th>
<th>Black, non-Hispanic</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>1972</td>
<td>14.6</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>22.2</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>21.2</td>
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</tr>
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<td>1975</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>29.2</td>
</tr>
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<td>1976</td>
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<td>12.0</td>
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<td>31.4</td>
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<td>1977</td>
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<td>19.1</td>
<td>35.2</td>
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<td>33.2</td>
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</table>

*Race/ethnicity (percent)*

NOTE: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding (for 2A and 2B).

Table 3

Event dropout rates of 15-through 24-year olds who dropped out of grades 10-12, by family income: October 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event dropout Rate(%)</th>
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<th>High income</th>
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<td>1974</td>
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<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>5.8</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>2.2</td>
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<td>1978</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>1.8</td>
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<td>13.9</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>1.8</td>
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<td>1985</td>
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<td>1986</td>
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<td>1.6</td>
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<tr>
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<td>10.3</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
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<td>4.7</td>
<td>1.3</td>
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<td>4.5</td>
<td>10.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>1990</td>
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<td>9.5</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: “Low income” is defined as the bottom 20 percent of all incomes for the year; “middle income” is between 20 and 80 percent of all family incomes; and “high income” is the top 20 percent of all family incomes.

### Table 4

*Rate, number, and distribution of status dropouts, ages 16-24, by sex, race-ethnicity, income, and region: October 1995*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Status dropout rate</th>
<th>Status dropouts (in thousands)</th>
<th>Number of Population (in thousands)</th>
<th>Percent of all dropouts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>3,876</td>
<td>32,379</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>1,978</td>
<td>16,208</td>
<td>51.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>1,898</td>
<td>16,170</td>
<td>49.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race-ethnicity</strong>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White, non Hispanic</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>1,887</td>
<td>21,991</td>
<td>48.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black, non-Hispanic</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>571</td>
<td>4,732</td>
<td>14.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>1,345</td>
<td>4,485</td>
<td>34.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family income</strong>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low income level</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>1,558</td>
<td>6,726</td>
<td>40.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle income level</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>2,108</td>
<td>18,365</td>
<td>54.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High income level</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>7,287</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Region</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>498</td>
<td>5,935</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>680</td>
<td>7,686</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>1,657</td>
<td>11,638</td>
<td>42.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>1,040</td>
<td>7,120</td>
<td>26.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

6. Due to relatively small sample sizes, American Indian/Alaskan Natives and Asian Pacific Islanders are included in the total but are not shown separately.

7. Low income is defined as the bottom 20 percent of all family incomes for 1994; middle income is between 20 and 80 percent of all family incomes; and high income is the top 20 percent of all family incomes.

NOTE: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

### Table 5

*Lifetime Costs of Dropping Out of High School (1997 Dollars)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total costs</th>
<th>Present value (2% discount rate)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lost wage productivity</td>
<td>$300,000</td>
<td>$155,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fringe benefits</td>
<td>$75,000</td>
<td>$39,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonmarket losses</td>
<td>$95,000-$375,000</td>
<td>$49,000-$194,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>$470,000-$750,000</td>
<td>$243,000-$388,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: Numbers may not add due to rounding.

Table 6

*Lifetime Costs of a Career Criminal 1997 (Dollars)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cost Category</th>
<th>Total costs</th>
<th>Present value (2% discount rate)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Juvenile career</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim costs</td>
<td>$62,000-$250,000</td>
<td>$60,000-$244,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal justice-related</td>
<td>$21,000-$84,000</td>
<td>$20,000-$82,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtotal Juvenile Career</td>
<td>$83,000-$335,000</td>
<td>$80,000-$325,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adult career</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim costs</td>
<td>$1,000,000</td>
<td>$850,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal justice-related</td>
<td>$335,000</td>
<td>$283,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offender Productivity</td>
<td>$64,000</td>
<td>$54,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtotal Adult Career</td>
<td>$1,400,000</td>
<td>$1,200,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>$1.5-$1.8 million</td>
<td>$1.3-$1.5 million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: Numbers may not add due to rounding.

Table 7

*Estimated Numbers and Educational Characteristics of Young Adults (Under 25) in Jails, Prisons, the Armed Services, and Among the Homeless Population, U.S. Selected Years*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>(A) Number of Young Adults Under 25</th>
<th>(B) Number with No Regular High School Diploma</th>
<th>(C) Percent with No Regular Diploma</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local jail, state and federal prison inmates</td>
<td>372,665</td>
<td>298,700</td>
<td>80.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity Duty</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military Personnel 2001</td>
<td>589,000</td>
<td>46,530</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeless population 1996 survey (typical week estimate)</td>
<td>101,040</td>
<td>45,470</td>
<td>45.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above Three Groups</td>
<td>1,062,700</td>
<td>390,700</td>
<td>36.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8 This ratio represents the share of all active duty military personnel who lacked regular high school diploma in 2001.
9 The ratio is based on the entire population of homeless with an assumption that one-fifth of those with a diploma or its equivalent have GED.

**Table 8**

*Lifetime Costs of Heavy Drug User (1997 Dollars)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cost Category</th>
<th>Total Cost</th>
<th>Present Value (2% discount value)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Resources devoted to drug market</td>
<td>$84,000-$168,000</td>
<td>$63,200-$126,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug treatment cost</td>
<td>$10,200</td>
<td>$7,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduced productivity</td>
<td>$27,600</td>
<td>$17,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical costs</td>
<td>$11,000</td>
<td>$8,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Premature death</td>
<td>$31,800-$480,000</td>
<td>$24,000-$173,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug-defined crime (criminal justice cost)</td>
<td>$40,500</td>
<td>$29,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtotal</td>
<td>$200,000-$781,000</td>
<td>$150,000-$360,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional crime (e.g., robbery, assault, murder)</td>
<td>$283,000-$781,000</td>
<td>$220,000-$606,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>$483,000-$1,260,000</td>
<td>$370,000-$970,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

*Numbers may not add due to rounding*

*See text. Although this appears to be small, a good portion of productivity losses may be accounted for in the “drug purchases” category. This is also likely an underestimate, as it is an average over all drug users, not just heavy users. Third party costs such as crack babies and child abuse or neglect are excluded due to lack of data.*


### Table 9

**Discriminant analysis coefficients by race/ethnicity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>White</th>
<th></th>
<th>Black</th>
<th></th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F1</td>
<td>F2</td>
<td>F1</td>
<td>F2</td>
<td>F1</td>
<td>F2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEX</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>-12</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEX/Q</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEST/Q</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>-.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRADES</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>-.21</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>-.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S/ESTEEM</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.00</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOC/CONTROL</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-.17</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOURS/WRKD</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>-.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRUANCY</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>-.17</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>-.55</td>
<td>-.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LATE</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.41</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUB/FEELS</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.16</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTHERS/C/ME</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACDM/INSTR</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REPUT/COM</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>-.24</td>
<td>-.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCHL/CLIM</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.14</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>-.26</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCHL/PROBS</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTR/SCHL</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.16</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DISCIPLINE</td>
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<td>.48</td>
<td>-.14</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>-.19</td>
<td>-.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAW/PROBS</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>-.18</td>
<td>-.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXP/SCHL/ATN</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>-.70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Group Centroids**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 (Dropouts)</th>
<th>2 (Stay-ins)</th>
<th>3 (College-bound)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-1.47</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>1.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-.58</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>-.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-1.28</td>
<td>-.39</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>-.35</td>
<td>.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-1.21</td>
<td>-.24</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>-.24</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Classified Results**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Predicted Group</th>
<th>Predicted Group</th>
<th>Predicted Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actual Groups</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 (Dropouts)</td>
<td>83%*</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 (Stay-ins)</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>61%*</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 (College-bound)</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>81%*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Overall Correct:**

|               | 70% | 68% | 67% |

**Note:** *Percent of accurate predictions for each group.

Table 10

Theme Creation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Jay</th>
<th>Tim</th>
<th>Vince</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary success</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dysfunctional family</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug use</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selling drugs</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black coaches</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White coaches</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle school difficulty</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peers (friends)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school problems</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad (“ghetto”) schools</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselors out to get me</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discrimination in school **</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retention in school ***</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence in School</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance/ditching</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alienation *</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial comments **</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspension/expulsion ***</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequent moving</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Back to school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grades</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jail</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be a star</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
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Figure 1

Status dropout rates of 16 through 24 year olds, by race/ethnicity: October 1972 through October 2001

Figure 2

Status completion rates of 18 through 24 year olds not currently enrolled in high school or below, by race/ethnicity: October 1972 through October 2001

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* Status completion rates represent the percentage of 18 through 24 year olds who are not enrolled in school and have not completed high school by earning a diploma or obtaining a high school equivalency certificate.

**Figure 3**

*Event dropout rates of 15 through 24 year olds who dropped out of grades 10-12, by family income: October 1972-2001*

**NOTE:** The numerator of the event dropout rate for 2001 is the number of the people ages 15-24 surveyed in 2001 who were enrolled in high school in October 2000, were not enrolled in October 2001, and had not completed high school by October 2001. The denominator of the event rate is the sum of dropouts (i.e., the numerator) plus the number of all people age 15-24 who attended grades 10-12 in 2000 and were still enrolled in 2001 or had graduated or earned a high school credential.

Figure 4

Percentages of young adults aged 18 to 24 years of age reporting past month cigarette use, by race/ethnicity and school enrollment category: 2002

NOTE: Rates for Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islanders were excluded from all racial/ethnic comparisons due to small sample sizes.

SOURCE: U. S. Department of Health & Human Services, Substance Abuse & Mental Health Service Administration, Office of Applied Studies.
Figure 5

Percentage of young adults aged 18 to 24 reporting past month alcohol use, by race/ethnicity and school enrollment category: 2001

NOTE: Binge alcohol use is defined as drinking five or more drinks on the same occasion (i.e., at the same time or within a couple of hours of each other) on at least 1 day in the past 30 days. Heavy alcohol use is defined as drinking five or more drinks on the same occasion on 5 or more days in the past 30 days; all heavy alcohol users are also binge alcohol users.

SOURCE: U. S Department of Health & Human Services, Substance Abuse, Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration, Office of Applied Studies
Figure 6

Percentages of young adults 18 to 24 year olds reporting past illicit drug use, by race/ethnicity and school enrollment category: 2002

NOTE: Rates for Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islanders were excluded from all racial/ethnic comparison due to small sample sizes.

**Figure 7**

*African American male interview data analysis*

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INTERVIEWS

Note: What follows are verbatim transcriptions of oral interviews with the study participants and participant counselor. *Only* the names of the participants, the school through which the interviews were conducted, and that school’s personnel have been replaced with pseudonyms.
Tim’s First Interview

Bob: Today is September 19th, 2006

Bob: Where are you from originally?

Tim: Kansas City, Missouri.

Bob: Kansas City, Missouri, ok. And how old are you?

Tim: I’m 19.

Bob: So uh, tell me how you ended up coming to Las Vegas.

Tim: My grandparents just moved out here. I was at home and I was about to go for my senior year at *unintelligible* High School. I got into with somebody at football practice and I got expelled. I didn’t want to go to the city schools, so my grandparents told me to come out here and try to play football.

Bob: Ok. When you were a kid, we’re talking ten years or younger, what did you want to do when you grew up?

Tim: Same thing I do now, NFL rookie.

Bob: Ok, talk to me about it. Who are your heroes?

Tim: My father, my uncles, Marcus Allen, Barry Sanders, right now Clinton Portis, LeBron James, different people that have made it. My cousin Tyrone Lue, he play for the Atlanta Hawks, just different, anybody that had it hard but still made it.

Bob: So you got it in your family?

Tim: Yeah kinda.

Bob: Any other sports that you were interested in? Did you play any other sports?

Tim: I played soccer, in the beginning. And then I played basketball, but then I started focusing on football when I started getting looked at by colleges.

Bob: Oh ok.

Tim: Basketball is just fun, I played basketball for fun, I didn’t really play it to go to college or anything. I’ll do what they want me to, but I don’t want to go have to kill myself.
Bob: You aren’t as dedicated to basketball as you are to football. In football you consider yourself dedicated, that you’re going to be the best.

Tim: Very [dedicated]. Yes.

Bob: What other kind of heroes do you have in your life, you know other than sports? Who are the other people you look up to?

Tim: My father, my grandpa, my grandma, my older brother, my little sister, just different people. Family members, Martin Luther King, *just really them*.

Bob: You keep going back to your Dad, which is good, so what does he do?

Tim: My father passed away when I was ten, he was a cop.

Bob: Oh he was?

Tim: I guess you really can’t say he was in the wrong place at the wrong time because he was a cop. But he was in gunfire, he got shot and killed.

Bob: God bless his soul. I got, I got cops in my family too and they’ve been in shootouts.

Tim: Yes sir. I remember it like it was yesterday, I remember how the incident went and everything.

Bob: So now your mom ended up raising you…

Tim: My momma left, my mom was just…as soon as, I mean I still love her to death but as soon as he passed away, she went and left.

Bob: Oh really?

Tim: Yeah. And she started doing drugs and now she’s in jail, down in Houston. So I’ve been living with my uncle and auntie since I was twelve. *Me and my best friend*. My uncle’s kind of rough, but it’s for a good cause.

Bob: When you say kind of rough, what do you mean?

Tim: He ain’t never happy...

Bob: Huh?

Tim: He ain’t never happy.

Bob: I got family like that.
Tim: *Only* time we kept him happy when you do something good on the field. He likes football too. He blew out his knee back in the 70’s, played for Oklahoma State, and after that he was just nasty. He tried to for me and my little brother.

Bob: But that’s good, that’s a good thing. Ok, that’s a good thing. So we talked about the heroes. So here’s the thing we need to get started on. So in school, elementary school, kindergarten through the 5th grade. How did it go for you?

Tim: Rough. We lived in the ghetto, and it was just like, we had to be home at a certain time. Or you was going to get, a lot of drug dealers and everything, we had to be home at a certain time. I played sports, I went to practice and stuff. I *couldn’t run around?*, I *didn’t?* have time for homework, we had chores. That’s when everybody was together, like the whole family. And we lived in the city. It was alright, I liked it, it was fun. But, it was like after school.

Bob: Ok, so now you were going to school in Kansas City. What was that elementary school called?

Tim: Thomas Edwards

Bob: Ok, Thomas Edwards Elementary School.

Tim: And I went to *Ingools*.

Bob: So what were your grades like?

Tim: In kindergarten, you know we had like 1, 2, 3, 4. I was average.

Bob: Ok and then, first, second, third, fourth.

Tim: Average. I never had to go like no speech...I had to go to speech, I had like a; I had an accent, they tried to beat it out of me.

Bob: You said they tried to beat an accent out of you? Time takes care of that. So you were never a good student or a bad student?

Tim: I was always a class clown. I was always being funny. I would want to be a comedian, but then that’s too much work.

Bob: Ok. What made you want to be the class clown?

Tim: My brother. My brother was hilarious. And everybody loves a class clown. ‘Cause I used to be shy, I mean like *I would wear one of my brother’s rings or my sister’s ring*, so that’s how that started.
Bob: Did it make you feel better?
Tim: It made people laugh.

Bob: Did it make you popular?
Tim: Yeah.

Bob: Ok.

Tim: As the older I got, the worse it got. Like, *why didn’t I shut up*?

Bob: So how did that go over with the teachers?

Tim: Some of them like, younger crowd were cool, but then like the older crowd they didn’t like it. Every now and then they’d laugh. And then they’d tell me to be quiet and I wouldn’t and I would go to the office. Every now and then. I didn’t get in trouble, they’ll say in the office: “stay here for a couple of minutes,” just chill out, drink some water.

Bob: So, do you think that held you back at all? They didn’t take it as being mean spirited at all, they just took it as you needing attention?

Tim: Well, the older crowd did, not the young crowd. Like, older women, older men, they’re trying to get back at me. Like you 10, and you and the other kids are gonna learn, I was just like: we’re laughing. I was ten, it wasn’t like I was *twelve years old or nothing* like I got to hit a learning center. So I had, you know, I’d say a couple of jokes every now and then. Especially with subs, like I used to go at it with subs.

Bob: I mean we all did, I mean to be honest with you, we didn’t know them and they didn’t know us.

Tim: And then we’d go at it and then you get the report. And they would tell me to go to the office. *I did this for a year and a half* and they told me I wouldn’t get recess, and I played sports, so that was a biggie.

Bob: So now, during this period of elementary school is when the whole family was together.

Tim: Yes.

Bob: So describe that for me, what was it like at that point. How many brothers and sisters do you have?

Tim: I have two brothers and two sisters.
Bob: Ok, so we were all at home, dad was still living mom was good, before anything happened to her.

Tim: Yeah, she was home.

Bob: Talk to me about those years.

Tim: It was wonderful, everybody was together, me and my brothers were always together. The girls were always together. We all had, like, our own things. We all had hair, my brothers had braids, I had braids. Twisties. My momma and daddy, they had dreads. So, that’s how that went. And everybody was they own individual. My brothers, all of us were the same, like, we all had the same clothes. Like, different colors. We were always together like, nobody could split us apart. The little one, you know, he’s the youngest. So, the little one, he was bored, so he wasn’t one to be alone hanging out with his little friends. We was always together. Especially, with my older brother, I was always with my older brother because I learned everything I know now because of him. So.

Bob: What are the ages of the kids?

Tim: My oldest brother is twenty one, the little one is sixteen, the oldest girl is twenty-three. And the youngest girl’s today’s her birthday, she just turned fifteen.

Bob: Oh, God bless her. Happy birthday for her. Alright. So now, did mom and dad go to school open houses, PTA meetings?

Tim: Yeah, they went to everything. My momma did, my dad didn’t get into that or he was more of an individual. He was a roofer. A roofer and a cop so…every now and then he would go.

Bob: Did they get involved with helping with homework and that kind of stuff?

Tim: My momma did. That was her job. And then my dad would like, she would get mad at us, and then my dad would like, come in and yell at us. So that’s how that happened. We always had our homework done.

Bob: So she’d check it line by line.

Tim: Oh yeah, she’d check it. She was a teacher, and she got off work around...

Bob: Oh your mom was a teacher?

Tim: Yeah so, after she got off work she would come with us, get done with her little homework and then she’d look at ours.
Bob: Oh man. All day at school and then you come home to that.

Tim: All day, then she came home and yeah. She was a high school teacher, you know so. She didn't have that much work, but...When she had the work done she would come to us like: “Let me see your homework.” I was like: “I ain’t had none,” she’ll say “I’ll call them right now, “

Bob: Ok so, good home life, at what age, I know its painful, but at what age did your dad pass away? How old were you?

Tim: I think I was eleven. I was about in the fifth grade.

Bob: Ok so your in the fifth grade. So how did that affect you?

Tim: At first I didn’t believe it. When he got shot, I remember when he got shot, I remember it like it was yesterday. We all just got back from basketball practice, and my mom was just sitting in the living room like dazed. I was like “What’s wrong with her?” She must have had a bad day at school so, we went upstairs. And then my aunties come in the house and she’s screaming and my momma come in the house screaming. So we were like: “What’s wrong with y’all?” So they tell us, my momma knew already. And so, then my older brother and my older sister, they was crying. They came to my room, came in my brother’s room, and they was crying. I had never seen my brother cry. I was like: “Ok”. My daddy wasn’t home, they were like, well daddy got shot. I was like: “Well he’s a cop, he’s got a bulletproof vest or something.” We went to the hospital, I remember he was laying in the bed. Nothing was wrong, he was just chillin’, he drank his little apple juice, he was just chillin’. And then I just talked to him for a second, he lived for about two days until he passed away. Then I was at school, and for the first time I got called to the office, I was like “Oh man, what have I been doing?” And it’s like, the principal was there, my whole family was in the office, with my Aunt. So my little brothers and my little sisters were there, I had to come to the office, my little sister was the first one there, she was bawling. And so I’m like “Oh man,” and then my momma was there to pick us up, well not my mom, my auntie, and I was just like... I was the only one not crying. Ricky was in junior high then, my sister was in high school, and they was just crying, I was the only one really who didn’t cry. Because I was just like, I didn’t believe it. I was like: “This is a joke.” My daddy’s not dead, my dad is probably sleep right now. It hit me at the funeral, that’s when it hit me that he wasn’t coming back. That hurt a lot.

Bob: So how did that affect your schooling?

Tim: Everything. I didn’t want to do nothing. For about a year, I didn’t want to do nothing. My momma wasn’t checking my homework, we moved out. We wasn’t in the city...South Kansas City, it’s kind of like the city. But, I was ready to get out of Missouri but everything we drove past reminded me of my daddy. And I didn’t want to even live there, so about when I hit junior high. That’s when my momma just went off, she just blew
up; had a nervous breakdown. So then she just, left. Like, not even saying goodbye, just left.

Bob: She just left the kids?

Tim: Just left all of us, just walked out the door. I guess she called her sister, my auntie and said: “Well, I’m not coming back I can’t take this, so…” I remember, we was at the house by ourselves, and then I remember, my aunts took care of everything, I remember.

Bob: So the aunt, is that your dad’s sister or your mom’s sister?

Tim: My mom’s sister.

Bob: You were already close, everybody was already close. So she just literally had to step in where your mom was.

Tim: Yeah she did. She was young, she was real young. Like, just got out of college. She was young. She was working at a radio station, the first hip-hop radio station, she’d just got married, and so she was just... I can’t believe she just took us in, she took all four of us in. My sister was a senior then; she was just about to graduate. So they was like, they want to see her file. She didn’t do nothing, she played basketball, she ran track so she was always at practice. So she never came home. My brother had just started high school, he was playing football and basketball, and he never came home. So it was really just me, Dominique and Shania, so became real close.


Tim: I was in junior high, I played for an hour after school and then I would walk home and he was in the seventh grade, he a year younger than me sounds like his his brother’s name? but he was a grade younger than me. So that just, we was always together. I didn’t want nobody to mess with him. Same with Shania, my baby sister, I started calling her “baby”. So, we just band together. So that’s how that happened. When she left it was, I mean, it took a toll, like you know. Nobody checked our homework. It was like vacation really. At first, nobody was checking our homework, I didn’t really do my homework ‘till the day I started seventh grade.

Bob: When your mom left, did you guys know where she went to?

Tim: They told us two months later; “Your mom’s in Houston.” She had a brother down there, my uncle. He just got out of prison. So, I’m like: “Ok, that’s not really a good fit for her.”

Bob: Mmmm, no doesn’t sound like it.
Tim: So my aunt came home, and right about my sophomore year, she got put in prison. For ten years, I think she’s got five left or whatever.

Bob: Oh, and she’s a teacher. Oh my God. Ok so now, you’re in elementary school, we’re going to get back to elementary school. So now it’s real tough, this happened in the fifth grade. Then what was the sixth grade going forward like?

Tim: My mom was like a zombie. The only time she said “I love you” was Christmas and Thanksgiving. And then like, I talk a bit more like my dad, I’m the middle child, basically. She always came to me and was like: “You look like your daddy.” And when I got in trouble, she would be like: “You act just like your daddy.” And would start crying when she said that. She was like: “Tim, I’ve never seen you cry,” well you keep saying daddy. I’m trying to for—I’m not trying to forget about him, but I’m trying you know. And so that was kind of rough. Sixth grade, I guess that was kind of the best year. ‘Cause that’s when I had, I met my fab five; I had a whole bunch of friends. That’s when I like, split apart from my brothers. And I had my own little group. That’s when we were still in the city. Elementary, sixth grade was fun, that was the year. I broke away from the house, I would spend the night at my friend’s house all the time. That’s when we all broke loose, we all had our own friends. Every now and then I had to take Domonique with me, I was told like “take Shania with you.” You know, all that crap. Every now and then, when I couldn’t spend the night at my friend’s house. Then my brother would be like, muttered “Ricky take Tim and Domonique with you.” So it was always us three.

Bob: Keep going. What was school like? What were your grades like?

Tim: They were slipping. They were below average.

Bob: They were below “C”.

Tim: It would be always barely passing.

Bob: And were you going to school, were you ditching?

Tim: I wasn’t ditching. I was going everyday, I was just being myself just being a comedian. I couldn’t believe it, I was out of elementary. I was living in the ghetto. That’s when the ghetto was cool. I was like, I live in the ghetto, this is tight, a whole bunch of black people together. It was fun then, so then different stuff happened all the time. That’s when we was skatin’, stealing and stuff like that. So then, we transferred to seventh grade, that was a big change. I moved in the seventh grade, I moved to the suburbs. My auntie, her job was doing cool and her husband was doing cool. Jump to the suburbs. Now that was a big transition, because I’m used to being with my friends all the time in the city. And now there were all these white people. I [had] never been called the “N” word before, I mean you know how brothers we like to say that. Got called the “N” word, I was just like, I didn’t know what to do, I was just like...
Bob: Are you for real?

Tim: I didn’t do nothing. My brother’s like: “don’t let that happen to me. I’ll come all the way out there, and my sister just graduated high school. But I was a sophomore. We all just moved out there. It was like, a big house, we had never lived in a house. It was a house so we all had rooms. Well, not all of us, me and Domonique shared a room, and my brother and my sister shared a room. The girls had a room, the boys had a room. But it was weird because we was in the suburbs. We was always in the house, routinely we would shoot out to the city. My brother had a car.

Bob: What was the name of the school that you went to?

Tim: Elementary school?

Bob: Well now you’re in...

Tim: ...junior high? Bernard Campbell Junior High.

Bob: What is it?

Tim: Bernard Campbell Junior High.

Bob: So that was, it was not that bad. Except for the fact that they were always calling you nigger.

Tim: It wasn’t all bad, sometimes I had fun.

Bob: Now are we talking about students, or are we talking about administrators.

Tim: White kid. I wasn’t used to seeing this many white people. I mean it was like, a couple of black people there. So then I made my other friends, all of the black people stuck together. We had our own little fun.

Bob: Did you get into any fights because of people?

Tim: Yes.

Bob: What was that like?

Tim: I never had to fight for nothing like that. I always had to fight for my brother, or because somebody said something to me. And the guy I was fighting, he didn’t know who I was. I’ve never had to fight for something like that. I’ve never had to fight for my race, basically. And that was just different. So I got real angry, and that’s when I started getting detentions and that was the beginning of detentions. Every now and then, even in
high school that happened. Came from mid-town moved to the suburbs, and kids be like, "Shut up, ‘n-word’" and then I’d be like, “Alright, it’s time to fight.”

Bob: So when you’re fighting, did you try to beat him to a pulp, or beat him ‘till where he knew he had a whooping.

Tim: I tried to beat him until he couldn’t breathe. Usually until somebody stop me. I’m not about to just stop... I want him to know to never say that again in my life.

Bob: Wouldn’t he look at your size and tell him that wasn’t a good idea?

Tim: Sometimes they’d be bigger than me.

Bob: Really?

Tim: There were some big white boys out there. Sometimes they’d be bigger than me, it took a lot out of me. I’ve done got beat up before by a white boy. And then I’d get my brother.

Bob: Actually, Tim, that’s the old fashioned way. That’s the way it should be, no guns no knives. Because that’s the way I grew up, just like what your talking about. If things were like that then we’d have a lot more kids around than getting shot on the streets. So now, they’re calling you out. Did I ask you what your grades were like up there?

Tim: They was alright. It was a lot harder because now you’re getting A’s, B’s and C’s. Now, they not on you like they was in elementary. I was at average in junior high, because I played football, and I had to keep my grades up. And my coach, he wasn’t like the coach at the ghetto school or Pop Warner because he didn’t care what your grades was. He just cared when the next fish fry was. This guy was like, I remember his name was coach Long, he was on it. So I had and B’s and stuff in the eight grade.

Bob: No you didn’t.

Tim: I had B’s.

Bob: You had B’s!

Tim: I had nothing else to do, I mean, I was always in the library with him, he was my best friend.

Bob: So he helped you out huh? Did they keep up with him.

Tim: No, I switched schools and everything and went back to the ghetto. We moved back for about a year, and then we came back to the suburbs. So it was like a moving process, back and forth, back and forth, so then the last time was the last time. I went back to the
ghetto school, my grades was above average. I had A’s I ain’t gon’ lie. The suburbs schools were way better than the ghetto schools. I’m learning stuff in eighth grade that they learned in sixth grade. The stuff I learned in eighth grade when I played football, we was real good in football, and so the white kids wasn’t. I good in football, but when we sitting there learning and I’m like: “I learned this last year.” So I knew it, but I wasn’t going to say nothing.

Bob: It’s like a gift.

Tim: So I got A’s in that year. So then that year, that’s when stuff used to happen, like you got A’s you can do anything you want; that’s what my auntie said. And that’s how we all was. My brother went to a ghetto school his junior year, he got A’s. Had a 3.0 average GPA, he was getting looked at from schools, ‘cause he goes to a ghetto school. And when we went back, that killed us. Cause his senior year that killed him, ‘cause he ended up getting like a 2.8. And it killed me because I was going to freshman year of high school. I’ve been doing stuff I was doing in the seventh grade, and then going back to high school. In the suburbs, that killed me. So my first year wasn’t that good. The first year I didn’t play football because then I played soccer.

Bob: Because you couldn’t keep your grades up.

Tim: Yeah. The soccer coach didn’t care, kept me in shape and I got faster. And then I started noticing racism, I started noticing in high school.

Bob: In what way?

Tim: They wouldn’t play me.

Bob: They wouldn’t play you?

Tim: And I was one of the best out there.

Bob: Football?

Tim: No. Basketball or soccer, or track. They wouldn’t run me, they wouldn’t do nothing.

Bob: Now this is in Kansas City?

Tim: This is in the suburbs. Cause my freshman year was the suburbs. Eighth grade was the ghetto, then ninth grade; after that was straight suburbs.

Bob: So now what’s this school called?

Tim: Lee’s Summit High School.
Bob: They wouldn’t play you? What did you talk to the coach about?

Tim: I couldn’t even talk to him. I mean, he wasn’t – the freshman coach was racist. I mean, it was four of us. If your daddy owned a bar or a local woodshop. You could run a 5.9 in the 40, you’ll play running back. You could be 400 pounds you’ll play quarterback. It didn’t matter. If the coach was cool with your father, you were cool with the coach you gon’ play. And I wasn’t cool with the coach, I didn’t even know him. So I played 3rd quarter, but I would score a goal in soccer. But I didn’t play football, because I knew what was going to happen “You don’t know how to play football, play something else.” The way it was then either you played a sport or you worked. So I played any sport I could play. So that’s where I came around and it’s the same thing, I didn’t believe it. They looked at me in eighth grade, and I’m in freshman B, I played ABAA in the ghetto school and we was good, we beat the suburb school. So I’m thinking I’ll play at least sophomore or JV, I’m in freshman B and I’m ballin’. I didn’t want to talk to nobody about it. My uncle did, and they was like “His grades is bad.” It’s been two weeks, we ain’t got our grades yet, so that tripped me out. That’s when I wanted to drop out, I wanted to go back to the ghetto school. I wanted to go back so bad. And then I kind of lost faith, I stopped going to church. That’s when I started getting my permit, and I started working. So during track season I didn’t run. I ditched a lot. My freshman year was probably my worst year. That’s what got me down.

Bob: Did the racism make you feel like you didn’t want to try in* school?

Tim: [Nonverbal gesture assumed to be yes]

Bob: Because, why?

Tim: Because it’s like, I wanted to make it to the top of the league so my momma could see me. So she could come back and say: “I want to see what my kids is doing.” That’s what I wanted to do.

Bob: I see what you’re saying. You were trying to do well so your mom would want to come back home. That makes sense.

Tim: So when that happened I was like: “How am I going to get my momma back?” So I just stopped trying. I just really stopped trying.

Bob: And you didn’t talk to anybody?

Tim: Every now and then I talked to my uncle, you know; “What should I do?” I did enough to pass ninth grade. In tenth grade I played football.

Bob: Were you still at Lee’s Summit?

Tim: Yes. In tenth grade we got a new coach, he was black. So that helped out a lot.
Bob: How’d that happen?

Tim: I have no idea how he got hired. So that helped out a lot. I was on my JV team, we was good. We was raw. You can’t go state in JV but we was good though. I played running back and quarterback. So I’m thinking I’m going to play varsity junior year. I did, but not a lot. My junior year I barely played. In basketball, I finally got out of JV, ‘cause I had to show my butt off. I did a lot of summer camps, I went to a Nike combine as a sophomore, so I’m like this has got to show something. This is getting – I’m in the paper.

Bob: I know that feeling. Clip those puppies out.

Tim: Then I finally got to play varsity, but not a lot. I didn’t start, this white boy was starting. Big bulky, 350 pounds white dude playing linebacker. So that made me mad. But then, junior year came around and I played quarterback. I hated quarterback. He knew I hated quarterback.

Bob: Now this is the black coach.

Tim: This is the white coach. Varsity is the white coach, JV is the black coach. He was the top of the line. If your daddy owned a bar, your going to play. And we sucked. This year was going to be my senior year, I was going to try to transfer, to a brand new school, called Lee’s Summit West. Brand new, brand new coach. The coach that was JV, the black coach was the head coach of that school, so I’m like: “I’m about to play.” So I transfer. The first day of practice, this how I got here. The first day of practice, this whiteboy started looking at my little sister, she’s a freshman now at the new school. And I noticed, I don’t see my sister no more. So then *I turn and* “He touched your sister.” So, I beat him up. First he lied to me, and his friends told me he did it, so I beat him up. And then he told the coach. I got kicked off the team, I could have transferred back to the other school. I didn’t want to go back to the city school, I really didn’t. They think I was a traitor because I went out to the suburbs, so I might get killed.

Bob: They’re going to hold that kind of a grudge against you?

Tim: Oh yes.

Bob: What was the ghetto school name?

Tim: Grandview.

Bob: In your senior year, at that point, were you going to have enough credits to graduate?

Tim: Yeah.
Bob: So you possibly could have graduated, if you hadn’t have gotten into that fight.

Tim: Yes. I wasn’t thinking like that, it was like…

Bob: No, I’m not asking you what you were thinking about. But was there a chance that if they didn’t come down so hard on you, that you would have graduated back then.

Tim: I probably would have still played football.

Bob: Well I guess I’m a little confused. Why did they come down so hard on you?

Tim: My junior year wasn’t the best year. I had to go to summer school. But it was good for football. All I was thinking about was football. My brother, he went to a D1 school, playing football. He went to a black college to play. And I went down there for a summer, and I went to summer school in Houston. I wanted to play. That’s when I started lifting weights everyday, started running with my uncle. And my uncle got real focused into it. So I’m with my little brother, he’s running with me. After I left, now he’s starting at the school I was supposed to start at, so now he’s doing his thing. So that’s what I was focused on when I came back. I was the starting running back, you’re not going to suspend me. Then I told them why I did it. They said that’s nonsense, you should have told us. I’m not thinking like that, that’s my little sister. They just didn’t want to hear it and they didn’t give me no time to explain and I was just done talking at that point. And then he was like: “You’re getting expelled.”

Bob: How many people involved in the decision making process were black.

Tim: My principal, he was brand new to the school, I didn’t even know him, him; and he thought he knew everything since he went to a ghetto school he thought he knew everything about black people. Him…

Bob: …was he black?

Tim: He’s white. He was the assistant principal, that was my principal, I used to get in trouble I would go to him. Then the head principal, he said it, then the board or whatever was like, yeah he need to be expelled.

Bob: Were there any blacks in that?

Tim: Uh-uh.

Bob: They were all white? Oh boy. And where was the black football coach in this.
Tim: He was there. He was like: “I would get fired if somebody else finds this out.” I didn’t hate him for that. He said: “If I let this slide,” you know kids talk. And sooner or later, a parent is going to find out. So he was like: “I could lose my job if I don’t...”

Bob: …so he had to side with them. Ay-yi-yi. And this all happened last year?

Tim: No, this happened two weeks ago. I played the first game. The first game was on the 1st, it happened on the second, then I was out here the next Tuesday.

Bob: You mean this is going on right this minute.

Tim: This all happened two weeks ago.

Bob: So you’ve been in this school how long now?

Tim: A week. A week today.

Bob: God works in mysterious ways.

Tim: It’s kind of a blessing because I get to graduate in December. I had a scholarship, and my uncle’s trying to work it out where I can go back to Missouri, and then go play early.

Bob: Where did you get the scholarship?

Tim: Missouri University.

Bob: And they gave you a four-year scholarship?

Tim: Uh-uh. Hopefully, I’ll be able to graduate early, start my college, and then I can play spring ball. Show them that I still got it. This season is done for me. They’re playing right now, they have a game Friday, so hopefully I can play spring ball and I’ll be fine.

Bob: Now, did your school know that you got a four year scholarship?

Tim: Yeah. Everybody knew. It was in the paper, I was on TopProspects.com. It was one of my goals to be one of the top fifty running backs in Missouri and I was.

Bob: And they still came down on you that hard?

Tim: Everybody told me they could lose their job.

Bob: But this boy felt your sister up.
Tim: That’s what I’m saying! I was telling them the exact same thing you’re saying right now. He touched my little sister, my baby sister. You all know what I went through with my family. And they still expelled me. He was feeling on my sister.

Bob: What race was he?

Tim: He was white.

Bob: Your sister is…

Tim: Black.

Bob: This is just unbelievable, I’m having a tough time on it.

Tim: She wasn’t going to tell me either. I talked to her about it, I wasn’t really mad at her. But she can’t handle herself. She let him do it, and she walked away. She wasn’t even going to tell me, my friends told me. And they told me exactly what happened and how he did it. And she said she slapped him and walked away. And you weren’t going to tell me? I wouldn’t have been as mad if you would have told me. She was picking up something, and he went over to her and pulled her leg and started socking her butt. So that’s a no-no.

Bob: That’s a beat down. In anybody’s book that’s a beat down; except Lee’s Summit I guess.

Tim: I was mad. They were taking away my whole life. I was about to be the first one to go to a D1 school. A Big 12 college. My brother goes to TSU, Texas Southern University, I’m going to a Big 12 school. I’ll be the first one in my family. My daddy never did it, my dad played at Oklahoma State, but he never got his degree. I’m trying to get my degree. I’m trying to work in radio just like my auntie. I had everything, I had a broadcasting internship at a local radio station with my auntie. So I had a little piece of the scholarship. Everything was going good in my senior year had started. A week later was the first football game, and I did pretty good. The next day, my life changed. If you had told me this a month ago I wouldn’t believe you.

Bob: You were in Missouri, and now you’re in Las Vegas.

Tim: If you told me that a month ago I would have thought you were crazy. I was in Missouri playing football, I wasn’t even thinking about it. I knew my grandparents lived out here. I got in trouble Saturday, and I was like I guess that’s it for me. I wasn’t thinking about going to an alternative school. I was thinking I’ll just get my GED and go on. I wasn’t thinking about playing football, it was over for me.

Bob: And you weren’t deficient any credits at all? you were on track to graduate?
Tim: I was cool. I took a summer school class, I was fine.

Bob: We’ve probably already covered it, but did you ever really feel that in your school career that you were discriminated against?

Tim: Yes. Everyday I felt like, is this 1940? I used to watch, during Black History Month in February, we used to watch those Martin Luther King tapes. I watched the Emmet Till tapes. We didn’t watch none of that stuff in February, they didn’t give a dang about Black History Month. It wasn’t like a hick town, it was a suburb, it had a nice little nightlife, but they didn’t say nothing. If I had a pick in my hair, they would make me take that out. If I would wear all red, they would be like: “Are you a blood?” If I wore all blue: “You a crip now too?” I’d be like: “Get out of here.”

Bob: Who would ask you that?

Tim: Just different teachers. The principal never said nothing to me. The other principal I had was a lady, she was cool. But the teachers, I hated them.

Bob: Did the teachers ever say anything racial to you?

Tim: Nothing too far where I could report it. But there’s some if I saw them on the street, I’d probably give them a piece of my mind. Especially a couple of them, if I saw them at Wal-Mart I would probably fight them.

Bob: What would make you so angry to go at them like that?

Tim: They used to talk stuff at me and I couldn’t say nothing back. I would be talking to my brother in class, and they would be like “Shut-up Tim.” I can’t say nothing back, I can’t say: “Why?” I knew they had a little plan, to tell me to shut the heck up. Then send me to the office, get detention.

Bob: So you do think that there was some discrimination.

Tim: Because I was big in football and because I was black. My uncle and auntie would say that I’m from the ghetto, and they wanted to make it hell for me. So now, I may have a better chance to get to college, I got a whole. I’m graduating this summer.

Bob: Trust me, this place is a blessing. You just work it.

Tim: I can’t play basketball, I can’t run track, this is my senior year! I can’t go to prom. I’ll probably go to prom with my girlfriend, back in Missouri. I’m trying to go back to Missouri as soon as possible. I miss my family. For the first time, I’m by myself out here. I’ve got one cousin, but I ain’t got no... I miss being with my brothers. When my older brother left for college, I’ve been with my little brother. My sister, today’s her birthday, this is the first time I’ve been away for her birthday. I’m going nuts.
Bob: Wear that phone out. That’s what you do, wear that phone out. Were you ever suspended?

Tim: Yes.

Bob: How many times?

Tim: At least twice a year.

Bob: At least twice a year.

Tim: Just for different things, fighting for my brother and my sister. It wouldn’t even be at m school sometimes, it would be at junior high. I would be a sophomore and my sister would be in seventh grade, somebody would call her a nigger b-word. So I had to go there and defend her me and my brother. Then the boy had a brother, so then the brother would beat me up. So every now and then, I would get suspended for a couple days a couple detentions, standing up for myself. You know you have a bad mood? Don’t want to hear it from nobody, just go do your work and go home? Every now and then they make it hell for you. “What’s wrong Tim? What’s wrong? You smoke weed today?”

Bob: The teachers?

Tim: Yeah. “You listen to Dr. Dre today?” and all that crap.

Bob: Was this black or white teachers?

Tim: White.

Bob: Did teachers think it was cool saying that in front of the class?

Tim: They would be like: “Alright Tim, peace. Peace out homey dawg.” I just got used to it, I just started laughing, I just laughed at them.

Bob: And you would be one of a few black kids around all white kids.

Tim: It would be two of us. A boy and a girl, or two boys.

Bob: And everybody else in the room was white?

Tim: They would be either white or Mexican.

Bob: Did it make you feel isolated?

Tim: Sometimes.
Bob: So how did it make you feel?

Tim: Alone.

Tim: When it was me and Domonique, it was rough for us. He had his own little friend, I had my own little friend. My friend looked ghetto. So sometimes we would all go to the movies in the suburbs, he see the boys, or I'll see the boys that made fun of us. "What's up now?" Get into a fight and then my boy would sock the white boy real good. And then when you come to school the next Monday, I had to worry about them trying to jump me. Some of them was cool, I played football with them. Some of them was cool, some respected me, and some of them didn't. Some of the coaches did, and some of the coaches stopped them from doing stuff like, "Tim's not going to start." Why, Tim's the best one out here. If it's not Tim, then it's his little brother. "Kyle is starting." Kyle's a freshman, it's my senior year.

Bob: But Kyle’s dad owns a liquor store.

Tim: Yeah.

Bob: I’m listening to you.

Tim: That's how it was at Lee's Summit. I want to go back, I want to prove myself. I want to play for a D1 college, and say: "Ain't no one playing for this college but me, I'm the only one from my school, except my brother." Nobody plays D1 from your school, and they still suck. My brother, I call him every now and again, he gives me a lot of advice. So that's how it is. So I can stop being — I was mad, I was just mad at the world. Why is this happening to me?

Bob: We're getting close to the end here. When did you...well you didn’t know until a week ago so that’s a bad question. I was going to say: when did you first know that you weren’t going to graduate. Well, day before yesterday. So it’s a little different from here. I’m going to ask you a little differently. What motivated you not to give up?

Tim: My mother, and my auntie. And out here all these folks crying like you’d better not give up. They was like: “If you do, you could stay with us.” “But I don’t want you to be like your uncle.” My uncle’s in jail and my momma’s in jail. And then just thinking about my daddy. I could drop out and just get a job, there’s a lot of opportunity in ways that I could just make it on my own. But I’ll think about it, I’ll watch some football tapes and be like OK, I want to do that.

Bob: That’s a big thing, never give up. That’s my family motto, you just never give up. And I know your dad probably feels that too. Well then, have you ever looked at whether dropping out of school would affect your ability to get a job? If you never went back.
Tim: Well my grandpa works for Ford Motor Company for like forty-five years, he just retired this summer. I could probably get my GED and work up there. I don’t need my diploma to make it, I mean, I want to play football. I can go back to Kansas City, get my GED and go work at Ford and make about as much as half the teachers make. I would be fine. I like working with cars and trucks, I’ll be just fine. But I want to play football.

Bob: You’ve got a motivation.

Tim: I thought about it a lot. When you’re sixteen you can drop out. “Man I should just drop out, get the GED. 10 years into my ? That’s what motivated me, and my little sister.

Bob: If there is there anything you could change about your high school experience, what would it be?

Tim: I’d stay in the ghetto or... Different school. Different stuff. Just different places. ‘Cause we picked where we was going to high school, it was three of them. I could have went to Goose Springs, East Illinois Saint Mary’s maybe, I would have picked “ ”. East Illinois had a black coach that I knew personally. But I wanted Lee’s Summit because it was across the street.” So I would have picked East Illinois, I’d probably still be there playing football. That wasn’t that good either but still.

Bob: So the school you had the fight with wasn’t Lee’s Summit?

Tim: It was the new school, it was in the west.

Bob: Oh, Lee’s Summit West. We’re talking about two weeks ago.

Tim: It just opened, August 23rd.

Bob: It’s not the same as Lee’s Summit.

Tim: Lee’s Summit is about unintelligible. Lee’s Summit west is unintelligible.

Bob: Well I tell you what, this has been one heck of an interview. I enjoyed it. My family motto is never give up. If my kids were sitting here right now, they would say yeah that’s all Dad says. No matter what happens, no matter what the world throws you, you never give up. I like your attitude there.
Tim’s Second Interview

Bob: We’re here with Tim on September the 22nd, 2006, for his second interview. I went over your first interview, and I had some questions that I wanted to fill in. What church does your family belong to?

Tim: Christian Fellowship Baptist Church.

Bob: How often does your family go to church?

Tim: I used to go every Sunday. I would go down to the city and go to church every Wednesday and Sunday.

Bob: Wednesday you went to what?

Tim: Bible study.

Bob: Why do you find it easy to go to church?

Tim: I grew up with half the people there, I’ve been knowing them all my life. Its just people I know, I feel like it’s a good place to come. I go every Sunday, the only time I miss is when I’m sick or I have practice. It feels like home.

Bob: That sounds great. When you were in school, did they ever make you aware that high school dropouts make less money than people that graduate?

Tim: My counselor mentioned it.

Bob: Did they do anything in class?

Tim: No.

Bob: So it was only the counselor that told you.

Tim: Yes. You know how they have billboards with different quotes?

Bob: Did they give you any idea of how much money is the difference?

Tim: No.

Bob: A quarter of a million three thousand over a lifetime.

Tim: Wow.

Bob: That’s pretty serious huh?
Tim: Pretty much.

Bob: I know you want to be a success in football. Have you ever thought about being a good parent and a good citizen?

Tim: A good parent?

Bob: Talk to me, what does that mean to you?

Tim: Well, I have a daughter.

Bob: Oh you do.

Tim: It’s one of those things where I was young...

Bob: …Well you’re still young.

Tim: I was like fourteen.

Bob: You were fourteen.

Tim: Thought I was a man and all that stuff, but I grew up quick.

Bob: At fourteen?

Tim: I was a freshman. I *wasn’t* really there for her, but we were talking about an abortion. And then her grandparents had just retired back in January, [and said]: “We’ll just do it, we’ll have something else to do.” So now they live in another city; he’s about five years old now. I see him in the summer but...So I’m not a really good parent right now. I plan on being in his life after a certain time, when I get my life together. And a good citizen, I guess I could always say I’ve never been to jail, never been arrested. You know, I get speeding tickets.

Bob: Yeah, you and my son. So you’re already a parent. So you have that added sense of responsibility right now. Is that kind of a motivator for you?

Tim: Yeah.

Bob: In what way?

Tim: To be successful.

Bob: In what way, just football?
Tim: Anything. If football don’t work, I have my plans spread out.

Bob: Ok, what’s plan B?

Tim: I’ve worked for a radio station for a long time so…

Bob: Doing what?

Tim: Doing a little talk show. A teen talk show in Kansas City.

Bob: Really?

Tim: I was on there since I was in the eighth grade. It was like a normal talk show, we always had a topic. Everybody supports, it was from different schools in the Kansas City area. I was a part of the suburbs.

Bob: Did you enjoy that?

Tim: Very much. I miss it right now. Senior year was the best year, you get to go around in limos, meet different celebrities. I remember all of the celebrities.

Bob: So what you say the best day as a radio announcer that you had?

Tim: The day we went to St. Louis on their radio station. And try to get them to go, *I met different rappers*. There’s a parade every year around this time. We got to ride in the hummer, and wave to everybody. That was tight.

Bob: That sounds like a lot of fun. So Plan B would be to get back in radio.

Tim: That’s going to happen no matter what, if I go to college that’s what I’ll go to college for. Something like that, I’ll work with the community a lot.

Bob: So your major in college will be…

Tim: Communications

Bob: OK. That’s a good fallback plan. Are you going to start college next year?

Tim: Hopefully January.

Bob: So you would be getting out in your plan in…?

Tim: *They hooked it up now* so I’ve got a semester ahead, and then I guess [I would graduate in] 2010.
Bob: So in 2010 you’re looking at either going into the NFL, or into radio.

Tim: Yes.
Bob: Not bad, for all that you’ve gone through.

Tim: Yes sir.

Bob: That’s not bad at all. Do you have a checking account?


Bob: That you put money in regularly. How are you doing with savings?

Tim: I had a job back home, and I’ll have a job out here. But now it’s kind of *background noise*. I don’t like asking for money too much. My grandfather kind of pushes it to me, leaves money in my little drawer by my shoes. I won’t take the money, unless I’m about to get something for him. I’m pretty good with money, I don’t know about saving. If I want something, I’ll save. I wanted a car, you know, different stuff.

Bob: I mean on a regular basis to just save. No one ever told you to save money for a rainy day.

Tim: Yeah, I never really took it into consideration. On our rainy day, we just would call my mom, or call my dad.

Bob: Read between the lines. Have you ever thought about buying a home?

Tim: Yeah.

Bob: Talk to me, when you think about buying a home, what do you think of?

Tim: I don’t think about huge things, *a lot of people talk about living* in a huge mansion. That’s too much to clean. I don’t want no maid either. It depends on what my family looks like. If I’m married, I don’t want no huge house for just two us. I would get a little apartment or a little townhouse. If my daughter comes back to live with me again, I would get a little bit bigger house. I don’t what no huge mansion, I just don’t want to have one.

Bob: But you do understand the difference between owning and renting.

Tim: Yes sir.

Bob: Did your parents own or rent?
Tim: Owned. My grandparents own my auntie’s *room*. But back in the day, we used to rent a lot.

Bob: You do understand that when you rent the money just goes.

Tim: I know.

Bob: When you own a home, you build equity. Did you think of anything else about your high school career that may have derailed you, since we had this time in the last interview, is there anything else in your high school experience that may have been responsible for some of the negative things that have happened to you, just in the last month?

Tim: Well I guess my background. I used to always talk, *where I’m from* I used to always talk. I’m not talking about just talk, I mean talk stuff. Right during the time when my mom had left, so I wasn’t too happy with the world. When I was taking care of my brothers and sisters, I wasn’t too happy with the world. *Unintelligible* I wasn’t trying to let nobody in. I didn’t want nobody to get to close to me. And when they tried to, I would turn them off. That probably could have messed me up, because two years later I was alright. And nobody believed it and they wouldn’t give me a second chance. I don’t say nothing to nobody, and everybody say their little comments. I just let it out on the field.

Bob: That’s going to do it for the today, because we’ve covered a lot of ground. Is there anything you can think about your background, your mom your dad, your brothers your sisters, that might have influenced you now and in the future?

Tim: Somebody did. For the radio show, we had a sponsor. *This granddad*. He kind of reminds me of you. Granddad, he was very big but he was soft. That’s the person I look up to, I told him what happened and he didn’t believe it. He wanted to go to the school and march up there. “Where the school at then?” And I was like: “That’s alright.” He taught me a lot about life. He’s like my best friend.

Bob: Good. Well we all need a best friend, and somebody we can look up to. Just in our lives.

Tim: He’s just like a father to me. We had to have a certain GPA to *unintelligible*

Bob: What is your GPA?

Tim: I don’t know what it is now, but when I was in school it was a 2.8, or a 2.9.

Bob: Ok, so you’ve got to pump that puppy up to a 3.0.

Tim: At least try to get it up to a 3.1.
Bob: Ok that’s good. So I’ll share something with you: when I was in college I had a radio show. For three years. The time might have killed you, from one in the morning to five. This is when I was a sophomore, junior, and senior in college, back in the 60’s. We did locals and spots and all that.

Tim: I remember we had a high school person a week in sports. I did sports, it was how I could sell myself. That was fun.

Bob: Well I can see from the smile that comes to your face that you enjoy it. It isn’t a bad way to get girls either.

Tim: Yeah it was really fun.

Bob: Well we’re going to stop now, I appreciate you coming back.
Bob: Today is September 25\textsuperscript{th}, 2006.

Bob: Hi again Tim. Because your previous interviews were so helpful, there’s really only one last small thing I want to get squared away...[smiling]...You played Lee’s Summit right? [Hands picture]. This is Lee’s Summit.

\textit{Tim: Yes sir. That’s the dean}

Bob: Now you played that this year.

\textit{Tim: No, that was last year.}

Bob: Oh that was last year. And you played there last year.

\textit{Tim: Last year I played Lee’s Summit high school.}

Bob: And you played Lee’s Summit, not West Lee’s Summit.

\textit{Tim: Right.}

Bob: Pretty impressive. Thanks for meeting with me.
Vince’s First Interview

Bob: Today is September 15, 2006.

Bob: Vince, where are you from?

Vince: Mckeysport, Pennsylvania, it is outside Pittsburgh.

Bob: How old are you?

Vince: 19, I was born June 7, 1987.

Bob: When you were a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?

Vince: I wanted to be a star. I wanted to act or play football. It was the celebrity lifestyle, everything was so lavished, the jewelry, big cars, just the way that they lived. I thought that the only way I could make that kind of money was to run the ball or act.

Bob: Who are your favorite actors?

Vince: Will Smith, Martin Lawrence, Eddie Murphy, Chris Tucker. I like Chris Tucker he is very funny.

Bob: What about football favorites?

Vince: Reggie Bush, Right now he is cold; when I play I try to mimic what he does and everything. Michael Vick, a great player, he does a lot; makes a name for himself and a path for other black quarterbacks by setting the pace. I also admire Barry Sanders, I thought he was the coolest guy ever; nobody could run like him.

Bob: You are kind of young to know about Barry Sanders.

Vince: I grew up watching football; I’ve watched Emmet Smith and Barry Sanders.

Bob: You are not a Philadelphia Eagles fan?

Vince: No, It is all about the Steelers.

Bob: Outside of sports and movies, did you have any other heroes?

Vince: Mom and dad; they worked really hard to provide for the family. My mom sacrificed a lot ’she had 3 jobs; my dad also worked, but not as hard as my mom, but he was always there. I was so happy that he was there because most of my friends’ fathers were never there or they did not know their father. I am so happy that he stuck around for me.
Bob: What kind of work did your mom do?

Vince: She was a security guard, then she worked at Sears in the mall and then she went back to college; she is still going right now, working for a business degree. My mom wants to start a clothing business, selling clothes. My father is a teamster; he works at the trade shows.

Bob: What does a teamster do?

Vince: I don’t know exactly.

Bob: Okay, Mom and Dad are still together, so how long have they been married?

Vince: 15 years, but they have been together for about 22 years, because my sister is about 20 years old.

Bob: Your mom had 3 jobs at one time, right? How does that make you feel?

Vince: I did not notice it; I just saw my parents hustling, so I thought I could hustle to make a couple of bucks. Sell some candy here and there at school. My parents worked hard and I thought I could work hard, as a six year old child I had to learn how to cook and fend for myself; my parents were not always at home, they were working, holding down jobs and stuff. So, I would hustle, Not drugs or anything like that, I would buy candy and sell it for a profit to make some money. My parents would buy paper and stuff and I would sell it and make profit from it; I could always have stuff to sell. They would say that I would always have money. I never paid attention to how hard my parents worked. I never noticed until I got older.

Bob: What you are telling me is that it made you feel like you want to work? Make you feel like work was good?

Vince: Yeah, okay, they must like working, so I must like working too.

Bob: Early school life, what was it like?

Vince: I was a good student, straight A student; good in math, everybody would come to me for help with their math problems. Teachers would say Vince you are so smart, you are going to make something of yourself. I felt the same, school was fun.

Bob: What grade level was this? K-6?

Vince: Yes.

Bob: Which ones were your best years, or were all of them good?

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Vince: It started off rocky; I did not want to go home. Kindergarten was the best experience, nap time, coloring, learning your ABC’s and meeting new people. I always loved being the center of attention; it was cool for me to be there; experience with these kids of the same age and stuff. The best was my 5th grade year; all of a sudden you transition from a kindergartener to top dog 5th grader. I was at the top of the food chain, everybody else was below me. It was a time when everyone knew me and they thought I was cool.

Bob: You were popular?

Vince: Yeah, everybody knew me.

Bob: What made you popular?

Vince: I guess it was my attitude, I was very outspoken. I never bite my tongue, if I had a question I would ask it. I was friendly and I played football with the guys.

Bob: From kindergarten to the 6th grade; what would you say was your grade point average?

Vince: I was a B average student.

Bob: How did the transition from the 5th to the 6th grade go?

Vince: Scary, I had to start all over again; at the bottom. I was trying to be popular like in the 5th grade, but no one wanted to hear that; I tried out for the basketball team; I tried to make a name for myself in middle school. For me being so short it was hard for me to play basketball; I was never good at it. I could ball but not as good as the other kids.

Bob: What that a disappointment?

Vince: Yeah, it was a disappointment because I was use to accomplishing things and excelling in football. It was weird for me.

Bob: What did you do to offset that feeling?

Vince: I started to have doubt conscience; at this time people were getting more violent and I started acting out with my fist; cursing out my teachers and walking out of class.

Bob: What grade was this?

Vince: The sixth grade; but then there was a recreation center after school and I would take out my frustration there, which helped out somewhat. They had computers and you could play solitaire, pool and watch movies. There was a party every other Friday and
those activities took my mind off my behavior. They also had intramural activities such as tennis and there were girls in the tennis games, so I had to play tennis.

Bob: You recognizing that your behavior is changed, I can see it in your face that you knew that your behavior had changed. What do you think about your about your own behavior cycle? Were you watching yourself grow up?

Vince: No, I did not notice the change; my sister had to point it out to me. She said that I had changed from this nice, kind caring person in elementary school to a person who did not care about anything; she noticed my grades were failing in the sixth grade and she thought I was so smart back then. I was never an A student; but I was pretty smart. I looked up to my sister and felt bad that she noticed this about me; but after I changed to be more aggressive and a violent attitude, I could not change, it was there to stay.

Bob: What was the trigger for that; do you know?

Vince: It was frustration, disappointments that I was having. I was trying so hard to fit in with people; I did not know what to do.

Bob: What kind of people were you trying to fit in with?

Vince: The cool people, older people, like the eighth graders. My sister was in the seventh grade and I wanted to hang out with them, hanging with the older crowd; the cooler you would be. The would be tagging and stuff like that; I never did tagging or smoked weed or anything like that, but I wanted to, just because they were doing it.

Bob: What kept you from doing it?

Vince: My father was addicted to marijuana and he is still in a battle with the addiction. I saw how he acted when he was doing it and I did not want to act like that.

Bob: Give me a description of your home life.

Vince: Okay, my mom was never home, although from kindergarten to the third grade she was home everyday when I got home from school. Then she started working more and trying to get a college education, so she was not at home as much especially as I got older; I guess she thought I could take care of myself. My father was running around doing what he does; he would always get work but when he didn’t he was in the streets with his friends and my uncles. So, my sisters and brothers; we had to take care of ourselves; wash our clothes, cook our food, make sure our homework was done and our little brother was in bed by nine. We would leave our homework on the table because my mother would check our work when she would come home late at night. In the morning we would see little notes on our papers to point out what was wrong such as misspelling and things like that. That was pretty much our life for awhile.

Bob: Did your dad get involved with your schooling?
Vince: No, he was more concerned about me playing football.

Bob: Did they go to P.T.A. meetings?

Vince: No, my mom did not have time, and my father was too concerned about the streets; I don’t think he knows what P.T.A. stands for, to be honest.

Bob: So did your dad go to any football games?

Vince: Yes, he would break his neck to get to the football games.

Bob: Did your mom ever go to open house at school?

Vince: Yes, she would take the time to go to open house and we would be so proud and she would be proud of us. My mom would walk us on the first day of school.

Bob: How many sisters and brothers do you have living with you at home?

Vince: I have 2 brothers and 2 sisters; I also have a half brother that I did not know about until the ninth grade.

Bob: Are you the youngest?

Vince: No, I’m the second oldest.

Bob: How old are your sisters?

Vince: My oldest sister is 20, my youngest sister is 14. My brothers are 17 and 16.

Bob: So, your parents spread their interest over school among the five of you at home?

Vince: Yes.

Bob: In your family, how many have graduated from high school?

Vince: The kids?

Bob: Start with your parents.

Vince: They both graduated.

Bob: Did your mom finished college?

Vince: She has an Associates and/or Bachelor’s degree in business management.
Bob: Did your father go back to school?

Vince: No he always said he just wanted to get his high school diploma.

Bob: What about your sisters and brothers?

Vince: My sister graduated in 2004.

Bob: When you were in school, did you feel that teachers and administrators respected you?

Vince: During elementary school they cared, middle school was mediocre; some teachers cared and some didn’t. High school I don’t think they give a damn.

Bob: Tell me about high school?

Vince: Well, I had trouble in middle school.

Bob: Okay, let’s start there; what was the name of the school?

Vince: Sedway Middle school; I went to a lot of schools but this one just opened and I got expelled for battery.

Bob: You got expelled?!

Vince: Yes for battery.

Bob: Sedway is that out here in Nevada?

Vince: Yes, it just opened.

Bob: How did the battery come about?

Vince: It was over nonsense, a student beat up my little brother on the bus; I was in the cafeteria at the time when they told me. I always look after my little brother; I really don’t like him fighting. I take care of the fighting in the family, and I didn’t think that he could fend for himself. I went outside and I saw the dean escorting my brother and the other guy off the bus and told me that he was suspended. I asked why my brother is being suspended when this guy jumped on him and he told me because my brother fought back so they both were suspended. I wanted to take matters in my own hands and the dean knows that I was not one to take these things lying down. He told me not to go near the boy, if I went anywhere near the boy I was going to get suspended too. Being me, I had a problem with authority. I did not like people telling me what to do. So I said I’m going to do it either way it goes. I’m going to do it the best way I know how; I went to talk to the boy and I confronted him about beating up my brother; his mother found out and she said
she felt threaten by what I had said, so I got suspended. That made me even madder. Okay you got me suspended, you want to do some little girl stuff; in my opinion like female intentions. I went back up to the school; I was not supposed to be there and I beat him up. A teacher tried to stop it and I ended up putting my hands on her. It was not on purpose, it was an accident. I ended up at Opportunity School in behavioral program. Half of my freshman year I was in a behavioral program after that I ended up at Desert Pines.

Bob: Did they charge you and the police take you away?

Vince: No, it was a hearing of Clark County Counselors; the police were not really involved, the school police, not metro police. It was a school matter. The dean wanted to send me to Clark Continuation for two years, but the counselors sided somewhat with me because they said it was self defense, so I went for only eighteen weeks.

Bob: Was this your dean?

Vince: Yes.

Bob: Why was he so hard core on you?

Vince: We had a lot of run-ins. If he said something to me I would say something back. I would not let him have the last word. I was in his office for the first two weeks in the eighth grade year.

Bob: What nationality is he?

Vince: He was Black.

Bob: Does he seem to be a fair type person?

Vince: No, I felt that he was out to get me, since day one. He did not even know me and on the third day he had pointed out that he did not like me.

Bob: How did he do that?

Vince: I guess he heard about my previous year at west; he pulled me over to the side and told me he already knows how I act and he was not going to stand for it at his school. I said okay you want to challenge me, we can go. He already had vendetta.

Bob: That was the beginning of the eighth grade?

Vince: Yes.

Bob: Okay, tell me about the ninth grade and high school?
Vince: Ninth grade started out pretty good. Got A’s at Opportunity school. They decided to let me out. So for regular school I choice of Rancho High or Desert Pines; I could not go to my zone school which was Mahogany because the boy that I had the fight with attended that school. My grandmother lives between Rancho and Desert Pines. I did not want to go to Rancho because of the Mexicans, I don’t have a problem with them per say, but they may have a problem with me. I chose Desert Pines.

Bob: Let’s go the tenth grade at Desert Pines?

Vince: It started out great; I was back on track basically due to football. I kept my grades up so that I could play football. After football season was over, I felt that there was nothing else to do why I should keep my grades up, it was over. I met friends that were in theatre; they ditched a lot, so okay I just thought it might be fun; the thrill of ditching became a habit. I did not know I had English in the second period until I got my report card. April 20th was ditch day, so everybody partied that day, everything got out of hand. I planned on going back to school to get my grades back up so that the next year I could play football. Things did not work out that way, I failed.

Bob: In the tenth grade; how many courses did you fail?

Vince: All of them, first semester I made it through a couple. The second semester was a major shut down; after a certain amount of absences they automatically fail you from class.

Bob: What are we looking forward to junior year? Did you have to repeat the tenth grade?

Vince: I was a junior with sophomore credits.

Bob: You were deficient at that point?

Vince: Yes, my mom felt Desert Pines did not do anything for me. She enrolled me in Home School. The name was Odyssey Charter School. I had to do work on the internet; they said you can work at you own pace; so I guess my pace was a little slower than everyone else’s.

Bob: Talk to me about your pace?

Vince: My pace is to do the work at the end of the quarter. I let the work pile up on me all at once, I felt pressure, and I could not finish and gave up. You had to go to class once a week and the teacher would evaluate your work. I did not do any work. The teacher explained to me that I should to the work at the beginning of the quarter and space it out, it would be much easier to handle. It was said that I could work at my own pace and there are times that I didn’t feel like it.
Bob: Did you get promoted in home school or were you at the same grade level?

Vince: I was at the same grade level.

Bob: How old were you at that time?

Vince: I was 17.

Bob: That was 2 years ago?

Vince: Yes.

Bob: Basically, you are repeating the tenth grade for the second time? Where do we go from here?

Vince: My senior year.

Bob: You had a senior year?

Vince: I count it as my senior year, basically my third tenth grade year. It was just like the eleventh grade; I did not do anything; my friends were getting ready to graduate, but it did not bother me. My parents thought that it was kind of weird that I wasn’t motivated to do my work. I didn’t really care; it was you guys go ahead and graduate. At this point I was wrapped up in my job, I worked at a moving company and it was so demanding. I figured I could work and go to school; it did not work out that way. I was just working; became a workaholic; not doing my school work. (Kept up with reading but not writing because that was for the eleventh grade). Everything fell apart.

Bob: Your friends graduated in 2006- how many graduated and how many did not graduate?

Vince: About 16 graduated; more than 16 did not graduate. I thought they were doing better than me; they were doing just as bad or even worse.

Bob: Your senior year over this past June- at that point what did you decide to do?

Vince: Before graduation came up I decided to stop going to school. I figure why I should still be in school if I’m not going to graduate. I just stopped going and kept on working. At this point my parents are mad at me so I left and moved in with my girlfriend. I lived with her for awhile when I was working. Then I heard about this program and I feel that this is my second chance; that was back in April. They said that I could credits really fast here but it was not fast enough for me and I dropped out again. I moved back in with my parents, they talked to me about going to school for all those years and deciding to quit in my senior year. They talk to me about finishing school; they kept beating into my head.
They did not force me, it was my choice. So I came back a couple of weeks ago. Now I’m trying to get back where I need to be.

Bob: What would have kept you in school the first time?

Vince: If I was passing; if I didn’t fall behind in the tenth grade; I feel I would have stayed on the ball and graduated.

Bob: Did you ever feel any discrimination in school?

Vince: Administrators I felt discriminate against anyone who wasn’t white. At Desert Pines, my dean was Mexican and I think that he didn’t like black people. He was a no nonsense kind of guy and I felt he just want to get rid of me. I could spit on the curb and he would say okay you are going home. I did not have any teachers that were discriminatory.

Bob: Did the dean say anything in particular to you that made you really feel that he was prejudice?

Vince: he would say thing like “you kids” or something to the effect “kids like you always want to be class clown, always want to cut up and act so stupid that’s why most of you don’t graduate”. I thought he was talking mostly about African Americans.

Bob: What grade was this?

Vince: Tenth grade, the last time in an actual school.

Bob: Did you have any incidents in school that you thought was racially motivated?

Vince: Mini-war between the Mexicans and the blacks. Mexicans would beat up a black, so the blacks would beat up a Mexican. The war started.

Bob: What school was this?

Vince: Desert Pines.

Bob: Did it make a difficult to study? Did it bother you at all?

Vince: It excited me actually. I like to fight. I enjoyed taking part in the action. It was exciting.

Bob: Do you ever think of going into boxing?

Vince: I don’t like getting hit.
Bob: You don’t mind hitting, but you don’t like getting hit.

Vince: Yeah, I can take it but I don’t like getting hit; I’m wild for boxing.

Bob: how many times have you been suspended?

Vince: Lots of times but I do know How many times I was suspended from elementary school 91 times. I would say about 20 times from middle school and about 7 times in high school.

Bob: How do you get suspended that many times? What was the main thing that got you suspended?

Vince: Violence.

Bob: Was hitting, pushing, kicking, verbal?

Vince: Whatever I could do that make the person feel bad.

Bob: Were you a bully?

Vince: I don’t know; sometimes I had to prove myself. I am a small person.

Bob: Did you take their money, shoes, jewelry?

Vince: No, I never did anything like that.

Bob: You take their manhood?

Vince: Yes, whatever I could do to make the person feel bad.

Bob: Whether they start anything or not?

Vince: They had to start something; I would never do cracking jokes.

Bob: If someone was playing the dozen and they topped you; did you punch them?

Vince: Yeah, time to get it on then.

Bob: When did you first know that you weren’t going to graduate?

Vince: Senior year.

Bob: Was it the senior year or earlier?
Vince: It was the eleventh grade. In the tenth grade I could work real hard in the eleventh grade and pass, but once in the eleventh grade it was all over.

Bob: What motivated you to come back to school to get your diploma?

Vince: Football. I went to watch my brother play at Eldorado High School; just listening to the cheers and the crowds.

Bob: Where are you going to play football?

Vince: I going to try to be a walk on at Michigan.

Bob: Has Dropping out school affected your ability to get a job?

Vince: No, I have always been able to get a job; I have connection from my family. I have had fast food, moving company and even a job where I was in charge like a manager.

Bob: Great, that’s it for today.
Vince’s Second Interview


Bob: What happened that you ended up in Las Vegas? When did you move from Pennsylvania?

Vince: My mom was born and raised in Las Vegas. She met my dad and they had children and she was tired of the country living and wanted to move back to Las Vegas, so my father’s parents moved to Las Vegas and we moved here; I was 10 years old then.

Bob: So went to elementary school in Pennsylvania? What grade were you in when you came to Las Vegas?

Vince: I was in the sixth grade.

Bob: As a kid did you see a difference between McKeesport and Las Vegas?

Vince: Oh yeah, McKeesport is small, urban; country with tree a lot of green. Las Vegas is fast with lots of lights, gangs and ghettos.

Bob: Which do you like better; if you had to choose?

Vince: I went back to McKeesport a couple of weeks ago. It has changed a little, the park by our house is no longer there; the house we lived in burnt down; but if I had to choose it would be McKeesport. I think I would have more of an opportunity to focus on my education and play football.

Bob: So you are saying McKeesport would have agreed with your schooling more so than Las Vegas?

Vince: Yes, I talked to my mom about that but I stayed here in Las Vegas.

Bob: What church do your family belong to?

Vince: Bread of Light.

Bob: How often do you go to church in a year?

Vince: About 15 times.

Bob: Why do you go so seldom?
Vince: I believe in god; I grew up in a Christian family; as I got older church seemed to be less and less the place to be. People were talking about me; always having something to say about me.

Bob: People were talking about you because you went to church?
Vince: No, the people at the church. I thought that they were messy people, two-faced; they were not really there for god.

Bob: Why would church people talk about you?
Vince: Not the grown folks, but the people my age who would make comments like your shoes are ugly; you dress funny and things like that. They would talk about my brother, find something to criticize us. The people really would make me mad to the point that I want to fight. I have a very low tolerance for B.S.

Bob: Did you consider yourself ill dressed? You were not poor?
Vince: No, it was just haters. We were not rich, but we were above average.

Bob: Is this the church in Las Vegas?
Vince: Yes, the church in McKeesport everyone got along. You dressed up for church and you had a good time.

Bob: I have a question from what you had mentioned in our first meeting; you have a problem with authority. Where does that come from? Why do you feel that way, even with your parents?
Vince: When people tell you to do something, it is like a demand; commanding you to do it then and now. I like to do things on my own time. When you demand me to do something, I take offense to that; like you are above me; nobody is above me.

Bob: If your mom asks you to wash the dishes and you are sitting at the table reading the sports section of the newspaper; you didn’t know the company is coming and she yells out Vincent go wash the dishes!! What do you do?
Vince: I take my time.

Bob: So the natural extension of that when you go to school makes it easier to have that same attitude?
Vince: Yeah.

Bob: Why didn’t your parents demand that you go to school and get good grades?
Vince: They kind of. Every time I get a bad grade they would say you better get good grades. It was a demand “you better” “you better”. I’m not going take that. It was a command. It made me not to do better more.

Bob: Why didn’t they pull rank on you and take you out back to straighten you out?

Vince: I got a whooping; behind whooping with belts, switches, shoes, canes and extension cords. It was the pull the pants down whooping, but it did not faze me, it only made not to want to do stuff that they wanted me to do. It sort of made me angrier.

Bob: While you were in school did they make you aware that a high school dropout makes less money than a high school graduate; about quarter of a million to $350,000 less than a graduate in a lifetime?

Vince: No.

Bob: Would that have affected you? Would it have motivated you to stay in school and graduated?

Vince: Probably, if I was younger; but now I look at the people in my neighborhood and I know a lot of people who did not graduate high school and they are making money; I know a drug dealer who makes more money than my father; and my father makes a lot of money. Then there are those rappers who didn’t finish high school and they are making millions of dollars; so if they didn’t graduate why should I worry about high school; they make millions and that maybe something I could do and make money.

Bob: You mentioned in the past that you would let your homework pile up to the end of the quarter, do you plan to do your work on time?

Vince: Yes, I have journalism now, my mom have told me that it is better to keep up than to catch up. It never dawned on me until now.

Bob: What kind of music do you like?

Vince: Hip Hop, Rap, R&B.

Bob: Who are your favorite Hip Hop artists?

Vince: Fifty Cent, Nelly, Pop Ditty and Tupac.

Bob: You always said you wanted to be a star, why?

Vince: I always thought that I was meant to be a star; the way people looked up to me for answers. I used to be in theatre class and I loved to be on stage and perform for people.
On the football field I loved to hear the cheering from the crowds; thousands of people looking at me for my talent.

Bob: Have you ever thought about being a good parent or good citizen?

Vince: No! I’m looking more for super stardom, a good parent is only known by their children; I want my children to respect me but it only goes so far. I want to be known outside of the local area.

Bob: Okay, thanks, we are going to stop here today.
Vince’s Third Interview


Bob: Going back over the information you were expelled from Sedway Middle School, explain why you were expelled?

Vince: A kid assaulted my brother on the school bus; everybody was running to telling me that my brother was being beaten up on the bus. I got there to see the dean take the boys off the bus and was warned by the dean not to go near the boy because he knew that did not take any stuff from anybody and that I would take matters in my own hands. They suspended both boys but the other guy got three days suspension and my brother got five days suspension; I felt that the was unfair, my brother really didn’t fight back, he was the one who got beaten up. So, I went a beat up the boy, and the dean expelled me after that.

Bob: What was the name of the dean?

Vince: Mr. Houston.

Bob: What year was this?

Vince: 1999 or 2000.

Bob: Let’s go back a second; you were in the ninth grade what school and what year?

Vince: Did I start? I started in opportunity school. Jeffery Behavioral Program.

Bob: That was because of the expulsion, right? What year was that?

Vince: 2000, I believe. I was in the ninth grade.

Bob: After that the 10th grade? You graduated from that right?


Bob: 10th grade the second time?

Vince: Odyssey High School.

Bob: Where is that?

Vince: Home school.

Bob: That would be 2002; the 10th grade for the third time?
Vince: Odyssey High School.

Bob: You were in home school for two years.

Vince: Three years because I was in the eleventh grade after that.

Bob: The home schooling backed up on you, so in 2004 you were in the third year of home school and in the eleventh grade. Then where did you go?

Vince: City Adult School.

Bob: Were you here in 2005?

Vince: Off and on. I would quit and come back.

Bob: So when you came to City Adult School the first time what grade level they said you were in at the time?

Vince: A credit short being in the eleventh grade.

Bob: You earned credit for the eleventh grade; did you get promoted to the 12th grade?

Vince: I think I’m in the eleventh grade still.

Bob: When will you be a senior and ready to graduated?

Vince: I have the credits now.

Bob: When do you expect to graduate?

Vince: This year.

Bob: In June?

Bob: At any point during your high school career did you feel that it was racism?

Vince: Yeah, I think I ran into it a little bit more than what it really was because my father thought everything was racist and everybody was out to get him, and I felt the same way. I felt the same way. I felt that everything was a racist comment.

Bob: When you say your dad felt like everybody was out to get him; where did that come from?
Vince: I don’t really know how he felt; but he didn’t like white people, redskins, didn’t like Asians; he really didn’t like black people; so like whom do you like? His attitude was that you could not trust anyone.

Bob: He’s still alive?
Vince: Yes.

Bob: Does he still have that same attitude.

Vince: Not as much, it is less intense. He still has the attitude trust nobody; but he is a church going person who gets in touch with his spiritual side. He is more understanding, doesn’t read too much into it as he used to. I think that was a problem for me as I always wanted to impress my father and I thought the way he thought.

Bob: Did your father try to blame is failures on other people are that what you are trying to say?

Vince: Somewhat, mostly he said that maybe if he did not have kids. At one point he said we were all accidents. We were driving home one day and he said that. That statement kind of hurt. It made me feel as if I did not belong on earth. We talk one on one and we try to get along we always argue, but that statement hurts.

Bob: How old is your father?
Vince: He is 40.

Bob: Opportunity School what was that like?

Vince: It was the best year of my high school career, I did well in school, the people were just like me, and I got along with everyone there was no drama. I could relate to them; trouble people, they were just like me.

Bob: Did you keep in touch with any of the people you met at Opportunity school?

Vince: Yeah, in fact I just talk to a girl yesterday, she has a child now, I talk to a couple of people; they are on the Westside and I go to the Westside sometimes.

Bob: Was it a fair school, did they treat you well with respect?

Vince: No, it was like we were criminals. It was like do the work! The counselor, Mr. C.J. Hall who was a hard ass would kick you out if you spit on the floor.

Bob: They had to be hard on you guys to make you fall in line?

Vince: Yeah, Don’t cut up, you lost those privileges.
Bob: What was the principle like?

Vince: *I never met the principle.*

Bob: You never got sent down to the office?

Vince: *I tried to stay low key, Opportunity School scared me, and I tried to stay out of trouble. I wanted to get out of there as soon as possible because I thought I might get swanked or something.*

Bob: What is your current GPA?

Vince: *I don’t know. 2 point something.*

Bob: GPA is not something that you kept up with over your high school career?

Vince: *No.*

Bob: Is there a reason why?

Vince: *I was never concerned about it. I never planned on going on to college. I just wanted to get done with high school, but now I’m concerned with it and I was scared to ask; afraid it maybe 0 points something.*

Bob: You are a senior now correct? You are not deficient in any classes’ right?

Vince: *Yeah.*

Bob: Have you applied to any colleges yet?

Vince: *No. I wanted to go to UNLV to play football or go to Michigan to play football.*

Bob: Do you have any idea on how to go about applying to these universities?

Vince: *No, I never thought about it. I don’t know where to start.*

Bob: Start with your counselors. Okay what high school did you play football for?

Vince: *Desert Pines, tat is the only high school I attended.*

Bob: If I lookup the rooster your name will be listed? It was in the year 2000?

Vince: *Yeah, my sophomore year 2002.*
Bob: Have you ever won any trophies for football or any sport?

Vince: Yeah, I have six trophies in football.

Bob: Was it rushing, yardage, or touchdowns?

Vince: Defense. We also won the championship.

Bob: How old were you when you got your work permit?

Vince: I was 16.

Bob: What prompted you to get a work permit?

Vince: Work. I started to work at McDonald’s. The guy just asked who wants a job and I answered I do, so I got the job with a work permit because I was just 16.

Bob: How did you get the moving job?

Vince: My father worked there; he told me to tell them that I was 18, but I was really 15 at the time. They did not do a background check, because where I was driving it was that I got paid daily and there was no paperwork or nothing.

Bob: You seemed to enjoy it. How long did you work there?

Vince: Yes, I worked there for 3 years.

Bob: Did your girlfriend graduate from high school?

Vince: I don’t got no girlfriend.

Bob: You said you moved it with her.

Vince: That’s old.

Bob: Okay, did your ex-girlfriend graduated from high school?

Vince: No.

Bob: Well, guess what? I think we are done! Thanks so much for meeting with me.
Jay’s First Interview

Bob: Today is September 13, 2006.

Bob: Where are you from?

Jay: Kansas City, Missouri.

Bob: How old are you?

Jay: 21.

Bob: When you were a child what did you want to be when you grew up?

Jay: Wanted to be a musician; jazz, blues, and gospel anything I could learn in music. Favorite musicians Z. Z. Hill, Favorite song Down Home Blues, Marvin Gaye, Aretha, Chaka Kuhn like soul music love Chaka’s voice.

Bob: What instruments do you play?

Jay: Not certified in any instruments. Play the drums, keyboard, and piano; can pick up music quickly.

Bob: Who were your heroes other than music?

Jay: Mentor from elementary school, a world traveler, big brother figure, loved to get knowledge from the mentor. Dare teacher served in the army, always in shape; inspire me to always work out.

Bob: Are there any sports figures?

Jay: Mr. Kelly Little league football coach stress structure and disciplined. He would push me to do things better everyday.

Bob: Can you tell me about your experiences in elementary school, memories good and bad?

Jay: Grade school memories good and bad; attended 3 different schools; different teachers with different attitudes. I was kind of ADD, I would finish my work quickly and needed to move or do something. I was bored and needed something to do, I would not do anything to anyone but I would get in trouble as if I did something inappropriate in class and my mom did not play that. Elementary school was good and Mr. Freeman was a farmer and he lived on the outskirts on Kansas City, came to teach in the city; most of the schools in Kansas City are mostly predominately black. Dealing with segregation at that time; the teachers are teachers but felt like you were separated from everybody else.
Bob: Did you feel that it was a racial deal going on?

Jay: Yes, I felt it was racial; he did not use the “n” word, I’m not going to pin that on him, but everybody felt it. During 1990 it seems that everything was getting out of control.

Bob: What do you mean when you say everything was out of control?

Jay: The parents did not seem to care, the teachers didn’t care, so why should I care.

Bob: After Mr. Freeman where do we go from there?

Jay: Ms. Frye, she was a black teacher in the third grade. Nice lady, taught me a lot, did not take no I don’t know; I can’t do; ain’t no such thing as I can’t, you know the answer give it to me, give it to me.

Bob: How did you do in that class?

Jay: I did well, she would ask me to help other students. She was impressible teacher; I like her a lot. She did not have to press me.

Bob: Where do we go from there?

Jay: Ms Wilson’s fourth grade, she was also a black teacher, we had snacks on Fridays and recess was fun, she made learning to be fun; we were learning multiplications at that time.

Bob: So, would you say you were a good student?

Jay: Yes, in grade school I received mostly all A’s. I was a good student. Received an award for maintaining a perfect grade point average after graduating elementary school; big ceremony and I felt really good when I walked on to the stage to accept it. I was enrolled in the best school in Kansas City, Lincoln College Prep Academy; I was entering the sixth grade.

Bob: So, after elementary school you are in the 6th grade, what was your year like?

Jay: It was also the worse year of my life; my dad went to jail, I was no longer living with my mother (we lost the house) and had to move in with my grandmother. With my mother up until my daddy went to jail our house was like the church. I was preached to daily and grew up with faith and the bible. All this stuff started happening and I felt that god was punishing me. Everything that could go wrong went wrong.

There was a big difference from living with my mom and my grandmother’s house. I was exposed to everything at my grandmother’s house; there was nothing I
didn’t see there. So it made that year impossible to go to school that year; in a typical week I would attend school maybe twice in a week.

Bob: What was the main reason why you did not attend school?

Jay: I guess it was just me being me and if I didn’t want to go to school I didn’t go. I was dealing with all new things at my grandmother’s house and trying to cope with the things that had happened to me. My grandmother had problems of her own and she would say if you don’t want to go to school tell me you don’t have to go. I also had to look after my sister, she was a year older but she might as well be a year younger because she looked to me as her big brother.

My grades would have been good if I had gone to school. My grade point averaged tanked from a 4.0 to 1.0; in order to remain in the school I had to maintain a 3.25 average but my attendance was so bad that nothing would help me to stay. When I go to school I would do the work but my attendance was a big factor, I realized I messed it up.

I had to go to Paul Robeson Middle school the next year, it was horrible; stilling living with my grandmother and dealing with more stuff. Outside of my grandmother’s house there was more stuff. I said to my self I would go to school and do what I have to do; but I was introduced to more stuff, bad stuff.

Bob: When you say bad stuff, do you mean gang, or fighting to try and punk you out?

Jay: Yes, you had to fight everyday; I did not do the gang, I’m not a follower; I’m a leader. Going to that school you had to be in the in-crowd and being in the in-crowd made me bad. You had to be bad and you had to be ready to fight the kid. Every time I was faced with a challenge I stepped up to the plate. You could lose your life and I met each challenge head on. In doing so I set myself back along with my attendance so I had to repeat the sixth grade again, because they said I was not there and I did not learn anything so I had to go back.

By this time I was introduced to selling dope and I had all the book knowledge I need and they was teaching the same thing over and over again; it was just review after review and I was just tired of it all.

Bob: You are still in the sixth grade?

Jay: Yes, I was in the sixth grade and I still made appearances at school, but I sold candy and I gambled. Teachers did not care, so why should we care.

Bob: The teachers knew you gambled?

Jay: Yes, they would tell you that they did not give a damn what you do. I have had teachers to say to me, “do your work and I don’t give damn what you do?”

Bob: Is the school 90% black?
Jay: White kids are null and void in this school; it is all black, if you see a white kid you would be shocked. I have been beaten by 9 dudes, and then 6 dudes jumped me. Dude jumped on by 12 girls. I have been through riot in this school, I have seen a lot here. Once you get into that pattern, it is hard to get out of.

Bob: Is this still Paul Robeson Middle School? Do we make it to the 7th grade?

Jay: No, I went to Central Middle School.

Bob: How did you transition from Paul Robeson to Central?

Jay: I was briefly living with my mother at age 13 and Central was closer. Central was worse than Paul Robeson; the whole school was shot up and that kind of messed with me because Columbine was national news and this happened on the first day; no telling how many more times this is going to get shot up. It’s predominately black; you have metal detectors to detect metal and every thing else is in the school, drugs in school. Kids are strung out at school. Drug deals are big time in school, kids are doing everything in the school. I thought about what was happening and although it was easy money, I did not want to bring down another black child; I had my fill of it. The guns are outside but there is everything you would want in the school.

Bob: How long did you go to Central?

Jay: Two years, my attendance was still bad, at this time I left my mother’s house because we got into it. I moved with my sister across town Kansas City, Kansas. Enrolled in 8th grade at Pearson Junior High on other side of the water, I liked that school, but I don’t think that I was ready or was the school ready for me. This school was predominately white, even the black kids thought they were white. I had the attitude that I could dominate this school coming from the ghetto; I had the true street smarts to get over. On the drug scene this school was way worse than the schools in the ghetto; these kids were in cocaine, heroine and other powder drugs. I did not know where they got it but it was worst than the ghetto. I had my hands in everything and I was the bad black kid in school no one messed with me. I played a little football, basketball because I was athletically incline more so than most of the white kids.

Bob: What were your grades like?

Jay: My grades were pretty good, that was the only thing I had going for me graduating out of middle school, if I had continued from the 6th grade I would have to repeat the 8th grade and not graduate and would not be able to enter high school.

Bob: Where did you go to high school?

Jay: I went to Central High school, back in Kansas City, Missouri. It is the worst inner city school; it is the high school section of the middle school that I went to in the 7th
grade. Even with metal detectors there are still guns inside the school. In order to survive there you need to be hard because people be taking your change, shoes, jacket or whatever they want. They would walk up on you and like say take that off I like that and I want it take it off. You could not be a punk because you would get beat up everyday. Going to that school was an eye opener.

Bob: Did you have time to do anything academically? How was your attendance?

Jay: I was out of control. I barely went to school and when I was there I barely paid attention.

Bob: Was that survival out of control?

Jay: Basic instinct, nobody could tell me nothing, it was me and my sister and I was only trying to survive, I not living with anyone, I’m on my own and I’m not listening to nobody. I’m doing what I have to do. I have girlfriends and having sex. I’m out of control.

Bob: It is you and your sister? How are you supporting yourselves?

Jay: I selling dope.

Bob: You are selling enough to support both of you?

Jay: Yes.

Bob: When you ended up going to Central High School was this the last school you attended?

Jay: No, I went to Northeastern. I failed the 9th grade at Central because of my attendance, the 4 absence rule was in effect, so I ’m again a grade behind when I enter Northeastern High School. At this time I am not interested in school, I have the brains, I’m smart and I can do the work but I went because the person that I ’m living with wanted to make me go to school. I have always done other things to keep me busy, so if I did not want to go to school I had to sneak to skip school, before I could just stay at home.

Bob: In your immediate family, do you have any brothers and sisters?

Jay: Yes, my immediate family includes 2 sisters and my dad had 3 kids by previous marriage, they were about 10-12 years older.

Bob: Core family, including mom and dad, how many graduated high school?

Jay: Only my dad’s 2 older children graduated.
Bob: Either one of your sisters, mom or dad, graduated?

Jay: No, my sister was going through the same thing that I was going through, my older sister left early on. My mom and dad did not graduate from high school.

Bob: Did you feel the teachers and the administration respected you as an individual, at any point of your school career when did you feel that you were either respected or disrespected?

Jay: I got respect from some teachers, but I was kind of smart and some of them like me, so you did not have to tell me twice. Then again some of them were kind of bad, you could even it out.

Bob: In general did you have some that showed you respect and some that showed you disrespect?

Jay: Yes, both.

Bob: Would you say one out weighed the other in terms of how you ended up dealing with school.

Jay: When you are already dealing with stuff at home, you don’t want to be disrespected at school especially a child that should not be dealing with things for an adult. You don’t want to go to school to be disrespected. In the 7th grade I had a teacher who was always mean, a big black guy, a rugby player who thought he could say anything to you, and he acted as if he did not want to be there, so why be a teacher if you don’t like or respect kids? I told him he could not talk to me that way; that is one of the reasons that I did not go to school, no one needs to take crap off anyone, especially at school.

Bob: Were your parents ever involved in your school experience?

Jay: My daddy was very involved during my elementary school years. He did accept anything below a “C”. I usually brought home mostly A’s and B’s. The only spanking from my daddy was when I got an “F” on my report card.

Bob: Mom was never involved in your school experience?

Jay: Yes, to extent, only that you got to go.

Bob: Did mom go to any PTA meetings or school night?

Jay: No, my mom was a drug addict; she had other things to do.

Bob: This might be a dumb question as your life has been really complicated, but what would have kept you in school the first time?
Jay: Not to mess with my head first off; once people start messing with my head when I had to go live with this person I had to do things this way; move to another person I had to do things that way; I knew I had to live and I knew it was only part time but they were demanding their way. If my parents would have stepped up to be parents; they were not the best parents; being interested in and insisting on good grades, I would have done better to bring home good grades. The people that cared for me only cared if I went to school; they were not interested in the grades. They would say I don’t care what you do as long as you go to school because I don’t want to go to jail because you are not in school. That is not enough to make want to go to school because they don’t want to go to jail. I did not want to be there, so it looks like we both were in a predicament.

Bob: You alluded to this before; did you actually feel like you were discriminated in school?

Jay: Yah, one teacher called the class niggers; students turned out the classroom, it was the start of riot in school because of one class; chairs were flying, desks, books everything was tossed about.

Bob: What school was this?

Jay: Central High, It was a substitute teacher who could not control the class.

Bob: Did you feel that you were discriminated against?

Jay: I would say it was the only time I really felt it; although it was not a personal attack; it was a feeling throughout the school.

Bob: At anytime did you feel you were part of the school? Did you have any loyalty to any of the schools you attended?

Jay: Yes, I had school spirit, I would wear my “P” jacket and my school colors; I was an athlete and I was proud to be a team leader. Just some schools I rarely made an appearance and when I did go everyone was in awe that I showed up.

Bob: Where you ever suspended?

Jay: Yes, from every school. I have a record a mile long. I got suspended for gambling smoking and inciting a riot in the cafeteria. It was a food fight, I threw a milk carton, and they pinned the whole thing on me.

Bob: Have you ever been expelled from school?
Jay: No, never. I have never done anything that I could not go back to school. I believe it was my grades that saved me; when I was there I did my work and if I missed 5, 10 days I would catch up and turn in my work. My grades were always good.

Bob: When would you say you had the first feeling you were not going to graduate from high school?

Jay: I always had that feeling coming out of elementary school and being exposed to life’s situation, living in a situation, being a man before being a teen. The situation that I was in I had that feeling early on. I had been through a lot, I had to learn a lot on my own, I am pretty smart and I just knew I was going to be a dropout.

Bob: What age would that be? Sixth grade?

Jay: The second time.

Bob: What got you motivated to even try to come back to high school?

Jay: I always wanted to do it, get it over and done with; try to get in to college for a better job. I cannot get into a dead end job; I want to be able to make a decent living and be proud of my job; feel good about going to work; there are people out there making $23.00 an hour, I don’t see why I can’t get in to something like that. You never know I may end up at a community college.

Bob: What would you like to do now if you get a job?

Jay: I would like to go into engineering, work with computers; break them down and putting it back together. I would like to work with graphics for computer games, programming

Bob: Have dropping out of high school affected your ability to find a job?

Jay: No, I can’t say that it has affected me at all. If I was in Kansas City which is so over populated that the jobs were few; but since I have been here in Las Vegas I got a job right away.

Bob: where do you work at now?

Jay: I am a shift leader at the Jack in the Box. I like my job, they give me a chance to advanced, and they don’t hold me down. The more I learn the more I can grow.

Bob: If you can change your high school experience, what would you change?
Jay: I would change everything, the whole city, schools: I would even change parents. The schools that I attended had teachers to tell students ‘you ain’t gonna be nothing; boy you ain’t gonna be shit. Teachers are supposed to be motivators, right?

Bob: What nationality?

Jay: They were all black teachers.

Bob: Very interesting. Okay, we will stop here today.

Jay’s Second Interview


Bob: When you were with your dad, what did he do for a living?

Jay: My daddy worked fast food or he was in school; during the early years when we were in the church, he was going to school for nursing, but long before we were in the church he was a pimp by profession. I guess that is the only term I can come up with.

Bob: What made him change and get out of that particular line of work?

Jay: He found God; he found Jesus; once he started going to church he stopped smoking, drinking and living the fast life.

Bob: What about your mom? What did she do for a living?

Jay: My mom did a lot of stuff, but early on she was a prostitute and a drug addict.

Bob: What would you say was her career?

Jay: Mostly customer service, working banquets, she was a maid for a short time; worked fast food and after that Missionary work.

Bob: What about your grandmother?

Jay: As long as I can remember my grandmother was disabled.

Bob: At anytime during your school years were you on welfare?

Jay: All the time.

Bob: What was it like, if you can remember as a kid?
Jay: It was hard, made me do things I shouldn’t have been doing. It was a mediocre life. Watching the whole world pass me by; people coming to school nicely dressed, nice shoes and everything like that; I took it as an escape goat for me to do what I wanted to do. Growing up always on welfare motivated me to do some of the things that I did in my life.

Bob: You are saying that motivated you to sell drugs because you needed the money?

Jay: Yes, it was collaboration, main reason; it probably was not a good enough excuse. It was not that I did not have anything; I just did not have the best. I took it upon myself to go out and get the things I wanted. In doing that, I put myself in another bad position.

Bob: Did you ever come in contact with social workers, how did their work affect you? Did they interview you an anytime?

Jay: I was interviewed a million times by case workers, child protective services and everything like that. In Kansas City, they would come to the house, knock on the door and would conduct sit down interviews. There were a couple of close calls of being removed from my mother’s house. Only because it was not in order, the house was always clean, but high maintenance; if you weren’t dealing with the rats and roaches, you were dealing with something that had to be fixed. Something was always out and needed to be fixed, or you were dealing with living in the projects.

Bob: Why would they come to the house and how did they find out?

Jay: People would call the agency on my mother. Her sister, my auntie called once; I had a cousin who called and a teacher that called.

Bob: It wasn’t physical abuse was it?

Jay: No, there was no punching. I would get an ass whopping, I go back do something bad and get another ass whopping; ass whopping on top of ass whopping leaves scars. My mom never tried to hide anything; she would say yes I whopped his ass.

Bob: Did the welfare people get involve at all about your attendance or grades in school?

Jay: Yes, that’s the reason they came to my grandmother’s house when I was attending Lincoln; my attendance started really going bad. My counselor would ask me why I was not coming to school; I thought I could confine in him the problems I was going through; moving in with my grandmother, taking care of my sister, trying to contact my mom and a lot of different things going at once. So, I don’t know if my counselor, or any another school official called the agency and they came out to my grandmother and interview me and I just lied about everything.
Bob: Did the caseworker try to give you the impression that the money would be taken away from your grandmother?

Jay: Yes, but my mother was getting the money; they have cut it off and that would be the main time I would see my mother.

Bob: Your mother was getting the money and you were living with your grandmother?

Jay: My mother would come and pickup me and my sister take us downtown Kansas City to the state building to get it turned back on and we may get a little bit of money and she might give my grandmother something, but my mother was very selfish and she only thought about herself; at this point my mother was not reliable.

Bob: So they got involved with the attendance, but never dealt with the grades?

Jay: They never took me out on my grades because I was a smart kid but my grade point average started to drop. I started with a 4.0 average and each year slowly decreasing, my attendance was bad, but I did my work when I was in school. Once it became a real problem I started moving because I did not want to be custody of the state; that is a life that I never wanted to be in. I was enjoying being by myself; it was just me and my sister living day by day.

Bob: Did you ever have to go to court for any of this?

Jay: I can only remember going to court one time in my life- my mommy and daddy's trial. We were not in front of a judge, nothing like that; the lawyers came and got us; sat us down then asked us questions. My mother and father were on trial for a drug case. I was not in school at the time, only my sister was in school.

Bob: Was this when your father was away for ten years?

Jay: No, this happened before that, it was serious but the only way they beat it was because they came in our house without a search warrant.

Bob: This was before you graduated and you kept your grades up during this time?

Jay: Yes, I was smart but still a kid.

Bob: Did you ever spend time in jail yourself?

Jay: Small juvenile stuff. They would catch me doing something and take me downtown, process me, put it on my juvenile record; put me in a holding cell until my mother came to pick me up. I got caught once for stealing a car; once for assault, and once for shopping lifting.
Bob: Did you get any felonies out of any of those?

Jay: No.

Bob: Basically, the juvenile stuff really hasn’t traveled with you over the years?

Jay: Never caught up with me and I thanked god for that, either one of those things I could have been locked up for. With the assault I was not living with my mother at that time and they told me they were going to take me downtown because I was not living with nobody. It was me and my homeboy Timmy; he was into stealing cars and it was my first time stealing a car. He did it all the time.

Bob: Did you guys chop it up for parts?

Jay: No, we were joy riding, we did not think of any money at that time. We would take it, ride around for 24 hours and then leave it somewhere. So he would call me and we would go to the parties in a stolen car, go to the mall in a stolen car, we would go everywhere in a stolen car. So I figured if we could do all that, then I would try and that was the time we got pulled over and ended up getting locked up for it.

Bob: You did not spend any particular time; two or three days?

Jay: No, not even a day and he did only a 24 hour investigation; they did not find anything. I really should have been doing time; I literally stole that car. It wasn’t like the keys were in the ignition, I jumped in, because we had the keys to the car and it wasn’t damaged, the person got their car back and didn’t file a complaint, we didn’t spend time in jail.

Bob: How old were you?

Jay: About 14 or 15; let me see; I believe if was 15.

Bob: You have kids now, right?

Jay: I am about to have my first child; my wife has a daughter, but this will be my first child. I have various kids that are not my kids; I have always been a stand up guy. I’ve been with girls who were pregnant, or had children; being mature, I took on that responsibilities being with the women too. I have kids but none that came from my DNA.

Bob: What kind of parent do you think you’ll going to make?

Jay: Well, knowing what I know what not to do. I know all the mistakes I can possibly make as long as I don’t make those mistakes I think I can do a stellar job. Give my child a wonderful life.
Bob: It seems that you are going to be involved in your kid’s lives?

Jay: Most definitely, the way I see it as the way I was cast aside by my mother, putting everything before me, my father got locked up in jail and he wasn’t around. Even now that he is out of jail and being out of touch for so long he does not know how to reconnect with me. I would not want to put myself along my child in a position where I looking down the line in 12 years, trying to figure out what I’m going to do for my child, how to reconnect with my child or how come my child would not speak to me. I take everything out of my life and learn from it; I think I have a head start of what to do, at least for the early years; if I can’t make it work, I’m willing to accept help. I not going to go places where my child can’t go, like my mother did with us; she would go live where we could not go and would stay there, she did not care. How are you going to go stay somewhere and they tell you your kids cannot stay there with you? I will never do that to my child.

Bob: Was this because of the drugs?

Jay: Yes, mainly

Bob: Does your sisters have any kids?

Jay: Yes, they both had their first child at 16. My oldest sister Tawsha has 5 kids, second oldest sister Krisha has 3 kids, another sister Jessica has 3 kids; my brothers John John my fathers son from a previous relationship has 2 kids and my little brother Jason has a little boy.

Bob: Now looking at the scale of you being a parent what kind of parents are they going to make?

Jay: I’m kind of disappointed; they put their kids through some of the same things just in different ways I don’t think they noticed it. My oldest sister neglects them but she is also there for them; it is not like with our mother who was never around. My sister would go through this depression and everything and lock herself in her room for weeks at time. She is in depression that bad. I would say that you are not taking time away from the world but you are taking time away from your children. The kids would sit around asking where mommy is and they are wondering if she is going to feed them.

Bob: She’s not cooking dinner?

Jay: No: no, the depression is that bad that she is locked up in her room for weeks.

Bob: How old are the kids?

Jay: One is about to be 13 in December; then there’s 11, 8, 5, and 3. The oldest one tries to cook for them; she is very responsible, but if they run out of fast food such as oatmeal then she would need to get my sister out f her room or try to find something else to cook; which is very limited.
Bob: Dinner is the same kind of thing?

Jay: She has someone to pick up the slack, if not me; my mother, or boyfriend, or now a girlfriend. My sister is now a lesbian; so her girlfriend stays with her. She would get up sometimes and cook for the kids; but she is lazy. She doesn’t feed the kids when she should only when she feels like it, when it is convenient for her. She has one kid and gave it up and now I guess she is trying to take care of my sister’s five kids. She was not ready to be a mother to her child so you cannot expect her to be a father figure with your child.

Bob: Have you ever talk to your sister to express your point of view?

Jay: Oh yeah, my sister and I are not speaking this day, over her girlfriend. I let her know the stuff that’s going on, I’m their uncle and I love these kids. I have been there their whole life and I letting you know that I don’t like this, these kids need to eat, these kids are growing kids, you can go to jail for neglecting these kids. All it takes is for somebody to feel like you really neglected these kids and you will be in jail.

Bob: Are the other brothers and sisters doing better as parents, just give a score of 1-10.

Jay: Krisha would get an 8 on parenting, as far as a role model putting words into action I would rate her 2. She has a little girl about 8 and she is learning now; everything she see’s her mother does, hear her mother say and exposing her to all kinds of environments. She does things that I would not mention, she is my sister, but she is not right. She does things to her husband that a woman should not do to a man whom she is married to. You don’t have that freedom anymore. She’s taken the values that should be instilled to them and twisting and turning them and making them think that is they way it should be. If you are going to teach them about marriage, show them how to make a good marriage, don’t show them was where it is going to be destroyed. As far as parenting she is good.

Bob: What about the rest of the sisters and brothers?

Jay: I can’t grade them, I haven’t seen their last 4 kids, matter of fact I haven’t seen them in awhile. So, I can not grade them because I don’t interact with them.

Bob: What do you read in your spare time?

Jay: First I like to read the newspaper, stay up on current events; I like to know what’s happening. Me, I’m a science fiction person; science fiction books that would take me away from where I’m at now. I like to read biographies; I like to hear it from the person’s mouth books with facts; telling the true picture. Science fiction is my favorite reading material.

Bob: You are very articulate, you speak very well. Where do you see that taking you?
Jay: *The sky is the limit.*

Bob: Are you working on a two-year plan or what are your goals?

Jay: Oh yeah, I’m not fooling myself; I know it is not going to be easy; but I must set my goals and I set them high. I wanted to set high goals so that I will feel like I achieved something once I get there. I feel like the sky is the limit and anything I want to do I can do it as long as I have this head on my shoulders and this gift to gab god gave me, there is nothing I can’t do. *The sky is the limit.*

Bob: It is more than a gift to gab; you have an ability to tell a story.

Jay: *I have always wanted to be a writer; even on paper I’m good at setting the tone and letting the people know exactly what I’m talking about.*

Bob: If you could write like you talk, I’ll go buy it.

Jay: I just look in my head, I will think about it, assess the questions you ask and assess my answers. I take my time to think about and assess it and give it full and in details. That’s why I like Ms. Frye; she always said that when you are writing sentences and paragraphs details can only help, so I take that to heart.

Bob: Thanks for sharing that. We will stop here for now and can talk more on this the next time we meet.
Jay’s Third Interview

Bob: Today is September 22\textsuperscript{nd}, 2006.

Bob: how often do you go to church?

\textit{Jay: Not as often as I should; the last time I went to church was months ago.}

Bob: What church do you belong to?

\textit{Jay: I don’t belong to any particular church.}

Bob: Do you have a problem with authority?

\textit{Jay: You can say that I have a problem with authority especially teachers like Mr. Vick. I used to always get into it with him, because o the way he would come at me, I don’t like people who always hollering and people who are always in your face. He was always in your face and hollering; he was also 4 times bigger than I was.}

Bob: Did your teachers make you aware that high school dropouts make less money than high school graduates?

\textit{Jay: Yeah, they always told us; tried to instill in us that in order to make money you need to get your diploma; even the worst teachers would place a value on the school. They would say that this is not the best school but if all you want is a diploma it is up to you.}

Bob: Did they tell you that the amount of money is somewhere between $250,000 and $300,000?

\textit{Jay: No, they did not put a figure on it; that sure sounds a whole lot better.}

Bob: Have you ever thought about being a good parent or a good citizen?

\textit{Jay: Yes, that’s kind of what’s I’m going for right now. I don’t have too many good things going for me right now. So, the more good I do starts to come back to me; not having many problems as before; reaping what I actually sow; it can’t always be bad stuff. I start putting good back into what I helped sow and help everybody deeds would help me.}

Bob: What is your idea of what a good parent would be?

\textit{Jay: Attention, attention. Kids need attention and some kind of communication. If I can master those two things I will be fine.}

Bob: What is your idea of a good citizen?
Jay: It is more than just obeying the law; need to show compassion to others besides you.
Bob: What career do you plan to do?

Jay: Music, I want to do music. I will want to dibble and dabble in other things but music is what I want to study as a craft. If I put my mind to it and study the craft I know that I will master it.

Bob: After music, what is the next craft?

Jay: Engineering, I want to do something with computers. Technology fascinates me.

Bob: Do you have a checking account?

Jay: No, I did have one once but I have a problem with a payday loan that I need to straighten out.

Bob: Do you save money regularly?

Jay: No not many chances to save money, with a baby on the way and now I’m taking care of my mother, my wife.

Bob: You take care of your mother now?

Jay: Yes, I and my sister brought her here to Nevada; I have been taking care of her since November. I have a lot on my plate right now and don’t have many chances to save money.

Bob: Have you ever thought about buying a house?

Jay: Oh yeah, I think about it all the time. It will be the first step to establish myself. All the stuff I do will not mean anything if I don’t have something to show for it. Owning property will open up new avenues and have a sense of self worth and would not have the feeling of being strapped for cash. Real estate would be another occupation to go in to.

Bob: Did your parents own their own home?

Jay: Yes, we own the house and my mother was co owner of the church.

Bob: Are you in contact with your dad?

Jay: Off and on sometimes and since we are 1600 miles apart we do not talk at all. Three years ago before I moved to Nevada, He was released from jail and he only saw me 3 times in 3 months. So that tells you that his head is not in the right place; he still doesn’t care about anyone but himself. I have waited for him to step up to the plate and be a dad but he only thinks of himself. I don’t think he knows he will have a grandson soon.
Bob: Is there some point that you will reach out to him?
Jay: Yeah, I want his grand kids to know who he is; I’m not going to take that away from him. It was never my intentions to turn him away; ever since he got out of jail I have been reaching out to him and he has not been reaching out to me. That sort of made me mad for a minute and I quit trying. If he puts forth an effort, just a small effort, nothing super amazing I will reach out to him again; other than that I ’m not going to put myself out there to be kicked in the face again.

Bob: Is there anything else about your high school experience, maybe you thought of and you might want to share or things you would do differently?

Jay: Oh man, a lot of stuff. I would think if I was placed somewhere else if it had turned out differently. Same mother, father but in a different place, better circumstances. I don’t know, I think it was the lifestyle. I don’t blame it on anybody it was my entire fault. Teachers were harsh and in the end it was all on me.

Bob: Thanks for meeting with me, it has been really great.
Interview with Participant Counselor


Bob: I here with Ms. Jean Farr, counselor at City Adult School; I interviewed Tim M., do you know him?

Ms. Farr: Yes, I know what he looks like.

Bob: He’s only been here for 3 weeks; there was an incident that happened in Kansas City, can you tell me anything about that?

Ms. Farr: I don’t know what the incident was; I just know he had to leave Kansas City and moved here.

Bob: Basically, he beat up a kid and had to move here.

Ms. Farr: Oh.

Bob: Can you describe anything about his personality, do you remember that well?

Ms. Farr: I’ve only seen him twice: I did not notice anything out of line or anything like that; but as you know the students we get here mainly are people who have had issues; so you kind of keep your eye out; but I did not see anything unsettling about him. I saw someone who was anxious to go to school; maybe the situation back there had been some sort of lesson for him, a change for him.

Bob: Is there any information you can share with me about the student’s academic background?

Ms. Farr: Yes, he’s been here since September 13, 2006 let’s see here, he has not completed a class yet. That’s 3 weeks times 5 days equal 45 hours and he is in the ballpark of completing a class but he has only 42 hours of journalism and 34 hours of math application. He has not accomplished very much yet.

Bob: Is he eligible for graduation this year?

Ms. Farr: I have no idea; we haven’t gotten his official transcripts yet.

Bob: I got to ask this question; how would you gage this student’s feelings about his grades; was there any indication that he seemed to be sensitive?

Ms. Farr: No, as you probably noticed this school is very ethnic censored; there are more Hispanics and African Americans then there are whites. Reasons; 1) neighborhood; and 2) because of the low graduation rate among African Americans and Hispanics. It’s their background.
Bob: You didn’t feel he had a chip on his shoulder?

Ms. Farr: No, not at all.

Bob: How would you gage the students’ motivation, internal, external?

Ms. Farr: As I remember it was internal; time to get moving, time to make some sort of peace with what you have to do in order to survive. I think what happens is a lot of our students haven’t figured that out yet. High school students figure it out in their sophomore year, our students figure it out when they walk through the door, maybe; but he will be 19 in February and it is time.

Bob: has he been involved in any incidents since he’s been here?

Ms. Farr: No, I usually hear about things going on in the school, his name was never mentioned.

Bob: Why do you think the student re-entered the education system?

Ms. Farr: He might have a parole officer and was told he was on probation and one of the conditions was to be enrolled in school. Good percentage of our students if they get any kind of federal money, been engaged with the law in anyway or behavioral school usually have some sort of condition on them; they will attend school to avoid incarceration; collect insurance money, Medicare coverage; etc., etc., etc. There is an attachment to keep them motivated. I don’t know about him; but I would think an external motivation is attached.

Bob: What is the students’ discipline in attendance; absences and tardiness?

Ms. Farr: Two classes in journalism and math, well his attendance is sporadic.

Bob: Do you consider the student to be loyal to the school?

Ms. Farr: I have no was of knowing that.

Bob: He has not done anything disruptive to the school?

Ms. Farr: No, loyalty in everyday lives. Here at school we are a means to an end; we are not a place that offers a lot of social activities.

Bob: My other student is Vince B., do you know him?

Ms. Farr: I have no idea who that is. Let me pull his folder to see what counselor has worked with him. He’s half way, 9½ credits to go. Doing this way back since January
2006; so far he has been with us for 9 months or so. His attendance is sporadic; yesterday he was in class for one hour a day before those 2 hours.

Bob: How long is each class?

Ms. Farr: 3 hours.

Bob: What’s happening here is that the student does not return to class after the break?

Ms. Farr: That is a good way to put it.

Bob: Does anyone call him on that?

Ms. Farr: This is adult school. We technically should not have a school full of 17 year olds, but in fact it changed the whole atmosphere of our school. Drifting accountability of regular schools; telling that they are not going to graduate, so might as well go to adult education; so they come here. Before the guidance was to keep students in regular schools for 4 years, now it has drifted to 3 maybe 3½ years. These 17 year olds were not successful in their own school; no one intervene or guidance, no hiatus’ for them. They haven’t had time to figure out what’s important; they go from their school to here, and someone told them they must go to school or their mother will lose their benefits; they can’t get a driver’s license, on and on. So they find out and they come just often enough. The situation is that they should be in regular school their 4th year because they are not mature enough to take responsibility to be here.

Bob: Vince B. said he was 18 when he came here.

Ms. Farr: You are right; however he was at Odyssey; left in January and came right over here. He did not have time to think school was important to him.

Bob: How long was he at Odyssey?

Mr. Farr: He was at Odyssey for 2 semesters (2004-2005). Let’s see he was at Jeffery for Behavior. Attended 3 semesters at Desert Pines; 3 classes at Canyon Spring (summer school). Just looking at this, the student hasn’t learned the value of an education and it shows in his attendance. This is a problem we are having at this adult school since “no child left behind”; I don’t mean to generalize; but that’s when accountability changed; we got 19, 20 year olds and older who have been out of school and figured out a diploma was necessary; so it is a change in atmosphere and attitude.

Bob: So you are not familiar with this kid?

Ms. Farr: No, I can tell you is that his GPA is 1.289; he his not attending regularly and another issue is that this is his fifth school; that is really tough on the student. Just by the
nature of the statistics on this kid, he’s troubled. I don’t know why he has had trouble other than the 8th grade.

Bob: You hit it on the head.

Ms. Farr: No discipline from Odyssey.

Bob: What about Jay J. he was in to register that day?

Ms. Farr: He did not register, he did not pay. He may have filled out a folder but he did not peruse it.

Bob: Thank you so much for your time.
APPENDIX 2

IRB APPROVALS
UNLV
UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA LAS VEGAS

Social/Behavioral IRB – Expedited Review
Approval Notice

NOTICE TO ALL RESEARCHERS:
Please be aware that a protocol violation (e.g., failure to submit a modification for any change) of an IRB approved protocol may result in mandatory remedial education, additional audits, re-consenting subjects, researcher probation suspension of any research protocol at issue, suspension of additional existing research protocols, invalidation of all research conducted under the research protocol at issue, and further appropriate consequences as determined by the IRB and the Institutional Officer.

DATE: August 9, 2006
TO: Dr. Kevin Crehan, Educational Psychology
FROM: Office for the Protection of Research Subjects
RE: Notification of IRB Action by Dr. Paul Jones, Co-Chair
Protocol Title: A Multi-Case Study Re-Entry African American Male High School Dropouts
Protocol #: 0607-2018

This memorandum is notification that the project referenced above has been reviewed by the UNLV Social/Behavioral Institutional Review Board (IRB) as indicated in Federal regulatory statutes 45 CFR 46. The protocol has been reviewed and approved.

The protocol is approved for a period of one year from the date of IRB approval. The expiration date of this protocol is August 8, 2007. Work on the project may begin as soon as you receive written notification from the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS).

PLEASE NOTE:
Attached to this approval notice is the official Informed Consent/Assent (IC/IA) Form for this study. The IC/IA contains an official approval stamp. Only copies of this official IC/IA form may be used when obtaining consent. Please keep the original for your records.

Should there be any change to the protocol, it will be necessary to submit a Modification Form through OPRS. No changes may be made to the existing protocol until modifications have been approved by the IRB.

Should the use of human subjects described in this protocol continue beyond August 8, 2007, it would be necessary to submit a Continuing Review Request Form 60 days before the expiration date.

If you have questions or require any assistance, please contact the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects at OPRSHumanSubjects@unlv.edu or call 895-2794.

Office for the Protection of Research Subjects
4505 Maryland Parkway • Box 451047 • Las Vegas, Nevada 89154-1047
(702) 895-2794 • FAX: (702) 895-0165

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TITLE OF STUDY: A Multi-Case Study of Re-entry African American Male High School Dropouts

INVESTIGATOR(S): Kevin D. Crehan and Bob Walker

CONTACT PHONE NUMBER: 895-4364

Purpose of the Study
You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to learn more about African American male high school dropouts to understand what motivated them to dropout of high school without receiving a diploma. To get the point of view of African American male dropouts is important to create interventions that will prevent dropouts in the future.

Participants
You are being asked to participate in this study because you are an African American male high school dropout between the ages of 18 to 26 years, and your point of view about what caused you to dropout of high school is important.

Procedures
If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following: you will be asked to respond to approximately 15 questions asked in at least three 60 minute interviews. The questions will cover the subjects’ life history to the present, highlighting family background, school experiences, school successes and failures, and incidents of racial discrimination. The interviews will be recorded on a digital recorder and transcribed for analysis.

Benefits of Participation
There may be direct benefits to you as a participant in this study. These benefits would be;
1. A personal catharsis
2. Self-acknowledgement.
5. Empowerment.
6. Providing a voice for the disenfranchised.

Risks of Participation
There are risks involved in all research studies. This study may include only minimal risks. These minimal risk are;
1. Questions that might make the participant uncomfortable.
2. Participant may feel uncomfortable about the research experience.
VITA
Graduate College
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Robert P. Walker

Degrees:
Bachelor of Business Administration, Economics, 1969
University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati

Employment Record:
Work with at-risk students as a Success Monitor at Desert Rose Adult High School.
Found job placement for unemployed students, housing for homeless students, tutoring,
clothing, and anything to help my students succeed.

Special Honors and Awards:

  Scholastic Award, Alliance of Professionals of African Heritage, 2006
  University of Nevada Las Vegas

  Scholastic Award, Alliance of Professionals of African Heritage, 2007
  University of Nevada Las Vegas

  Scholastic Award, Alliance of Professionals of African Heritage, 2008
  University of Nevada Las Vegas

  Scholastic Award, Alliance of Professionals of African Heritage, 2009
  University of Nevada Las Vegas

  Scholastic Award, Alliance of Professionals of African Heritage, 2010
  University of Nevada Las Vegas

Thesis Title: Re-Entry African American Male High School Dropouts Through the Lens of Critical Race Theory with Content Analysis of the Case Studies

Poster for Graduate & Professional Student Research Forum 2010:
Title: A Comparative Analysis of Workforce Education in the United States and France as these Struggle to Engage Immigrant Youth

Thesis Examination Committee:
  Co-Chair, Christine Clark, Ed.D.
  Co-Chair, Paul Jones, Ed.D.
  Committee Member, William E. Cross Jr., Ph.D
  Committee Member, Dr. Cliff McClain, Ph.D.