THE BLACK COLLEGE EXPERIENCE: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO AFRICAN
AMERICAN TEENS? A DESCRIPTIVE CASE STUDY INVESTIGATING STUDENT
PERCEPTIONS AND ITS INFLUENCE ON COLLEGE CHOICE AND HBCU
STUDENT ENROLLMENT

by

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ABSTRACT

LAKIA MARIE SCOTT. The Black college experience: What does it mean to African American teens? A descriptive case study investigating student perceptions and its influence on college choice and HBCU student enrollment**. (Under the direction of DR. GREG WIGGAN)

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) continue to represent a great legacy in the history of education for African Americans; however, these institutions are faced with contemporary challenges that include: declining Black enrollment, financial constraints, and questions concerning the value an HBCU degree holds. Research illustrates how HBCUs are academically and culturally accommodating for Black students (Albritton, 2012; Fountaine, 2012; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Outcalt & Skewes-Cox, 2002; Thompson, 2008), but when deciding on which college to attend, high schoolers give more consideration to financial access and prestige, and less to the development or affirmation of racial identities (Braddock & Hua, 2006; Fleming, 1984; Freeman & Thomas, 2002; Tobolowsky, Outcalt, & McDonough, 2005). The current scope of literature fails to recognize Black high school students' perspectives on electing to attend an HBCU (Dancy & Brown, 2008; Davis, 2004; Dillon, 1999; Freeman, 1999). Critical Race Afrocentricity provides a lens to examine how HBCUs serve as a historical and contemporary marker for educational opportunity among Black college students in a time where the concept of race is seemingly not a determinant in college selectivity. This study examines the perspectives of 13 Black college-bound high school students in regards to attending an HBCU. Since there is a slight decline in Black enrollment at HBCUs, it is necessary to examine the contemporary role HBCUs will serve for future generations of Black students. Findings of the study indicate that Black teens recognize

the intellectual, cultural, and social value in attending an HBCU; however, they feel that factors such as financial affordability and academic reputation are more pertinent factors in college selectivity. Furthermore, there is a need for future research to examine the participants' perspectives (as teens aspiring to attend college) to their collegiate experiences.

Keywords: Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU), Black college enrollment, college choice, African American student perspectives.

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DEDICATION

To April and Paul (PJ); you have been my chief motivation for going to and completing my postsecondary education. May this dissertation prove to you that anything is possible with hard work, dedication, and faith.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In pastime, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), postsecondary institutions established in the 1800s, represented one of the few opportunities for African Americans to have access to higher learning (Jackson, 2001; Lovett, 2011). Prior to the Reconstruction Era—in U.S. history, the period (1865–1877) that followed the American Civil War (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2014)—a great number of African Americans (termed as "Negroes") were in positions of servitude, and they were not permitted to receive a formal education. It was illegal for a slave to learn how to read and write for it threatened the labor hierarchy and the institution of slavery (Woodson, 1915). The pursuit of education became evermore important for Blacks after slavery because it served as a promise for freedom and racial uplift.

After the Reconstruction Period (1865-1877) and landmark legislation (such as *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954) pushing for the development of education for all Americans, the introduction of new educational opportunities greatly influenced Black students' decision to attend HBCUs. However, by the early 20th century, African American student enrollment at HBCUs began to decline. According to data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), there was a continual decline in African American student enrollment at HBCUs that started in the early part of the 20th century (NCES, 1995, 2004). From the second half of the 20th century to the present, there have been several prevailing factors that jeopardize the future of HBCUs: (a) looming financial

issues (Cantey, Bland, Mack, & Joy-Davis, 2012; Minor, 2008; Stuart, 2012),

(b) accreditation concerns (Fester, Gasman, & Nguyen, 2012), and (c) negative media

attention (Gasman, 2006, 2007; Gasman & Bowman, 2011; Jencks & Riesman, 1967).

Although HBCUs have played a major role (both historically and contemporarily) in the

education of African Americans (Albritton, 2012; Anderson, 1988; Cantey et al., 2012;

Franklin & Savage, 2004; Freeman, 1999; Kim & Conrad, 2006; Perna, 2001; Thompson,

2008; Wiggan, 2011; Woodson, 1915), one is left to wonder about the continued

significance of these institutions in the future. If HBCUs are looking to African

Americans as their primary constituency for enrollment, then it should be imperative that

these institutions obtain feedback on how this demographic perceives these institutions

when considering which college to attend.

Substantial literature illustrates HBCUs' historical and continuing contributions to

the African American community (Anderson, 1988; Davis, 1998; Franklin & Savage,

2004; Gasman, 2007; Jackson, 2001; Wiggan, 2011). Many researchers attribute HBCUs

with providing students with cultural value, social empowerment, and the development of

racial identities and attitudes (Brown, Ricard, & Donahoo, 2004; Franklin & Savage,

2004; Gasman, 2006; Lovett, 2011). These traits are consistently identified as being part

of an HBCU environment. It should then be recognized that Black students who attend

HBCUs participate in what shall be termed as a *Black college experience*. Davis (2006)

discusses the HBCU experience as one that is characteristic of institutional family,

cultural immersion, and universal inclusion. That is, in the Black college setting, students

feel more connected to the faculty, staff, and their peers through social activities and

organizations; all of which help to solidify common cultural values and bonds. Therefore,

this study seeks to examine African American college-bound teens' reasons for selecting and attending an HBCU. Additionally, there is a need to consider if student perspectives are related to the declining 21st century Black enrollment at HBCUs.

<div align="center">Contemporary Issues Facing HBCUs</div>

HBCUs are recognized for continuing to produce the largest number of African American undergraduates in the nation; however, perceptions surrounding the historical and contemporary role of these institutions continue to challenge their intellectual and cultural vitality. In other words, HBCUs were perceived as important when African Americans were unable to gain access to higher education at other institutions of higher learning. More recently, many question if HBCUs are still relevant since African American students are often able to pursue multiple opportunities in higher learning. In addition to decreased enrollment, policies and funding (Cantey et al., 2012; Minor, 2008; Stuart, 2012), negative media attention (Gasman, 2006, 2007; Gasman & Bowman, 2011), and accreditation concerns (Fester et al., 2012) are some of the issues that HBCUs must mediate.

Minor (2008) has discussed the issues related to HBCUs in regards to financial challenges, anti-affirmative action policies, and competition from Predominately White Institutions (PWIs) and community colleges. Minor (2008) explains that much of the confusion about the role of HBCUs rested on where they were historically and what they are becoming contemporarily. Historically, HBCUs chiefly served African Americans. However, affirmative action allowed for shifts in enrollment among all public higher education institutions. As a result, some opponents to affirmative action see HBCUs—or any institution that is premised and operated to serve a racial minority student

population—as unnecessary and unjustifiable in a contemporary sense. Still, HBCUs remain an important vehicle that helps provide African Americans access to postsecondary education. Minor (2008) argues that three elements are needed to understand the contemporary role of HBCUs: (a) assessment of enrollment trends over the last few decades; (b) legal sanctions that have influenced HBCU infrastructures; and (c) the relationship that racial context has as a variable in education attainment. He asserts that despite Civil Rights triumphs through legislation in the late 20th and early 21st century, Mississippi has still found a way to segregate higher education opportunities. Mississippi has restricted access by race to state colleges by promoting disparities in admission policies, academic programs, and funding. Specifically, "other race" decrees (funding tied to non-Blacks being enrolled, recruited, hired, and awarded scholarships) have been imposed that support greater enrollment stipulations which ultimately increase an institutions' eligibility to receive state funding (Minor, 2008). Given such racially restrictive and unchallenged policies, Minor (2008) contends that the survival of HBCUs will depend on how successful these institutions are in convincing the public that their mission is the education of all people, regardless of their race.

These findings are consistent with NCES data from 2004 and 2012. National college enrollment for African Americans has increased. Among public HBCUs, African Americans are still the greatest enrollment constituents; however, as NCES (2013) data reveals, the number of African American students entering and attending HBCUs continues to decline (see Table 1). Cantey et al. (2012) concur and also recognize that decreased enrollment must be countered with new initiatives in technology, the

recruitment and retention of high quality faculty, and by modeling Black success through increasing the presence of African American faculty who hold PhDs.

Negative publicity and media coverage is another issue that plagues 21st century perceptions of HBCUs. Former Harvard University professors Christopher Jencks and David Riesman deemed HBCUs as "academically inferior institutions" because of their inability to recruit and maintain White students, failed administrative leadership, and lack of financial resources (Jencks & Reisman, 1967, p. 4). Jencks and Riesman's challengeable contentions were only published in the *Harvard Educational Review*, but were later distributed to other news outlets. Their article received widespread attention and helped to promulgate a negative perception to the general public about Black colleges and their effectiveness.

Jencks and Riesman were challenged by Gasman, who debunked their findings. In a positive presentation of HBCUs, Gasman (2006) focused on the near universal financial contributions that have been made to the United Negro College Fund and the Black community's efforts in reshaping and restoring the image and reputation of HBCUs. Gasman (2006) proposed that even subsequent to the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* legislation that passed unanimously in May, 1954 (The Leadership Conference, 2014), HBCUs are important because they serve as a vehicle for Black intellect and continue to provide access and opportunity for African Americans. Gasman (2007) also investigated the media's coverage. Her work revealed how the faults of a few institutions have extrapolated into damaging, broad generalizations for all HBCUs. Gasman (2007) also suggests an ulterior agenda by the media with regards to their claim

to exercise fair reporting practices when addressing racial issues such as the future of

Black higher education. Gasman (2007) notes:

> With very little background or knowledge of the history of these institutions, the media is contributing to a discourse on Black colleges, which contains catchphrases that are used continuously, picked up by politicians, policymakers, and academics, and thrust into the public domain. For example, the frame of financial problems at Morris Brown combined with the theme of the decline of Black colleges easily gave rise to a discourse on the "taint of inferiority" left over from segregation. (p. 131)

She argues for HBCUs to become more forthright in exposing unfair and biased media

coverage, and suggests that these institutions become more assertive and aggressive in

getting their stories out to the public instead of allowing such outlets to set the agenda.

Matthews and Hawkins (2006) note that HBCU administration and leadership

should showcase how institutions that are in need of additional support are still striving

and thriving, in spite of tribulation. They elaborate:

> Despite their problems—fractured budgets, ailing and aging infrastructures, and revolving door leadership—they continue to do more with less while managing to outpace majority institutions in training and producing the majority of the nation's Black teachers, preachers, social workers, lawyers, doctors, journalists, engineers, and scholars. (Matthews & Hawkins, 2006, p. 37)

However, Gasman and Bowman (2011) discuss that research supporting the idea that

HBCU faculty and administration prove to persevere due to their ability to mitigate

institutional resources despite cutbacks does not help to secure additional support for

these institutions. They posit that in order for HBCUs to be taken more seriously, these

institutions need to be part of the mainstream discussion regarding higher education

systems. Additionally, Gasman and Bowman (2011) advocate for fair media coverage

and emphasize the need of HBCUs to become more proactive by engaging and

interacting with news outlets.

Stuart (2012) also discusses some of the challenges that HBCUs currently face in a constantly evolving higher education climate. HBCUs are in dire need of realignment in terms of (a) finding new and sustainable funding sources, (b) dealing with pressures to recruit and retain academically qualified students, (c) improving completion and matriculation ratings, and (d) growing non-Black enrollment and STEM programs in order to increase access to federal funding. Stuart (2012) notes that institutions such as Jackson State University are moving forward with technological initiatives such as increasing their programs for non-traditional students to include online and distance learning courses, as well as providing e-learning resources for traditional students. These new initiatives aim to impact the traditional classroom model in order to become more viable, competitive, and sustainable in the higher education arena (Stuart, 2012).

Fester, Gasman, and Nguyen (2012) conducted a literature review on accreditation standards in relation to HBCUs. Their findings concluded that there is a lack of research on accreditation measures with regards to the process. As a result of misunderstanding how to pursue accreditation measures, some HBCUs are unable to receive adequate funding (federal and other) in order to support and sustain academic programs at the institution–this ultimately undermines their credibility when compared to other postsecondary institutions. Gasman and Nguyen (2012) challenged national accreditation agencies because they found that standards were not specific to the institution's type or program. In other words, the mandates increase disproportionalities because HBCUs do not have the same amount of financial resources as PWIs. Gasman and Nguyen (2012) conclude it is evident that HBCUs are heavily scrutinized in the higher education arena, despite having a proven track record of success through

undergraduate completion and matriculation, and by continuing its existence amidst financial and political restraints imposed by state and federal guidelines. Regrettably, the declining enrollment among Black students and contemporary issues facing these institutions force many to consider the future and continued existence of HBCUs.

Historical and Social Context of Education for Blacks

To understand how HBCUs contribute to African American education, there must first be a brief discussion on the history and education of Blacks that dates back to 1619 when indentured servants from Barbados were transported to Jamestown, Virginia. Slavery emerged as the labor system within 60 years of their arrival. While there were some free Blacks in the area, most African descendants were brought to Virginia as slaves by the Dutch West India Company in 1619. As communication between slaveholders and slaves and free Blacks and Whites deteriorated throughout the 17th century, the degradation, dehumanization, and negating of Black citizenship rights encouraged racial stratification and the ongoing linkage of Black skin and race to enslavement (Anderson, 1988; Woodson, 1915).

In this context of evolving racism, historian and educator, Carter G. Woodson (1915) discussed Black education. Woodson divided pre-emancipation or the pre-1861 era into two periods: (a) the introduction of slavery when debates ensued regarding whether slaves should be educated, and (b) the Industrial Revolution where slavery transitioned into an economic institution and intelligent African Americans organized attempts—in spite of servitude—to be educated and freed. During Woodson's Industrial Revolution era, advocates of education for African Americans were one of the following: (a) slave masters who stood to economically benefit from an educated labor force,

(b) reformers/abolitionists who wanted to help enslaved and free born African descendant people, or (c) those looking to proselytize slaves into Christianity (Anderson, 1988; Woodson, 1915). Beginning in 1441, Pope Eugene IV authorized the creation of crusading as a means of colonizing continental Africa. Woodson (1915) recalled:

> With all of these new opportunities Negroes exhibited a rapid mental development. Intelligent colored men proved to be useful and trustworthy servants; they became much better laborers and artisans, and many of them showed administrative ability adequate to the management of business establishments and large plantations. Moreover, better rudimentary education served many ambitious persons of color as a stepping stone–to higher attainments. Negroes learned to appreciate and write poetry and contributed something to mathematics, science, and philosophy. Furthermore, having disproved the theories of their mental inferiority, some of the race, in conformity with the suggestion of Cotton Mather, were employed to teach white children. (p. 5)

The effort to establish schools specifically for African American children emerged, and these schools provided courses relevant to work demands, as well as programs in the arts and sciences. From this time period (1600s) through 1835, there were some White citizens who taught the slaves how to read and write the English language. This brought about much debate—an African American slave who could read, write, and communicate with those served to be useful not only with labor demands, but also in handling administrative tasks, managing businesses, and educating others– including the slaveholder's children and those of other slaves. However, White settlers who stood in opposition of educating Blacks argued that if slavery was to continue, slaves would have to remain in the dark–in the lowest state of ignorance (Anderson, 1988). The rise of production and plantation crops in the South called for more slaves, and many Southerners decided that it would be more profitable to work a slave to death instead of teaching them how to read or write (Woodson, 1915).

Fugitive slaves and freed African Americans who lived in the Northern states organized to attain access to schooling. Their efforts yielded considerable challenges to their status as citizens with the right to public education. At the same time, White Christian ministers provided learning opportunities in the form of memory training and religious instruction (Anderson, 1988; Morgan, 1995; Woodson, 1915). These learning techniques by memorization quickly spread and those who opposed the education of Blacks became even more aggressive with legislation prohibiting any form of instruction for "Negroes." It is fitting to mention here that as early as 1740, North Carolina was one of the first states to pass legislation that prohibited slave education. In spite of these attempts to prevent Black education, abolitionists continued to defy these laws because adhering to them would only stifle their own efforts to either have an efficient labor force or disseminate principles of Christianity (Anderson, 1988).

With the spread of Christianity, less concerted efforts were made to break up secret schools (schools created by African Americans hidden from plantation owners in order to teach basic reading and writing skills) (Woodson, 1915). Some plantation owners and White settlers observed that those who could read the Bible and learn for themselves remained loyal and subordinate to their slaveholders because they were generally taught to be submissive to Whites (Woodson, 1915). The relocation of African Americans to areas in eastern and northern America came with the help of philanthropic organizations (such as the American Missionary Association) and abolitionists who colonized freed and fugitive slaves. By 1840, this force of educated northern African Americans was pivotal and with the help of such supporters, they helped to make higher education opportunities possible (Anderson, 1988; Jackson, 2001; Watkins, 2001).

The physical and mental bonds of slavery posed limitations to an African American's access to education; however, Anderson (1988) elaborated that slaves remained persistent by teaching each other in secret and creating independent Black schools. Additionally, some liberal White colleges in the northern states provided educational opportunities for Blacks prior to Reconstruction. Most notably, Alexander Lucius Twilight was the first African American to receive a college degree in North America from Middlebury College in 1823 (Journal of Blacks in Higher Education [JBHE], 2013). Additionally, in 1826, Edward Jones was the first African American graduate of Amherst College (Amherst College, n.d.) and in the same year, John Brown Russwurm became the first African American graduate of Bowdoin College (Bowdoin College Library, n.d.).

Formation of Schools for African Americans

The Reconstruction Period marked the Civil War Amendments—freedoms granted in order to gain support and participation in the Civil War—from 1861 to1865. It should be noted that Blacks earned their freedoms by fighting in the Civil War and as a result, they were freed from slavery (13th Amendment), provided greater legal rights (14th Amendment), and the right to vote (15th Amendment) from provisions in the U.S. Constitution. The Emancipation Proclamation (1863) provided Blacks with opportunities to begin establishing themselves as citizens; however, there was still great discontent for African Americans in the South. In fact, slaves in the South did not find out that they were free until two and a half years after the Emancipation Proclamation was signed (History of Juneteenth, n.d.). Anderson (1988) explains that ex-slaves coming out of the Civil War were the first to "crusade for the state systems of common schools" (p. 148)

for Black children, but this was only the case in northern and New England states. It was not until the early part of the 20th century that Black children were given access to mainstream public elementary school education in the South. Access to learning occurred long after common schools were developed for other American school children from the 1830s through the 1860s. Anderson (1988) argues that as a result, resources for Black education were limited because public school funds (money collected through taxation) were being allocated primarily to White schools for White children.

The Freedmen's Bureau in particular, along with Northern philanthropists, helped to establish formal schooling and education for Black children in the South (Anderson, 1988; Morgan, 1995; Watkins, 2001). Originally known as the U.S. Bureau of Refugees, Freedman, and Abandoned Lands, the Freedman's Bureau helped to establish more than 4,000 public elementary and secondary schools for African Americans (Holmes, 1934; Jackson, 2001). Watkins (2001) elaborates on the influence northern philanthropists and missionary societies made with regards to educating African Americans. Watkins (2001) states:

> They were a part of the cultural and religious evolution of the South, they accepted an evolutionary view of societal change, they espoused the paternal social and racial relations of the South, they accepted the emergent corporate-industrial economic arrangements as modernization, and they were willing and eager participants in educating minorities. Although accepting of America's economic order, the missionary leaders were fervent believers in education as a tool for racial advancement. (p. 15)

However, Anderson (1988) asserts that northern philanthropy was ill-fitting for educating African Americans in that White missionary teachers were incompetent when compared to their counterparts at White institutions. Additionally, others posit that philanthropic efforts were really intended to exercise political and social ideology related to social

servitude (and dominance) over Blacks (Watkins, 2001; Wiggan, 2011). Woodson (1933)

elaborates:

> The unfortunate successors of the Northern missionary teachers of Negroes,
> however, have thoroughly demonstrated that they have no useful function in the
> life of the Negro. They have not the spirit of their predecessors and do not
> measure up to the requirements of educators desired in accredited colleges. If
> Negro institutions are to be as efficient as those for the whites in the South the
> same high standard for the educators to direct them should be maintained. (p. 17)

Anderson (1988) adds:

> Equality was carefully defined as political and legal equality. They [northern
> missionaries] consented to inequality in the economic structure, generally shied
> away from questions of racial integration, and were convinced that black's
> cultural and religious values were inferior to those of middle-class whites.
> (p. 241)

In this sentiment, Anderson (1988) illustrates that with regard to postsecondary

institutions established for African Americans, political and legal equality was dictated

and maintained by northern philanthropist organizations. Finally, Anderson and Moss

(1999) note:

> Philanthropists created and supported schools, argue some scholars, as a means to
> achieve larger goals, particularly the maintenance of social peace after the Civil
> War and the creation of a class of submissive workers. (p. 1)

Still, with the combined efforts of the Freedman's Bureau and missionary

organizations, HBCUs began to emerge to help educate African Americans. Most

notably, Howard University was established by the Freedman's Bureau and chartered by

the U.S. Congress in 1867. Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute (currently known

as Hampton University) was founded by the American Missionary Association (AMA)

and Freedman's Bureau in 1868 (Anderson & Moss, 1999; Fields & Murty, 2012;

Jackson, 2001). Additional schools formed by the AMA included: Atlanta University

[1865], Fisk University [1866], Talladega College [1867], and Tugaloo Institute [1869]

(Anderson, 1988; Fields & Murty, 2012; Wiggan, 2011). Wiggan (2011) highlighted the formation of Atlanta University in the state of Georgia and provided ample discussion on how the AMA was instrumental in providing higher education to Blacks in the South through the founding of the school. These schools were used primarily to teach former slaves to read and to train Black clergymen (Anderson, 1988; Fields & Murty, 2012).

Other religious affiliates that helped to establish HBCUs included organizations such as the American Baptist Home Mission Society, established in 1824, whose main mission was to "preach the gospel, establish churches and support ministry among the unchurched and destitute" (American Baptist Home Mission Societies, 2007, para. 2). This organization founded the Augusta Institute in Augusta (currently known as Morehouse College) in 1867, and others: Virginia Union University (1865), Shaw University (1865), and Benedict College (1870) (Fields & Murty, 2012). Additionally, the Methodist Episcopal (ME) Church helped to establish Morgan State College (currently Morgan State University) in 1866 and Rust College in 1867 (Anderson, 1988; Fields & Murty, 2012). During the Reconstruction Period, northern ME churches supported freedom initiatives for African Americans. In fact, disputes between northern and southern ME church leaders over slavery placed great difficulty on the role of the church for the first half of the 19th century (Carwardine, 2000). Notwithstanding the American Home Baptist Mission Society and the ME church's contributions in promoting postsecondary education for African Americans, it is important to note that all of these institutions chiefly relied on the Freedman's Bureau, AMA, and church affiliations for financial support.

With regards to Black church groups and the formation of HBCUs, the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) and specifically, Bishop Richard Allen, have been recognized for providing higher educational opportunities for African Americans across the entire country (Wiggan, 2011). In addition to Allen serving as a chief leader in the AME ministry, he also developed the African Society for the Education of Youth (African American Registry, 2000). Some of the institutions established under the AME church included Wilberforce University (1856) and Paul Quinn College (1872) (Fields & Murty, 2012; Jackson, 2001). The African Methodist Episcopal Church Zion (AMEZ) also established Livingstone College, Clinton Junior College, and Lomax-Hannon College (Fields & Murty, 2012; Watkins, 2001). Finally, institutions such as Lane College, Paine College, Texas College, and Miles Memorial were founded by the Colored Methodist Episcopal (CME) Church (Anderson, 1988). The aims of these institutions were to promote religious and spiritual education and principles, along with helping students to develop a sense of social responsibility and Black consciousness.

Corporate philanthropic groups were another contributor to the formation and continuation of private HBCUs. Watkins (2001) notes:

> Race philanthropy was ideally suited to educating Blacks as well as other minorities. The building and support of schools, the training of teachers, and, very important, the construction of curriculum could be accomplished handily by corporate philanthropies. (p. 19)

He elaborates that corporate contributors such as the Slater Fund, Rosenwald Fund, Peabody Education Fund, Rockefeller, Carnegie, and Ford foundations and many others provided financial support to HBCUs. As a result, their political and ideological perspectives on education for Blacks, which privileged vocational training, were disseminated by Whites. In fact, a division between corporate philanthropists and

northern missionary organizations existed with regard to educational aims; corporate entities more heavily supported industrialized models, whereas northern philanthropists were proponents of classical liberal arts education (Anderson, 1988).

Following the Reconstruction Period, public HBCUs (schools funded by state and federal monies) were formed primarily to provide industrial, agricultural, and mechanical training for Blacks; yet, these schools did not initially confer baccalaureate degrees. Public HBCUs were also created to prevent Blacks from attending White land-grant colleges which had received federal funding from the First Morrill Act in 1862 (Fields & Murty, 2012; Library of Congress, n.d.). However, the Second Morrill Act of 1890 required states with segregated higher education systems to provide land-grant institutions for African Americans. Additionally, the U.S. Supreme Court case *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896, mandated that states provide separate but equal educational accommodations for African Americans. This, however, never was the case. Thomas (1997) elaborates:

> Legally, the case created precedent for a comprehensive set of laws that regulated the lives of "whites" and "coloreds" in the South until 1954. Its symbolic importance is harder to determine, but clearly when the highest court in the land ruled that states could claim that legislation separating the races promoted the public good, it sent a message that African Americans would find little support from the federal judiciary. (p. 170)

In understanding the historical and racial context of this case, *Plessy v. Ferguson* justified the need for and established formation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), an organization dedicated to overturning segregation and racially-biased legislation in the United States. Additionally, this case was particularly important in the fight to provide access and opportunity through public HBCUs because these institutions were unequal to PWIs in funding sources, degree programs, and overall

resources from their founding onward into the 20th century. Public higher education in the South during the 19th century served as a resource for building Black human, social, and economic capital–as the two most popular professions of graduates were teachers and clergymen (Anderson, 1988; Morgan, 1995; Wiggan, 2011).

Jackson (2001) notes that by 1880, 30% of the Black population nationwide was literate. More than 40 higher education institutions for African Americans (both private and public) were spread out across the nation. Schools were and are continually categorized as: public 2- and 4-year colleges/universities, private 4-year colleges/universities, and land-grant institutions. The ways in which these institutions were categorized were directly related to their funding sources. That is, many private institutions began and continue to operate with the support of philanthropic efforts and/or religious affiliations, whereas others are funded by the state through land-grants or other resources.

By 1900, approximately 2,600 African Americans had postsecondary credentials; however, only 55% of the population was considered literate (Jackson, 2001). Still, there was a continual push among Black advocates for African Americans to attain education through HBCUs. Notable scholars such as W. E. B. Du Bois, Alain Locke, and Carter G. Woodson, emerged to form a new group of Black scholars and leaders. Additionally, organizations such the NAACP in 1909 and the National Urban League in 1910, were founded in order to advocate for African American educational and civil rights. In 1915, Carter G. Woodson initiated the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (currently in operation today as the Association for the Study of African American Life and History). Shortly thereafter, in 1916, he began the publication of *The Journal of*

Negro History which is now the *Journal of African American History* (Jackson, 2001).

By 1927, there were 77 Black colleges and universities and over 14,000 students enrolled

(Jackson, 2001). In 1944, the United Negro College Fund (UNCF), a consortium of 39

private HBCUs, was incorporated with the main purpose of providing scholarships to

students, raising funds for member institutions, and enhancing the overall quality of

education for Black college attendees (United Negro College Fund, n.d.).

<center>National Initiatives and HBCU Enrollment</center>

Although there were initiatives for HBCUs and enrollment increases, challenges

pertaining to educational access and opportunity were still prevalent. As early as 1787, a

group of Black Bostonians petitioned to the Massachusetts legislature to rally for

common school education for their children (Martin, 1998). Within the northern region,

this act and many others during this era helped to position the *Roberts v. City of Boston*

case in 1849, which fought for Black inclusion in Boston common schools (Martin,

1998). Following *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896 (as discussed earlier), in 1950, the landmark

case *Sweatt v. Painter*, a Black student's denied access to enroll in a Texas law school,

challenged the separate but equal doctrine. In the same year, the court case *McLaurin v.*

Oklahoma State Regents proved the separate but equal clause inequitable in providing

educational opportunities to a Black school teacher who decided to pursue a graduate

degree at the University of Oklahoma (Martin, 1998). These cases were paramount in

establishing grounds as to why "separate but equal" was not equal. Soon after, the 1954

landmark legislation, *Brown v. Board of Education*, declared apartheid schooling

unconstitutional. However, it's important to note that although this powerful piece of

legislation crippled school segregation, it did not end it and, in some cases, the mandate

did little to change the systems of educational inequities for Blacks. Martin (1998)

elaborates:

> Thus, while *Brown* ended legalized Jim Crow in public school education, it did
> not end untold varieties of voluntary and actual racial segregation. Similarly,
> *Brown's* haphazard and varying nationwide implementation has not yielded the
> racially integrated elementary and secondary schools or equality of educational
> opportunity envisioned in the flush of its immediate afterglow. Likewise, in spite
> of federal mandates that the dual (separate white and black) college and university
> systems in various southern states be integrated, racially identifiable institutions
> persist: better-funded predominately white ones and less well-funded historically
> black colleges and universities. (p. 231)

In this sentiment, Martin (1998) shares how even with federal mandates to end racial

segregation in schools, educational inequities continued. Charles Hamilton Houston and

Thurgood Marshall are fitting to mention here for their contributions in dismantling the

"separate but equal" doctrine (NAACP, n.d.). A decade later, the Civil Rights Act of

1964 outlawed discrimination against race, religion, and gender. Additionally, the Voting

Rights Act of 1965 ended unequal voter registration requirements and racial segregation

in schools and the workplace. The affirmative action policies and practices established

allowed for equal access to opportunities, in particular, admission policies permitted

minorities access into predominately White collegiate institutions. However, it could also

be argued that these same policies provided more financial restrictions on HBCUs

because these institutions now had to admit non-Black students. By 1969, the National

Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education (NAFEO) was founded. This

organization was established by HBCU presidents and serves as an international advocate

for preserving, building, and sustaining HBCUs and predominately Black institutions

(PBIs). Since its founding, NAFEO has served as a policy advocate for the 118

established HBCUs (Jackson, 2001; NAFEO, n.d.).

In the 1970s, college integration became more preeminent because of the Civil Rights Movement and the Civil Rights Act of 1964. As a result, only 34% of Black students in college attended HBCUs. In 1980, President Jimmy Carter declared a federal initiative (Executive Order 12232) to help provide funding to HBCUs. In 1981, under the Ronald Reagan Administration, cutbacks in federal funds awarded to education placed HBCUs in a state of financial peril. In 1992, *U.S. v. Fordice* found that even though public universities in Mississippi eliminated racially charged admissions policies that would deny African Americans from attending, the modification of these admission standards were still discriminatory, and continued to suppress the number of Black students who would be admitted. This court ruling helped to solidify race-neutral admission practices at PWIs under the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment. However, the pendulum swung in both directions for admission policies. That is, as race-neutral practices at PWIs were expected to increase so an institution would not be subject to less federal funding, HBCUs were also urged to increase their non-Black student enrollment or relinquish federal monies. This is evident in research conducted by Minor (2008), who noted how Black colleges in Mississippi were deemed ineligible to receive funding as a result of not meeting non-Black student enrollee quotas that were set by the state. With regard to public colleges and universities in the South, funding disparities similar to the Mississippi case was the norm.

Despite inequitable opportunities in enrollment, Black students are persistent in their goals to pursue higher education. With regard to admission, African American students are 11% more likely than Whites to enroll in a college/university after graduating from high school (Perna, 2000). National data in college enrollment reveals

that the percentage of Black students attending college has been steadily increasing since the late 1970s (NCES, 2012). In 1976, 10% of the overall college population was Black, whereas in 2011, African American students accounted for 15% (NCES, 2013). The increased enrollment among African Americans since the 1970s can be attributed to the influx of students attending HBCUs, as well as state-level racial integration measures subsequent to the *Brown* legislation that have encouraged students to consider PWIs as another viable avenue in pursuing a college degree.

Black students' decisions, however, on which institutions to attend have been changing ever since *Brown*. With regard to HBCUs, the number of students enrolled has gradually increased since the late 1970s, and most notably, national data highlights the growing number of non-Black students at these institutions (as illustrated in Table 1). Table 1 reveals enrollment for non-Black student populations since 1976 has increased to nearly 19% at HBCUs. In comparison, the Black student population at HBCUs has slightly decreased from 85% to 81% respectively. This gradual trend demonstrates that while HBCU enrollment is on the rise, Black student populations at these institutions are decreasing. According to the U.S. Department of Education (NCES, 2013), in 2011, the total number of African Americans enrolled in U.S. accredited institutions was approximately three million, but only 9% of those students were enrolled in HBCUs, which accounted for 323,616 students. The remaining 91% of African American students are enrolled in public and private PWIs, two-year institutions, or non-degree granting institutions (NCES, 2013).

Table 1: Fall enrollment at HBCUs (1976-2011)

Year	Black Population	Total Population	% Non-Blacks	% Blacks
1976	190,305	222,613	14.6	85.4
1980	190,989	233,557	18.3	81.7
1982	182,639	228,371	20.1	79.9
1984	180,803	227,519	20.6	79.4
1986	178,628	223,275	20.0	80.0
1988	194,151	239,755	19.1	80.9
1990	208,682	257,152	18.9	81.1
1991	218,366	269,335	19.0	81.0
1992	228,963	279,541	18.1	81.9
1993	231,198	282,856	18.3	81.7
1994	230,162	280,071	17.9	82.1
1995	229,418	278,725	17.7	82.3
1996	224,201	273,018	17.9	82.1
1997	222,331	269,167	17.5	82.5
1998	223,745	273,472	18.2	81.8
1999	226,592	274,321	17.4	82.6
2000	227,239	275,680	17.6	82.4
2001	238,638	289,985	17.8	82.2
2002	247,292	299,041	17.4	82.6
2003	253,257	306,727	17.5	82.5
2004	257,545	308,939	16.7	83.3
2005	256,584	311,768	17.8	82.2
2006	255,150	308,774	17.4	82.6
2007	253,415	306,515	17.4	82.6
2008	258,403	313,491	17.6	82.4
2009	264,090	322,789	18.2	81.8
2010	265,911	326,614	18.6	81.4
2011	263,414	323,616	18.9	81.1

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Higher Education General Information Survey (HEGIS), "Fall Enrollment in Colleges and Universities," 1976 through 1985 surveys; Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), "Fall Enrollment Survey" (IPEDS-EF:86-99); and IPEDS Spring 2001 through Spring 2012, Enrollment component. (This table was prepared January 2013.)

When considering declining enrollment trends among Black students at HBCUs, some research points to federal legislation as a causal factor. Because of its pernicious impact on HBCU attendance, Democratic U.S. Representative Mel Watt from North Carolina critiqued the federal loan policy changes made to the Parent Plus Loan in 2011.

The policy revisions expanded the measuring criteria for a family's credit history and its influences on declining student enrollment at HBCUs. According to Watt (as cited by Morrill, 2013), only 27% of applicants at HBCUs were approved for Parent Plus Loans; for the 2013-2014 academic year, this figure dropped to 7%. This dramatic decrease in approval ratings for financial aid has adverse effects on students because, as cited in the literature, financial aid serves as a significant factor in college choice (Freeman, 1999). If students (and their parents) are not approved for financial loans, this decision increases the likelihood that they will not attend. In this case, public HBCUs stand to be greatly affected when considering that: (a) the cost of tuition is considerably less than other public and private universities; and (b) Black students are the predominant population.

While Black student enrollment at HBCUs continues to decline, this is also the case at more selective postsecondary institutions. University-wide policies created to increase student diversity at PWIs are creating enrollment disparities for Black collegians. Perna et al. (2006) used national data on postsecondary enrollment to reveal inequities facing African Americans in attendance and completion of bachelor degrees in southern and southern-border states. They concluded that Black undergraduate enrollment in these states was more dependent upon institution type. For example, public flagship institutions illustrated the greatest inequities in diversity enrollment and graduation rates, and were less reliant on federal mandates or compliance to desegregate public higher education institutions. In other words, researchers found that educational inequities for African Americans existed among the more selective institutions within the state. That is, for these particular colleges/universities, both student enrollment and graduation rates for African Americans were low. This research is particularly important

because these regions have historically gipped African Americans out of educational

access and opportunity. Additionally, these are areas where HBCUs are more

prominent—and for good reason—Black communities had to create educational

opportunities for students even though governmental influence was supposed to level the

playing field in higher education for Blacks (Franklin & Savage, 2004).

<div align="center">HBCU Matriculation and Life Outcomes of Graduates</div>

Despite enrollment trends, HBCUs have awarded more bachelor's degrees to

African Americans than any other postsecondary institution type (Richards & Awokoya,

2012). Some research asserts that HBCU environments help Black students to pursue

advanced level degrees (Albritton, 2012; Kim & Conrad, 2006; Thompson, 2008). Of

approximately 31,000 bachelor's degrees earned at public and private HBCUs during

2009-2010, African American students who were conferred degrees accounted for 86%

(Snyder & Dillow, 2012). Awokoya, Richards, and Myrick-Harris (2012) elaborate on

the academic success and social mobility of HBCUs:

> An analysis of the 2011 college rankings published by the *Washington Monthly*
> reveals that historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) outperform
> many non-HBCUs, including some of the country's best known and prestigious
> institutions. (p. 3)

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (2010) reported on the educational effectiveness of

HBCUs and confirmed many existing trends in the success of these institutions.

According to the study, students who attended an HBCU experienced a greater likelihood

and persistence to graduation when compared to Black attendees of PWIs. Additionally,

students attending HBCUs were considered more participatory in democratic societal

practices that included "charitable giving, political participation, religious participation,

and propensity to major in the physical sciences" (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights,

2010, p. 2). Price, Spriggs, and Swinton (2011) also found that due to the supportive environment and nurturing nature of HBCUs, its graduates have higher earnings and greater educational justification in their fields when compared to non-HBCU counterparts.

Interestingly, research correlates socioeconomic status (SES) to degree attainment and matriculation for African Americans. Using longitudinal data, Walpole (2008) investigated social class effects on the college experiences and outcomes of African American students at both HBCUs and PWIs. Correlational data and logistic regressions revealed that students with lower SES levels were less involved academically, received lower grade ratings, and held work obligations outside of college when compared to their peers with high SES levels. Additionally, graduates that originated from lower SES backgrounds had lower aspirations and completion ratings, were less likely to pursue advanced degrees, and continually held positions with lower incomes when compared to their counterparts. Findings from this study further support the relationship between SES and college, and career and life outcomes for African Americans.

Additionally, HBCUs seem to transcend the obstacles associated with postsecondary education by providing students with valuable collegiate experiences that will also serve them well in their personal and professional pursuits. It should be noted that these findings support literature that discusses the historical persistence that African Americans have had in attaining advanced level degrees. Edward Bouchet [Yale University, 1876], Eva B. Dykes [Radcliffe College, 1921], Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander [University of Pennsylvania, 1921], and Georgiana R. Simpson [University of

Chicago, 1921] all serve as exemplars for being the first African Americans to earn

doctorate degrees (JBHE, n.d.).

On the contrary, Kim and Conrad (2006) found that students who attended PWIs

and HBCUs had the exact same level of degree aspirations despite having different

socioeconomic backgrounds. African American students at PWIs tended to be from

families with higher parental incomes and academic preparation; African American

students at HBCUs were less academically prepared than their counterparts at PWIs. Pitre

(2006) investigated how African American students' perceptions of high school

preparation influenced their desire to attend college. Findings revealed that students who

felt that high school did not prepare them sufficiently for college were less likely to

aspire to attain higher education. This study is particularly important because it sheds

light on how students' aspirations for attending college are also determined by their

feelings and conceptions concerning their academic preparation from high school.

Research has also found that institutional resources and faculty characteristics at

institutions also differed significantly; both of which were related to degree completion

among African Americans (Kim & Conrad, 2006). PWIs provided greater access to

resources and expenditures for students and had higher percentages of faculty with PhDs,

whereas HBCUs had higher student-faculty interaction and lower student-faculty ratios.

These factors contribute to the success and degree completion ratings of African

American students at both institutions.

HBCUs help to advance African American students' aims in higher education. In

her study, Fleming (1984) elaborates on how African American males benefit mostly

from HBCUs; this particular demographic had the most social and academic gains during

their years in college. In another study, Warde (2008) conducted interviews with African American male HBCU graduates to determine the factors that positively contributed to their degree completion and found that the most important factor was students' own realizations of the value of higher education, despite societal circumstances. These findings were consistent with historical aims of education for African Americans in that it was viewed as a key to freedom. Additionally, Warde (2008) mentioned that access to resources, mentorship, and developing traits of resiliency were factors that allowed students to persist to graduation.

HBCUs also serve as an important contributor in promoting African Americans' participation in the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields (Parks, 2003; Perna, 2001; Solorzano, 1995). More specifically, Perna et al. (2009) conducted a case study to identify institutional characteristics, policies, and practices that attributed to the success and promotion of African American women in the STEM fields. Using Spelman College as the institutional model, findings derived from this study include the following: (a) students choose to attend Spelman because of its reputation for promoting women in the STEM fields; (b) students enter Spelman and maintain their educational and occupational goals and aspirations to persist to graduation; (c) Spelman college and its constituents acknowledge barriers that African American women face in the STEM field; and (d) Spelman College attempts to counteract such barriers by providing support services, research opportunities, and cooperative learning settings for its students (Perna et al., 2009). In this way, the literature helps to solidify the notion that HBCUs are helping African American students to successfully matriculate through some of the most difficult and competitive career fields.

Statement of the Problem

The future of HBCUs is at risk for several reasons. First, the continual decline in Black student enrollment questions the historical relevancy and contemporary viability of HBCUs. Second, HBCUs face financial challenges with limitations imposed from federal and state legislation combined with a lack of external funding sources which makes self-sustainability extremely difficult. Next, when compared to a PWI, many question whether a degree from an HBCU will provide social and upward mobility for graduates. For these reasons, there is a need to examine Black student perspectives and how these views can shape and inform future practices in continuing the HBCU tradition of providing access and opportunity in postsecondary education for African Americans.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to investigate Black students' perceptions about attending an HBCU, and how their choices in what school they attend influence the Black enrollment of these institutions. Additionally, it is important to know how a student's connection to African American culture and history may or may not influence their decision to attend an HBCU. Investigating the perspectives of African American college-bound teenagers is particularly important because they are the newest generation of college goers. If HBCUs and/or the Black college experience are not necessary or relevant to them, then where do the future implications of HBCUs lie? Findings from the study could also inform policy makers with necessary directions to increase enrollment and academic opportunity for Black students at HBCUs. Alternatively, implications from the study could help to find ways in which additional resources can be allocated to preserve the historical and cultural capital of these postsecondary institutions.

Research Question

Overall, the study seeks to investigate Black students' perceptions about attending an HBCU and how their choices in college selectivity influence the slight decline in Black enrollment at HBCUs. In order to accomplish this task, this study involves participation from Black college-bound high school students who are asked to answer questions about their knowledge of HBCUs, the value of gaining a Black college experience, and their overall attitudes about attending an HBCU. Therefore, this study is guided by the research question:

1. What are the perceptions of African American college-bound students on attending a Historically Black College or University (HBCU)?

Significance of the Study

Research conducted in the Office of Civil Rights (1991) identified factors that have influenced enrollment in HBCUs that included cost, cultural and racial diversity, remediation and retention, faculty support, and new programs. However, these factors may not be the only determinants for Black students when considering HBCUs. How important is it to them to have or identify with a Black college experience? Historically, HBCUs were established and premised as a main access point for African Americans to receive higher education. Additionally, HBCUs are historically situated to reflect a racially conscious society. However, some would argue that in the 21st century, post-*Brown* and other integrative measures, reasons to attend a college/university are not influenced by race. Historical circumstances have placed more stress on mainstreaming the HBCU to accommodate the shift away from racial segregation, to forming a new type of democratized education in the 21st century. This study examines how societal

influences, cultural, and family connections have shaped students' perceptions about HBCUs, particularly since Jim Crow legislation. This study is important because it attempts to reveal perceptions and attitudes about attending HBCUs through the voices of Black high school students. Additionally, there is a significant gap in the research regarding African American student perspectives on Black colleges and universities. This study helps to give voice to a traditionally marginalized demographic, while also helping to inform future research on Black student perceptions and higher education.

<div align="center">Definition of Terms</div>

Historically Black College or University (HBCU)

HBCUs are degree-granting institutions that were established in the 1800s and prior to 1964 with the principal mission of providing educational opportunity and access for African Americans. While HBCUs have traditionally and contemporarily served mainly African Americans, enrollment is available to all students regardless of their ethnic make-up or background. These schools are categorized as: public 2- and 4-year colleges/universities, private 4-year colleges/universities, and land-grant institutions. There are a total of 105 public and private HBCUs across the nation that confers associates, bachelors, and advanced-level degrees. HBCUs are also recognized as the leading producer of Black undergraduate and graduate degrees.

Predominately White Institution (PWI)

A predominantly White institution (PWI) is a postsecondary college or university with White students accounting for 50% or more of the student enrollment population. Additionally, these institutions are considered historically White and are most commonly rooted with patterns and traditions of Western Europe.

African Americans/Blacks

An African American is someone who is of African descent which can include being born in the United States, but having lineage to continental Africa. Additionally, this term is also inclusive of immigrant born Blacks; that is, people who are from continental Africa and now reside in the United States. The term *African American* is used interchangeably with *Blacks*. Due to the historical and contemporary nature of the topic, this study does not differentiate between the two terms.

Limitations

The study does contain specific limitations. First, it should be recognized that each participant's background knowledge regarding institution types (specifically HBCUs and PWIs) is varied, and therefore cannot be controlled. However, as part of the initial screening of participants to be included in the study, each is considered to be "college bound," which indicates that he/she has some knowledge about colleges and universities and plans to attend. Second, through the collection of interview data as a result of the interviews, there may be brief discussions on PWIs in order for participants to make comparisons or contrasts. However, it is important to note that it is not the focus of the study to make vivid comparisons between the two institution types. Instead, it is the primary goal to provide descriptive detail and insights regarding attitudes and perspectives about attending an HBCU.

Delimitations

The study does contain specific delimitations. First, participants sampled are from one geographic region of the United States. While geographic locale can be a determinant for how students choose which college they will attend, due to the scope and nature of the

research, snowball sampling among area high schools in the district seemed to be the most reasonable way to conduct the study. Second, due to the focus of the study being on African American college choice, perceptions about HBCUs and its potential influence on Black student enrollment at HBCUs, the researcher is only interested in understanding and investigating perspectives from African American college-bound high school students.

Summary

This chapter provided an introduction and background for the study by elaborating on the historical and social context of education for Blacks; then transitioned by recognizing independent and collective attempts to provide access to education for African Americans, most specifically through HBCUs. Next, a discussion on the formation of HBCUs by different entities helped to provide insight on institutional goals, funding sources, and aims of education. Additionally, national initiatives have served as a pendulum for HBCUs, which have ultimately influenced their enrollment and access to higher education for African Americans. While Black college enrollment trends have illustrated success and effectiveness for African American students, when considering student perspectives, relevance, and financial viability for these minority-serving institutions, the question still remains: where does the future of HBCUs lie? In consideration of the fact that the mission of HBCUs are changing in order to accommodate greater racial diversity, the need to sustain federal and state funding has served as an influence in declining Black student enrollment. Furthermore, these trends over the 20th and 21st century are indicative of how integration has positively and negatively influenced HBCU enrollment. Notwithstanding, HBCUs have been and

continue to be a top contributor in conferring African American undergraduate degrees (NCES, 2012). However, because of the gradual decline in Black enrollment at these institutions, there is a need to understand their historical and contemporary significance current from the perspectives of Black high school students who are the in position to choose to attend an HBCU.

Chapter 2 provides a review of literature guided by the following questions: How do students choose college; what are current Black student experiences in college; and, how do aspiring students perceive college to be? The first topic to be explored is the historical and contemporary relativity of the HBCU as an agent of transmission for African and African American culture and racial identity. Second, the experiences of Black collegians, both at HBCUs and PWIs are discussed. Next, components such as institutional factors, financial assistance and availability, networks to institutions, access to information about college, and influences from the media are examined as the literature discusses college selectivity and decisions to attend for African American students. Finally, student perceptions are explored at both institution types which reveal congruent themes to the current experiences of Black collegians and factors influencing attendance and enrollment.

In Chapter 3, the research method is discussed. In particular, the use of Critical Race Theory and Afrocentricity as a combined theoretical framework is defined and elaborated. Both of these theories are particularly important to the study because they provide a lens to analyze students' perspectives on the influence of racial identities and preconceptions about African and African American cultural heritage in the context of postsecondary education (to be discussed in Chapter 5). Additionally, the research design

and use of descriptive case study as the core method of investigation is discussed. A

descriptive case study allows for the researcher to investigate a single case to describe a

particular phenomenon. However, in this case, the phenomenon has yet to take place.

Instead, the "case" to be studied is rather perceptions of what the college experience will

be like and decision on which type of institution to attend. Other structural elements such

as the instrumentation, research setting, sample selection, data gathering, data analysis

and coding, limitations, and basic assumptions help to shape the study.

Chapter 4 provides an elaboration of the findings by categorization of the major

themes that emerged from the study. Particular to qualitative research method, salient

quotes from participants exemplify each theme or subtheme discussed. In Chapter 5 (the

final chapter), a discussion on each theme in relation to the theoretical framework of

Critical Race Afrocentricity and existent literature is presented. This chapter also

provides implications for policy makers and HBCU administrators in order to provide

prescriptions on increasing and retaining African American students in Black colleges.

Next, recommendations are provided for furthering research on Black student

perspectives on HBCUs.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Chapter 1 provided an overview of the historical and social context of education for Blacks. Landmark legislation affecting schooling for Blacks and frameworks for the establishment of HBCUs also offer a more comprehensive review of the topic. HBCUs are credited for being the top institutions for producing African American undergraduate degrees–especially within the STEM field–yet there is a continual decline in Black enrollment at HBCUs. Some assert that declining enrollment can be attributed to late 20th century affirmative action measures in higher education (Martin, 1998; Minor, 2008). Others claim that the decreasing numbers of Black students at HBCUs is a result of the contemporary issues (policies and funding, negative media attention, and accreditation concerns) facing these institutions. With many questioning the quality of education an HBCU can provide, the future, sustainability, and vitality of these institutions are unknown. More specifically, it is important to examine the attitudes and perspectives of the newest generation of Black college students to further inform policy and practice for HBCUs. The research question remains: *What are the perceptions of African American college-bound students on attending a Historically Black College or University (HBCU)?*

This chapter provides a review of literature that begins with a discussion on the HBCU as an institution that builds and transmits cultural and social capital to its students by allowing for ethnic identity development. Then, the collegiate experiences of Black students at the various institutions (HBCUs and PWIs) provide context on the topic.

Next, components that influence college selectivity for African American students are elaborated. Finally, current student and pre-collegiate perceptions on HBCUs and PWIs are shared.

<div align="center">Education in Antiquity</div>

It is important to provide a preface that predates the development of Western civilization and its subsequent philosophies in order to understand the nature and relevance of education for African Americans. The early development of institutions of higher education is attributed to and directly linked to continental Africa and historical Egypt (also known Kemet). Obenga (1992) asserts: "a crucial understanding of the transmission of knowledge can be understood by the direct line that the Greek educational lineage inherited from Kemet" (p. 21). He further postulates: "this is why we are interested in African philosophy of the Pharaonic period: to connect the contemporary with that of the ancient and to demonstrate the pre-existence of African philosophy before its appearance anywhere else on this earth" (p. 28). To this extent, it should be recognized that access to and further development of knowledge for African Americans in a contemporary sense is rather an inherited right from their ancestral beginnings because people of African descent have been creators and transmitters of knowledge since its inception. In fact, two of the oldest universities in the world, the Temple of Waset and the University of Sankore, were located in continental Africa (African Kingdoms, n.d.). Clarke (1977) provides insight on the intentional and neglected intellectual history of African scholarship by elaborating on the University of Sankore. He writes:

> Before the destruction of the Empire of Songhay by the Moroccans and European mercenary soldiers at the end of the sixteenth century, the Africans in the Western

> Sudan (inner West Africa) had been bringing into being great empires and cultures for over a thousand years, the most notable empires being Ghana and Mali. The Songhay Empire and the University of Sankore, at Timbuctoo, was in existence over a hundred years after the slave trade had already been started along the west coast of Africa. During this period in West African history–from the early part of the fourteenth century to the time of the Moorish invasion in 1591– the city of Timbuctoo and the University of Sankore in the Songhay Empire were the intellectual centers of Africa. Black scholars were enjoying a renaissance that was known and respected throughout most of Africa and in parts of Europe. (Clarke, 1977, p. 142)

To this extent, the notion of Greeks being the founders of knowledge and wisdom, as encouraged by Western philosophies, should be dispelled and debunked. Clarke (1977) and many others have attempted to correct these forms of miseducation through their scholarship in fields such as Africana Studies in order to realign philosophical, methodological, ideological, and theoretical paradigms and perspectives to center on continental Africa–where intellectual foundations began. In fact, a recent study conducted at the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign sought to determine what percent of U.S. colleges and universities offer African American studies programs. The findings revealed that currently 76% of U.S. colleges and universities provide Black Studies programs. These curricula are offered through departmental units or elective courses in order to continue the conversation of African and African American contributions to society, global connections, application and practice of African philosophical thought and paradigms (Alkalimat et al., 2013).

HBCUs as a Mecca for Cultural Capital

Emerging in the late 1970s, French sociologist, anthropologist, and philosopher Pierre Bourdieu, is recognized for his scholarship on cultural capital theory. He posits that the culture transmitted and rewarded by social institutions are reflective of the culture expressed by the dominant class. He further postulates that much of the cultural

values and norms that an individual subscribes to can be developed from social class, family background, community, and educational systems (Bourdieu, 1977). It is to this extent that Davis (1998) elaborates on the role of HBCUs as a producer and transmitter of cultural capital for African Americans. He asserts:

> It is conceivable that the HBCUs, while not typically the domain of the 'ruling class' and not necessarily the purview of traditional European class markers, such as the knowledge and exposure to the arts, including literature and music, are responsible for cultural learnings. (Davis, 1998, p. 149)

Many researchers discuss the experience of education for African Americans in terms of how institutions were primarily charged with producing and reproducing influential members of society through HBCUs (Anderson, 1988; Davis, 1998; Fleming, 1984; Morgan, 1995; Wiggan, 2011). More specifically, private institutions promoted culturally accepted lifestyles and behaviors that were implicitly and explicitly a part of the curriculum. Davis (1998) contends: "Various strategies, such as more explicit, direct instruction of proper etiquette and public social behavior, to the less obvious integration of African American literature and history in the curriculum, were employed to increase students' cultural capital" (p. 149). Distinguishing from the context of an institution's social capital, Davis (1998) elaborates that HBCUs extend beyond pre-collegiate experiences, family, and previous schooling structures in that it provides "new cultural resources, such as networks, attitudes, behaviors, and expectations" that are chiefly existent within the HBCU environment and experience (p. 149).

In their book, *Cultural Capital and Black Education: African American Communities and the Funding of Black Schooling, 1865 to the Present*, V. P. Franklin and Carter Julian Savage (2004) examine cultural capital as a chief mechanism in building systems of education, restoring cultural values and principles, and continuing the

tradition of funding and access for freedom to benefit African Americans. Discussing the financial support and material resources that African American communities helped to provide in order to create and maintain schools at all levels, the authors add a dynamic and much needed perspective to the conversation regarding the historical and contemporary significance, *via cultural capital*, in which the HBCU provides for African Americans.

Many researchers have also seconded the cultural capital that students who attend an HBCU receive an increased awareness for one's racial identity and self (Brown et al., 2004; Gasman, 2006; Lovett, 2011). In mainstream society, there exists stratification among those who are in the dominant social class group and those who are not. The dominant group creates, governs, and participates in the values and norms of the cultural group. On the other hand, the marginalized group is disconnected and silenced from dialogue, which results in their non-participation and oppression in the group dynamic (Delpit, 1988; Delpit & Dowdy, 2002). Du Bois's (1903) book, *The Souls of Black Folk*, introduces the concept of double consciousness that exists for African Americans. In this struggle, he asserts that the only way in which Blacks will develop a healthy racial identity and self-concept is in understanding the "twoness" of being an "American" and a "Negro" that exists within, and finding a way to interweave such identities throughout the warring worlds. In the discussion of how HBCUs promote cultural capital, Black students are the dominant group in this particular setting. The notion of being silenced or disconnected no longer exists because they can participate in the cultural values and norms established by the group.

This notion also extends to Rucker and Gendrin's (2003) research on ethnic identification and immediacy in the context of higher education. These researchers sought to understand the influence of Black identity on learning with African American instructors. Rucker and Gendrin (2003) found that "the way students perceive themselves in terms of racial ideology influenced differentially their perceptions in learning in classes taught by African American and Euro-American instructors" (p. 213). This research concludes that Black instructors have an influence on how African American students perceive their racial identities. Additionally, Cokley and Chapman (2008) also investigated whether the ethnic and racial identity of African American students related to academic achievement. Their findings concluded that students with more positive ethnic identities had higher academic self-concept, which also related to higher grades. This finding supports the notion that the development of a student's racial or ethnic identity has significant influence on their academic development. The aforementioned studies help to affirm the role of ethnic identities in African American student achievement, and substantiate how a positive self-image is needed to attain positive academic outcomes.

In conclusion, HBCUs produce, transmit, and continue the cultural values of African Americans through participation in social activities and gatherings, a sense of community from supportive faculty and staff, and the positive affirmation of ethnic identities for Black college students. In this sense, HBCUs serve as a direct link to understanding both the historical and contemporary cultural lifestyles and behaviors of African Americans. It is through this cultural experience that Black students' ethnic

identities are further enhanced as a direct result of being a part of the mainstream community in their educational setting.

<div align="center">Black Collegiate Experiences at PWIs and HBCUs</div>

The previous section elaborates on the HBCU's function in the Black community. That is, HBCUs also serve as a social institution that produces and transmits cultural norms, values, and behaviors for African Americans. In narrowing the scope of the research study to better understand how Black college teens perceive HBCUs, it is first necessary to review literature on the collegiate experiences of Black students and its relationship to Black cultural and racial identities.

Experiences at PWIs

The literature reveals that African American students continually experience marginalization and minimal academic support to– and through their matriculation at PWIs. These marginalizing experiences also contribute to Black student social adjustment or lack thereof, when participating in the mainstream culture of the PWI. A Black student's racial identity and development is one issue in the public school education models that carries over to higher education. Woodson (1933) notes, "the thought of inferiority of the Negro is drilled into him in almost every class he enters and in almost every book he studies" (p. 1). This sentiment still rings true in spite of all that has happened to provide equal access and opportunity to African American students. Delpit (1995) references the "culture of power" which is an approach that takes place in schools and enacted in classrooms in which codes and rules are set in motion to participate. The power dynamics is a direct reflection of those in mainstream society that have been explicitly taught these structures, and on the contrary, implicitly directed to

acknowledge their existence. Often times, the minority student group is silenced in language and in actions in the classroom because the processes of instruction do not reflect the skills that are inherently taught (Delpit, 1988, 1995). When students are taught to be dormant and/or silenced in the classroom, they develop low self-esteem because their sociocultural values go unrecognized.

Douglas (1998) noted that first-year African American students felt disconnected on their campus due to limited services and activities that were available to African American constituents at PWIs. Additionally, Schwitzer, Griffin, Ancis, and Thomas (1999) investigated 4th year African American college students' social adjustment experiences at PWIs and found that students felt vastly underrepresented among the student population. Students also mentioned receiving less support throughout their collegiate experiences and having difficulty transitioning into college life.

In the PWI setting, Black students also revealed that there were minimal interactions with faculty (Schwitzer, Griffin, Ancis, & Thomas, 1999). Participants expressed that they were less likely to receive classroom support, academic advising, or career guidance because of feelings of intimidation due to race and negative perceptions of Black students at PWIs (Schwitzer et al., 1999). This finding is echoed by a study conducted by Fries-Britt and Turner (2002) in which Black students at PWIs experienced a lack of interaction with Black faculty and peers and described many campus activities as being geared towards the White student population. Kozol (2005) discusses how structural inequalities and teacher perspectives of Black students also contribute to negative perceptions in academic environments.

Additionally, Wallace and Bell (1999) reported that students expressed feelings of assimilation while attending a PWI. Some participants noted their engagement in mainstream culture, events, and activities as a means to enhancing their collegiate social experiences. Fries-Britt and Turner (2002) also postulate that Black students who enroll at PWIs have often interacted more with the White culture and may share many existing, associated behaviors. To elaborate:

> To survive on White campuses, some Black students consciously assimilate into the White culture, but this does not mean that they know less about Black culture. More than likely, Black students at [traditionally White institutions] have learned to become bicultural, developing a repertoire of expressions and behaviors from both the White and Black community and switching between them as appropriate. (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002, p. 320)

Next, institutional racism and structural inequalities in schooling are still eminent and greatly affect the achievement and life outcomes of African American students. Schwitzer et al. (1999) found that students felt elements of institutional racism in the college environment–in particular, students mentioned that the university condoned separatist mainstream White activities with regards to social clubs and events. This finding is also consistent with Douglas' (1998) study which concluded that students felt voluntary racial separation on their campus. That is, students felt isolated in popularized campus-wide events and activities and as a result, formed networks with other students based on race and cultural similarities. Additionally, Wallace and Bell (1999) revealed that students minimized their feelings of victimization due to race, and sometimes objected to being termed as victims of social and economic practices. To elaborate further, researchers discussed how affirmative action programs in higher education provided more access and opportunity for minority student groups in recognition of the existent disadvantages at PWIs. However, according to Wallace and Bell (1999), as part

of attending a PWI where racial marginalization is both explicit and implicit, students refused to see themselves as "disadvantaged" or "victims" despite not being on equal footing prior to–and throughout their academic and social experiences of college in comparison to their White counterparts.

Collectively, the authors provide ample discussion on Black college students' themes of disconnectedness, marginalization, silenced dialogue, and assimilation throughout their experiences at PWIs. The research suggests that students did not see themselves or their ethnicity in a positive manner because of their cultural experiences at PWIs. This literature contributes significantly to understanding how African Americans socially and academically adjust to PWIs in that it reveals that a Black student's racial experiences are denigrated in order to cope with mainstream culture and practices. In these settings, students experience racial hostility in every facet of their educational experience; Du Bois's notion of double-consciousness becomes ever present in their daily interactions because they are constantly reminded that they are African American and not Caucasian.

Wallace and Bell (1999) also mentioned that students felt that their previous education (students graduated from schools that served a predominately Black student population) had not prepared them for higher education. Students expressed initially majoring in STEM-related fields upon enrolling, but changed majors due to having to take additional, lower-level mathematics courses. Participants shared that they felt academically underprepared despite being high achievers in such courses in high school (Davis, 2004; Kim & Conrad, 2006; Wallace & Bell, 1999). Kozol (2005) discusses the conditions of schooling for Blacks in inner-city schools. The educational environment for

Black students explicitly demonstrates racial disparities and implicitly communicates to students that they are not valued as contributing members of society, but rather as second-class citizens that will always be considered working class. These studies are particularly important when considering how current high school students perceive their academic preparedness for entering college. Additionally, the literature contributes to understanding the problems associated with equitable opportunities in schooling for African Americans and its influence on college choice, persistence, and matriculation.

Next, research reveals how a student's SES and racial background influence their experiences in college. Chavous, Rivas, Green, and Helaire (2002) explored how the social and socioeconomic backgrounds of African American students related to their perceptions of racial identification and centrality, academic adjustments, and overall feelings of "fitting in" at PWIs. Findings revealed that African American students' social and SES backgrounds were indeed related to competency and performance levels, as well as their perceived college adjustments to predominately White settings. That is, students from less affluent backgrounds and racially homogeneous environments experienced less ethnic fit than those from higher SES backgrounds and more integrated settings. Students with strong racial identities exhibited higher academic performance ratings; however, perceived ethnic fit negatively influenced the students' academic competence (Chavous, Rivas et al., 2002; Dillon, 1999). In this matter, students who perceived not "fitting in" also felt less confident about their academic endeavors. This research gives credence to the aforementioned topics of disconnectedness and marginalization; however, further ties these particular feelings with the student's sociocultural backgrounds.

The literature presented within this section clearly articulates the influence of race in higher education systems specific to PWIs. Despite university attempts at diversity and increased inclusion, African American students continue to experience marginalization, stigmatization, and feelings of assimilation in order to persist to graduation. These topics are directly related to the scope of the current study because it helps to inform, and possibly predict, the collegiate experiences of aspiring Black college students at these institutions. That is, by identifying factors more deeply connected to current students' racialized experiences in PWI settings, prospective enrollees can become more cognizant of the academic and social adjustments needed to transition into college life at these institutions.

Experiences at HBCUs

Less literature has been written about the specific experiences of Black students at HBCUs. However, there are persistent themes which can be postulated from research. First, HBCUs provide a comfortable learning environment for its students. Outcalt and Skewes-Cox (2002) found that students at HBCUs demonstrated higher levels of academic involvement than their counterparts at PWIs. That is, more students reported completing work on time, tutoring another student, doing extra work for the class, and not feeling bored in class. Perhaps telling of the overall climate and racially supportive environment at HBCUs, they found that "fewer HBCU students tended to attend racial/cultural workshops, take ethnic courses, or belong to racial/cultural organizations than PWI students" (Outcalt & Skewes-Cox, 2002, p. 338). With regards to overall satisfaction with their institutions, 80% of students reported being "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with their experiences at HBCUs in contrast to 74% at PWIs. To elaborate:

> African American students at HBCUs tended to be more satisfied with the sense of community, student-to-student interaction, and the availability of leadership opportunities than their counterparts at comparable PWIs. (Outcalt & Skewes-Cox, 2002, p. 342)

Thompson (2008) also discussed the unique academic support and intervention programs that HBCUs provide to students with adequate undergraduate preparation to continue on to advance degrees, specifically doctoral programs. Additionally, Albritton (2012) mentions:

> Whether they are first generation college students or the sons and daughters of college-educated parents, Black students who attend HBCUs benefit from a strong and committed network of faculty, staff, and professional leaders who seek to offer learning opportunities that will increase possibilities for long-term success. (p. 327)

Second, research has evidenced strong peer and faculty interactions at HBCUs which adds to academic success of its student population. Fountaine (2012) investigated the student-faculty interactions at HBCUs with regards to the experiences of female doctoral students. Findings revealed that strong student-faculty relationships are fostered and existent at HBCUs, which ultimately serve as a mediating factor for persistence to graduation. The majority of participants in this study reported that "faculty members at HBCUs were more sensitive to students' needs, had students' best interest at heart, and cared about students as a whole", however, some felt that demands from faculty were extraneous and difficult to balance with other life obligations (Fountaine, 2012, p. 142). Finally, participants shared high satisfaction levels with their engagement with academic advisors. Fries-Britt and Turner (2002) also reported that students have strong and meaningful connections with faculty members.

From the literature, it can be posited that HBCUs are indeed supportive in terms of academic and social development for Black college students. Black collegians feel

strongly about the learning environments, intervention programs and initiatives, faculty and peer interactions, and the encouragement to continue their educational pursuits. It should also be mentioned that the existent literature focuses less on the racialized experiences of Black college students at HBCUs. Perhaps Black students at HBCUs do not experience marginalization or cultural disconnectedness because the majority of the population shares the same racial background. On the other hand, the discussion on racial experiences at HBCUs for Black students may be less explored for the very same reason of assuming that there lies no culture difference amongst African Americans. Regardless of the reason this particular topic is less discussed in the literature, there is a necessity to explore these experiences from a Black student perspective. There needs to be a better understanding of the Black college experience, not only in terms of academic and social development, but also in terms of correlating these experiences with the aforementioned research on the cultural and social capital of HBCUs.

<div align="center">College Selectivity and Decisions to Attend</div>

Institutional Factors

In identifying some of the reasons in which African American students choose to attend college, institutional factors such as social and cultural capital, racial climate, and institutional reputation are presented in the literature. Perna (2000) noted that African American students view the social and cultural capital of an institution as important as academic ability, which attributes the direct relationship and significance that HBCUs hold for its constituents. Freeman and Thomas (2002) sought to understand the characteristics of Black high schools students who chose to attend HBCUs. Their findings revealed that though HBCU students elected to attend PWIs to increase racial

integration among PWIs, consideration for the HBCU was still eminent because students were vested in the history and tradition of HBCUs.

Additionally, Van Camp, Barden, and Sloan (2010) conducted a study with Black students who chose to attend an HBCU to investigate their race-related reasons in college selectivity. Researchers discussed how racial identities are developed throughout life, and a student's racial centrality is relative to expressions about ethnic identity and engagement in ethnicity-affirming activities. To this extent, they argued that Black students whose racial identity is more centered are more likely to make decisions about life, and more specifically, about college, based on reasons pertaining to race. Van Camp et al. (2010) also found that Black students that have more contact with other African Americans indicated choosing to attend an HBCU to sustain their racial identities. Similarly, students with less contact with African Americans chose HBCUs to develop or enhance their racial identities and as a result, were more engaged in race-oriented activities on campus (Davis, 2004; Van Camp et al., 2010). In a more recent study, Torres and Massey (2012) found that while African American students from integrated educational environments felt more academically prepared at the college/university level, their limited social interaction with same-race peers were reasons in which they decided to attend a majority Black university or HBCU.

The consideration of race and how it influences college selectivity is a permeating factor throughout the literature. Specifically, these studies contribute to the discussion on how African Americans choose college or universities based on their racial backgrounds, and their expectations for how the university will help to affirm or develop racial identity and solidarity among its students. This literature is paramount to the current scope of the

study because it solidifies the importance of race in college selectivity for African American students. However, there is a need for further research to investigate how the concept of race influences African American students when considering which college to attend. How does a students' perception about their own racial identity shape their attitudes on how to select colleges? Hence, this study seeks to provide greater insight on this particular topic from the voices of Black high school students who are currently deciding on which they will likely attend.

Finally, institutional reputations also have bearing on students' decisions to attend. Tobolowsky, Outcalt, and McDonough (2005) found that with regards to African American students selecting HBCUs, a school's prestige and the academic programs offered are important factors. Additionally, Braddock and Hua (2006) found that a significant number of African American high school seniors review the athletic reputations of colleges and universities when considering colleges to attend. These findings suggest that students view collegial sports and their potential for scholarships as a way of entry to postsecondary education. These findings are relevant in the discussion on the growing population of Black student athletes and their enrollment at PWIs versus HBCUs.

However, how students perceive HBCUs in terms of their historical and contemporary value remain to be explored. Current literature is lacking with regards to how prestige and institutional reputation is measured and correlated to the different institution types. Is institutional reputation based on the university's admissions requirements and selectivity? Is prestige impingent upon the school's resources? How is prestige related to matriculation ratings? Or is an institution's reputation structurally and

architecturally bound; that is, does the look of the institution make it prestigious? There is a need for future research to further explore this concept and its relation to Black student college choice.

Financial Assistance and Availability

The second most prevalent factor in the consideration of which college to attend is financial assistance and availability. In an earlier study, Fleming (1984) conducted a comparative study of college access to Black and White institutions and found that Black students experienced greater opportunities in HBCUs than their White counterparts; however, financial aid and availability of scholarships were more abundant at PWIs. According to Freeman (1999), economic and financial barriers continue to obstruct African American students' access, entry, and participation in higher education. Freeman and Thomas (2002) noted that financial aid has been and is consistently a large consideration in college choice for African Americans who currently attend HBCUs. They conclude that students are choosing to attend HBCUs because of their financial affordability and it still stands that many families cannot afford to finance higher education (Thomas, 2002).

Kim, DesJardins, and McCall (2009) investigated college affordability and its influence on enrollment ratings for underrepresented student groups. They examined how differing types of financial aid, combined with racial/ethnic factors and income-levels, affected student applications and enrollment. They found that race and income were determinant factors in financial aid expectations when considering colleges. More specifically, African American student enrollment decreased when financial aid packages did not match expectations or need in order to attend college (Kim et al., 2009). Finally,

Gyapong and Smith (2012) found that students most frequently searched for information on tuition followed by location, facilities, activities, and class size when considering their decisions about college. That is, the cost of attendance was the most important factor when considering which college to attend. These studies help to illustrate the importance of financial aid and its availability as a significantly influential factor for African American students; especially those who are not from upper-level income backgrounds.

This research demonstrates how influential financial aid, scholarships, and monetary awards are for African Americans in making decisions about selecting and attending college. However, it should be noted that while PWIs are cited in the literature for providing more financial aid and scholarships, there is less discussion about disproportionalities that exist in funding when comparing these institutions to HBCUs and the trickle down effects on student college choice. Additionally, even fewer studies have investigated the relationship between SES, academic ability, financial aid packages, and how these combined variables influence college selectivity for Black students. Still, the literature helps to further inform this study by examining how financial aid and availability influence perspectives on which institution type students choose to attend.

Family, Friends, and School-Related Networks

Other considerations in school choice for African Americans stem from family influences and community networks. Freeman (2005) discussed the family's influence on the collection selection process. First, there is an automatic expectation exerted from the family. She illustrates how these expectations become more automatic with the higher SES status of the family; however, families with a lower SES status still relay the

importance of attaining higher education to their students (Freeman, 2005). She

elaborates:

> Unfortunately, the largest number of African Americans participating in higher
> education are still first-generation college goers and higher education is not
> automatic. However, with African American families, the value of higher
> education is often instilled even when family members have not participated in
> higher education. (Freeman, 2005, p. 16)

Freeman (2005) also provides ample discussion on the student's feelings of going beyond

the family's level of education as encouraged by parents or family members with regards

to students' decision to attend an HBCU. Freeman and Thomas (2002) also elaborate on

how family, teacher/counselor, and a community of influences who are connected to

HBCUs serve as influential factors. This finding is congruent with other studies regarding

African Americans and college choice that reveal family ties to HBCUs increased student

interests in attending (Freeman, 1999; Gyapong & Smith, 2012; Tobolowsky, Outcalt, &

McDonough, 2005).

The current state of the literature provides ample claims to illustrate the influence

of these networks and their relation to college choice for African American students.

However, more is left to be discovered with regard to the family's influence on which

type of college institution to attend. More specifically, few studies have investigated the

narrative experiences from a multi-generational perspective and its influence on a

student's decision on which college to attend. Additionally, while the literature attributes

how those who are connected to HBCUs to serve to influence future attendance, less has

specifically addressed how guiding perceptions about these institutions are either

subliminally reinforced or dispelled through perspectives of individuals who have

attended. For example, if a school counselor is a proud and boastful HBCU alumni, but

not effective in his/her roles and responsibilities related to counseling students, how does

the individual perceptions of the counselor influence the student's collective perspective about those who attend and graduate from these institutions? Furthermore, there is a need for more research in investigating the relationship between alumni networks and Black student college choices.

Access to Information about Colleges and Universities

Tobolowsky et al. (2005) sought to understand how African American students from California, along with their family and educational networks, received information on HBCUs and how this information affected student perceptions on attending. They found that both students and parents faced difficulties in accessing information on HBCUs (Tobolowsky et al., 2005). However, participants noted that HBCU recruitment and admissions associates were diligent in their communication attempts with parents and students, and relayed a personal touch in recruiting and scheduling campus visits. With regard to the mediums in which students received information on HBCUs, Gyapong and Smith (2012) found that 95% of students used the internet as their primary source to gather information about college. Other participants obtained information concerning HBCUs from a wide variety of media formats: Black Entertainment Television (BET) and Entertainment and Sports Network (ESPN), radio, and magazines (most popular amongst the group was Vibe and XXL).

Current research articulates a need for more access to information about HBCUs in order for students to make informed decisions about which college to attend. Specifically, this research study seeks to find out how students gain information about colleges and universities in their current schooling environments.

Influence of the Media and Popular Culture

Current literature discusses the influence of media and popular culture on students. The vast majority of media perception studies discuss how graphic depictions of television cartoons or video games promote aggression, violence, and criminal mischief. Yet, there are selected pieces of literature that can adequately relate to the scope of this study that pertain to how students perceive media in relation to their racial identities and education. More specifically, Means-Coleman (2002) provides a text on the relationship between African American audiences, media, and identity. She posits: "Black audiences are deeply embedded in the consumer culture and thus consumption patterns and market forces are of critical importance for structuring social meanings and framing cultural identities" (p. viii). In this sense, the media helps the African American consumer to navigate their cultural and social identity. Wood (2002) extends the discussion about representations of African American identities in the media by discussing how Blacks are portrayed negatively in television newscasts through crime stories, events, and recounts. In order to counter these controlled spaces, Wood (2002) proposes that Blacks engage in "Afrocentric talk" to deconstruct and reconstruct inscribed ideologies surrounding negative depictions of African Americans in the media.

Similarly, Sun, Cooks, Rinehart, and Williams (2002) conducted a study with Black male youth to examine how they construct their identities within the context of family, education, and pop culture. Using two frames of reference, DMX and the Cosby Show, researchers were able to conclude that oppositional identities were debunked with youth. In other words, students from low-achieving educational backgrounds did not automatically dissociate characters presented on the Cosby Show and vice versa. Also, students from high-achieving backgrounds were not dissuaded from rap artists that

promote violence and aggression. Instead, researchers found that students negotiated between these two identities. These findings were consistent with an earlier study conducted by Jhally and Lewis (1992) who posit that youth identify with positive representations of themselves. From these readings, it can be concluded that the media and popular culture has an influence on the ways in which African American students cultivate their identities.

<div align="center">Student Perceptions on Institution Types</div>

The remaining section of this chapter elaborates on student perceptions on postsecondary institution types. It should be noted that much of the literature surrounding this topic centers on students who are currently enrolled in college or graduates who have shared their past collegiate experiences. There is limited research that examines the African American high school student perspective with regards to postsecondary institutions, and more specifically, Black colleges. Nevertheless, the remaining two subsections provide ample research to discuss guiding perceptions on PWIs and HBCUs.

PWIs

Davis (2004) captures the collegiate experiences of Black students at PWIs in four stages that are harnessed throughout the duration of their attendance. The *Inquiry/Campus Incongruity* stage is the initial period when Black students enter PWIs and all things are perceived in a dichotomous manner. Students meet other Black students from various backgrounds and come to realization that not all African Americans are like minded; combined, they inevitably begin to experience what it feels like to "be a minority." She elaborates:

> Coming to the college campus may have been the first time these students had confronted different interpretations of what it means to be "Black" because of

   differences in cultural norms based on where they were reared, parental ethnic
   origin, and citizenship. (Davis, 2004, p. 116)

In the next stage, *Identity Confusion*, students search for an understanding of themselves.

In her study, students discussed African American Studies as a course, major, or minor

and developed bonds with other students because they felt they could let their guard

down. This occurred during the sophomore and junior year; students shared that this was

a time in which they found themselves. In the third stage, V*alidate Identity/Goal*

Assessment, students have experiences of dissonance as they navigate through challenges

and making decisions. At this point, they exude more confidence, having affirmed their

Black identity, and are more determined to graduate.

   The final stage, *Goal Clarification*, occurs during the senior year or later.

Students form personal commitments to complete degree programs despite racism or

other adversity in which they had experienced. In her study, students connected their

success at the university to the struggles of African American ancestors in order to

remember what the value of completing their education meant to their family and cultural

community. This particular study is relevant because it illustrates the attempts of Black

students at PWIs to finds ways to cope with feelings of isolation and marginalization by

connecting to their ancestral past. Additionally, the perceptions of these students are

consistent with the experiences of students who have attended PWIs (as mentioned in

section 2.4), which provide credence to the reoccurring theme of disconnectedness,

marginalization, and silenced dialogues.

   Another poignant theme presented in the literature is the perception that PWIs

hold greater reputations and prestige in comparison to HBCUs. In particular, the notoriety

of the institution was important to students not only because of the increased resources

available to them in comparison to HBCUs, but also because of the stigma that was associated with getting into such an institution (Braddock & Hua, 2006; Davis, 2004). Davis (2004) explains that some students shared that they had applied to both institution types; however, these students were happy with the choice to attend a PWI because "being accepted" meant that they would not only experience feelings of pride from being able to enroll in such a reputable institution, but also because it meant that they were successors from their family and community. To elaborate, some students shared that private HBCUs in particular were more selective with admission standards in comparison to public PWIs. Additionally, since the PWIs were also considered to be more popular on a regional level, there was some element of success in being accepted to and enrolling at these institutions for Black students.

As mentioned earlier, there is limited discussion on how reputation and prestige are measured from the perspective of Black students who are looking at institutional differences as factors to which college or university they will attend. Furthermore, while current literature elaborates on how students make comparisons between the institution types (HBCUs and PWIs); there is limited research that dispels some of the assumptions and misconceptions that students have about institutional reputations and prestige. More specifically, there is a need to investigate perceptions about institutional reputation and prestige before students enter college. Then a follow-up is necessary to discuss their lived experiences in comparison to preconceived notions. Still, the current state of literature contributes to the understanding of the study by providing ample discussion on how institutional reputation and prestige impact student perceptions which influence college selectivity.

Additionally, students perceived PWIs to offer greater components of diversity. In her study regarding African American high school student perceptions, Freeman (1999) found that African American students from predominately Black educational settings considered PWIs because they wanted to experience cultures different from their own. They often equated the experiences that they would gain at PWIs to be more synonymous with "the real world." These perceptions speak to the mainstream ideologies surrounding White supremacy when in fact "minorities" are the current majority populous of the nation. Additionally, the racial homogeneity of their schools and communities, as well as the lack of interaction with other cultures, seemed to influence students' considerations for attending PWIs (Freeman, 1999). This finding is also consistent with Dillon's (1999) dissertation that investigates how race influences perceptions of institutions. His findings concluded that African American high school students felt less positive about their sociocultural fit at PWIs, and White students felt the same regarding HBCUs (Dillon, 1999). There is a need to reevaluate the findings of the existent literature since it is dated. There are very few, more recent studies that have investigated student perceptions on college institution types as a factor in their decisions to attend. Hence, it is the direct aim of this study to investigate student perceptions and its influence on college choice. These particular studies provide useful background and rationale with regards to the research methods and selection of participants which have shaped the current study.

Students also expressed that PWIs provide more financial, economic, and employment gains after graduation. Dancy and Brown (2008) sought to understand how African American men perceived their college experiences at both institutions, most notably after admissions policies and collegiate climates were altered as a result of *Brown*

v. Board of Education. They found that students' current perceptions about college, educational attainment, and levels of engagement were largely based on their pre-collegiate experiences, family, and social environments. Males from both institutions "perceived college as a vehicle to inform and reshape their manhood choices" (Dancy & Brown, 2008, p. 996). However, in different ways: (a) students at PWIs saw the financial gains and job opportunities that accompanied graduation from such an institution, and (b) students at HBCUs saw the potential to make lasting impacts in their community and felt well prepared to pursue advanced education (Dancy & Brown, 2008). This finding is consistent with Price et al. (2011) who elaborate on the positive returns on the HBCU degree for Black students in comparison to PWI graduates.

However, not all perceptions of attending a PWI were positive. In particular, institutional racism and stigmatization was perceived through academic expectations and support services for Black collegians. Davis (2004) mentions that in classes, racial isolation existed, or students perceived having to become the spokesperson of the entire race. Additionally, there was added pressure for both males and females to perform well in classes because students perceived their intellect and abilities to be constantly in question. Davis elaborates that students felt that the university faculty, staff, and students held negative connotations about Blacks: "It is not unreasonable to expect that university staff and students have stereotypical notions, vicariously imposed by the mass media, about the Black students who come from these urban areas" (Davis, 2004, p. 68). Davis (2004) adds that students perceived their role at PWIs to be high achieving and active in extracurricular activities, but they also felt "silenced" in that they felt they could not contribute to mainstream conversations and dialogue about any issues they were having

while being at the institution. In a later study, Johnson (2010) provided transparency for how students would like academia to serve them at PWIs. Teachers who were perceived to be culturally competent in the classroom tended to make students feel a part of a group and greater sense of belonging.

Next, support services were also a major part of the discussion regarding stigmatizations on campus for Blacks. Davis (2004) shared that while support services acted as a cultural mediator for students to see more representations of their race, these programs were still perceived as isolating for students in the collegial environment. PWIs provided specialized campus visits and orientations that allowed students to "meet someone who could be that one familiar face in a sea of unfamiliar faces on campus," yet, the way in which these activities are marketed, planned, and implemented add to the stigmatization of race (Davis, 2004, p. 49). Additionally, the Summer Institute, a support service program, was also stigmatizing for students because it was based on pre-existing social and academic conditions of the student and was strict in providing a regimented schedule that students could not defray. Still, students shared that the friendships and bonds that were created at the institution were further developed throughout their remaining college years (Davis, 2004). Finally, students perceived the way in which they were housed on campus as supportive in promoting kinship amongst Blacks, but also increased their perceptions of racial stigmatizations on campus (Davis, 2004). The findings within this section are consistent with literature that depicted the experiences of current Black collegians at PWIs.

Another perception that Black students hold about PWIs is the ways in which involvement enhances their experiences on campus. Johnson's (2010) study about

African American students attending a PWI revealed that when students were involved in social activities, clubs, and events, they felt more connected to their environments and experienced less isolation from their peers and institution. These findings are also consistent with earlier literature presented that discussed the engagement experiences and measures of assimilation into the mainstream culture for students who attended PWIs (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Wallace & Bell, 1999).

The current state of literature regarding Black student perceptions about PWIs illustrates pre-existing themes about Black student experiences at these institutions. However, the literature is dated and in need of a more recent focus to either reaffirm or dispel the notions surrounding Black students' experiences at these institutions; but this is not the current focus of this particular study. On the other hand, this information provides insight on understanding the gradual decline in Black student enrollment at HBCUs by elaborating on how students perceive PWIs in comparison to Black colleges.

HBCUs

There is very limited literature that investigates African American high school students' perceptions about HBCUs. Research, however, attributes the teens' perspectives to be synonymous with current literature that elaborates on Black collegian's experiences at HBCUs. That is, students perceive HBCUs to be environments that provide them with a sense of belonging through racial identity, consciousness, and development. Freeman's (1999) study with African American high school students is most fitting for the focus and topic of this study. Conducting interviews with students from urban areas across the U.S., she contends that high school type, experiences within high school, and a student's connection to an HBCU (i.e., family, friends, alumni) are main determinants in their

decisions on whether to attend an HBCU. She found that students from predominately White private schools highly favored attending an HBCU over a PWI because they longed for a deeper connection to the African American community. Students from predominately White educational backgrounds recognized racial difference in a majority Black school which was vastly different from their previous educational backgrounds. These students expressed that being in such an academic environment helped them to appreciate the cultural significance and relevance of attending an HBCU (Freeman, 1999).

Additionally, Freeman (1999) mentions that students felt a dichotomy existed between their internal communities (i.e., family, community) and their external communities (i.e., school) because of perceptions surrounding and affirming racial identities. This further encouraged their interests in attending an HBCU, because they perceived HBCUs to take up the role of restoring and uplifting the Black community. Freeman (1999) also shared that these students wanted to attend HBCUs because "classes regarding their culture" were not included in school curricula and as a result, they felt that both they, along with their peers lacked knowledge about African American culture. These findings also align with research from Tobolowsky et al. (2005), in which some students indicated they favored attending an HBCU because of the racial homogeneity of the campus; that is, they felt more comfortable being around other Blacks. However, for the same reason of being around other Blacks, some students felt dissuaded to attend HBCUs. These students were from predominately Black schooling environments and wanted their collegiate experiences to be more racially diverse.

The State of the Literature

While existing literature regarding how a student's previous educational and racial background influence college choice, the research is dated and does not reflect current student Black student perceptions on college selectivity. However, the existent research is pertinent to the current study. First, the research recognizes the influence of race in college selectivity. Researchers were strategic to sample student populations from urban communities to either support or debunk preexisting literature on demographic locale, SES, and racial communities as determinants in college choice. Second, the studies are unique in the discussion of college choice because it seeks to gain perspective from a less-recognized voice; that is, it seeks to gather information from high school students. In this way, the researchers make significant contributions to the current state of literature surrounding Black student perceptions on college selectivity.

However, there are considerable limitations. First, Freeman's (1999) study utilizes group interviews to gather information. While it yields significant findings, the individual narrative experiences of these students may not have been fully captured due to peer influence in the environment. Second, in the study, there lacks a balance between the perceptions of institution types and the actual enrollment or intent of enrollment in which college the student will attend. It is important to triangulate perceptions with actions and lived experiences of students who participated in the study. Still, the research is an important contribution to the current focus and aim of this study, which seeks to understand the perspectives of African American students on choosing to attend an HBCU.

Students also perceived support at the HBCU to be relative to reasons to attend. Dillon (1999) found that Black students more strongly agreed that they could expect positive faculty/student relationships on the campus of an HBCU. This finding is also congruent with Tobolowsky et al. (2005) in which students perceived HBCUs to have more supportive faculty and instructional environments for African American students. Additionally, students at HBCUs felt they would gain a sense of autonomy and civic and social awareness as a result of attending (Dancy & Brown, 2008).

However, there are also perceived disadvantages regarding attending these institutions. Dillon (1999) found that the race of the students influence their perception of the academic quality at HBCUs, but not at PWIs. Students perceived that HBCUs had a lower quality of education and they would be less likely to get a good job or be prepared for an advanced degree. Tobolowsky et al. (2005) also shared that there is a perception among high school students that due to the non-competitive admission requirements at some HBCUs, these institutions are perceived as less academically rigorous.

In conclusion, there were several implications from the literature that help to inform this study. Research evidences that Black intellectual contributions, both historically and contemporarily, are diminished and denigrated in mainstream society's discussion on higher education. In consideration of the aforementioned issues facing HBCUs (as discussed in Chapter 1), there is a continued perception among Black students that PWIs are more reputable, prestigious, and academically rigorous when compared to HBCUs. The literature suggests that students are choosing PWIs based on institutional factors, academic reputations, and increased racial diversity from their previous educational settings. However, when capturing the experiences of Black

students at PWIs, themes of marginalization, racial stigmatizations, and feelings of assimilation are prevalent. During their college career, they come to recognize greater racial difference and separation in the form of isolation from peers, faculty, and social networks. Students share how PWIs are less accommodating to the sociocultural needs of the Black student demographic and as a result, these students feel "disconnected" and "silenced" during their collegiate careers.

On the other hand, much of the discussion regarding HBCUs has been centered on the reinforcement of cultural and social capital, as well as great strides in educational access and opportunity for students. According to the literature, HBCUs provide students with cultural experiences that help to develop their racial identities and shape their societal contributions. HBCUs also provide academic platforms for its students that allow them to persist, matriculate, and pursue advanced degrees. The experiences of Black collegians reaffirm the academic, social, and cultural support of these institutions; mainly by increased interactions with faculty, staff, and peers, as well as support interventions that ensure students' academic success.

The literature surrounding how students decide to attend an HBCU reveals many implications as well. Racial demographics of the institution are an important factor for students who consider attending an HBCU. More specifically, some students are looking to HBCUs to increase their feelings of racial unity and cultural identity development as a response to their previous educational environments. They recognize through networks of friends, families, and school contacts that HBCUs provide more support for its students, as well as serve to uplift the Black community. On the other hand, students from predominately Black environments are opting to not attend HBCUs because they prefer

to experience racial diversity. Additionally, the literature suggests that students perceive HBCUs as having a lower quality of education because of the non-competitive admission standards of some institutions. It should be noted that these students' perceptions are funneled through information available about HBCUs and community networks (family, friends, alumni, etc.); both of which can be either monumental or detrimental in recruiting students to attend these institutions.

The current studies help to typify the students who are looking to attend HBCUs. This is particularly important because HBCUs can readily use this information to their advantage in order to increase enrollment and overall student population. Additionally, the literature illustrates students' expectations for choosing to have a Black college experience. That is, they are looking for supportive and friendly environments that promote their cultural and racial identities. However, existent literature also recognizes that student perceptions about HBCUs are indeed limited because there is an overall lack of information that is readily available to them (Freeman, 1999; Gyapong & Smith, 2012); be it through their schools, communities, or when attempting to access information about colleges in general. Implications from these studies help to support the need to further investigate student perceptions through the lens of African American teens who are college-bound, a population that is understudied.

<p style="text-align:center">Summary</p>

This chapter reviewed the literature to provide context for the overarching research question: *What are the perceptions of African American college-bound students on attending an HBCU?* Specifically, African intellectual lineage provides justification for education to serve as an inherited right for African Americans as continued by the

cultural and social reproduction of capital at HBCUs. Additionally, the experiences of Black collegians at both institution types help to illustrate the succeeding section on how aspiring students go about college selectivity. Finally, current and aspiring student perceptions are explored which reveal congruency regarding topics of diversity, racial identity, support, and influences of race in postsecondary institutions.

In Chapter 3, Critical Race Afrocentricity is explored. Critical Race Theory (CRT) recognizes how racism is embedded in American life. CRT opposes the dominant culture's ideas of neutrality and objectivity, and asserts that every concept and ideal should be noted with a critical analysis of how race has enacted as a factor. Stemming from a legal perspective, CRT assumes that racism continually contributes to inequalities between majority and minority groups. Ultimately, CRT aims to not only recognize racism and racist practices, but to also eliminate biases and selectiveness that exist because of racial degradation. Afrocentricity places continental Africa at the center of every idea in order to individually and collectively frame political, social, cultural, psychological, and economic principles. The main goal of Afrocentricity is to re-center and realign the African American with his/her ancestral identity. Combined, these theoretical frameworks form Critical Race Afrocentricity, which shapes the findings of the study in a way that is centered on capturing the historical and contemporary significance of HBCUs for Black students who are considering which colleges to attend. Additionally, the next chapter provides ample discussion on how participants are recruited and selected, and rationale for selecting methods of data collection, coding and analysis.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODS

This chapter discusses the research methods used to conduct the study. Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a theoretical framework that centers on issues of race rather than class. Afrocentricity is a theoretical and practical response to Eurocentric philosophies, theories, ideologies, and White actions against the Black body. Combined, these theories form Critical Race Afrocentricity, which places the racialized experiences, ideals, and perspectives of African Americans at the center of the research. This theoretical framework serves as the lens to answer the posed research question: *What are the perceptions of African American college-bound students on attending a Historically Black College or University (HBCU)?* The chapter also elaborates on the instrumentation, research setting, sample selection, data gathering procedures, analysis and coding, and limitations of the study.

Role of the Researcher

It is important to clarify the researcher's position within the framework of the study. First, the researcher is a two-time alumnus of HBCUs; that is an undergraduate degree and master's degree were conferred at public HBCUs in the South. This point illustrates connectivity to the cultural traditions, historical and contemporary significance, and personal relationships that accompany the Black college experience. This is particularly important when considering the researcher's previous educational background of attending a predominantly Black high school in the South. The existing

literature proposes that students from these backgrounds are more likely to attend PWIs because they want to experience greater diversity in their postsecondary endeavors. Additionally, the researcher has also attended, but not matriculated from, a PWI in the South. The literature suggests that student perceptions and experiences about racial marginalization and disconnectivity regarding these institutions exist. These combined personal educational experiences both support and debunk some of the literature that is presented within this study, which provides justification for the framework to continue research.

Second, the researcher is a former educator from an urban school district and a current affiliate for a non-profit organization that conducts college and university tours with African American high school students. This point illustrates a base-level understanding of the current generation of Black college-bound students. That is, through these experiences, the researcher has observed and participated in discussions with students about attending college specific to their institution types. This is particularly important because it demonstrates a level of awareness that the researcher can provide to inform the field, but also illustrates the competence in the researcher's ability to interact with this demographic.

Schwandt's (2007) definition of reflexivity emulates the researcher's position on this topic. By acknowledging "through critical reflection of one's own biases, theoretical predispositions, preferences, and so forth" the researcher asserts that this topic is one that is closely relative to personal and professional experiences (p. 260). The aforementioned experiences manifest two perspectives to be considered within the scope of this study: (a) HBCU alumnus perspective, and (b) educator perspective. The HBCU perspective

greatly influences the researcher's outlook and determination for this research study. Since there is limited research that captures the experiences of Black students attending Black institutions, there is ample motivation to carry out the study. Second, the educator perspective also seeks to implement the study in order to find ways to increase a student's academic and cultural preparation into postsecondary institutions. The researcher hopes to provide a platform in which the experiences and perspectives of African American students can shape and inform the surrounding literature on race, college selectivity, and student perceptions on postsecondary institutions, specifically HBCUs. As a result, the researcher balances these biases of perspective in order to examine the students' perceptions of HBCUs and their decisions regarding whether to attend in an objective fashion.

<center>Theoretical Framework</center>

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

CRT emerged as a response to Critical Legal Studies (CLS) that addressed the injustices of individuals and groups in social, cultural and political contexts. CRT strives to transform the relationship among ethnic groups and power by examining its role in everyday constructs. In relating CLS and CRT to education, Tate (1997) elaborates:

> The theories and belief systems predominant in education related to people of color and the representations of these citizens in American jurisprudence have shared a common trait. Both have been premised upon political, scientific, and religious theories relying on racial characterizations and stereotypes about people of color that help support a legitimating ideology and specific political action. (p. 199)

In this excerpt, he shares that policymakers within the legal system have used race as a factor in the creation and governing of laws that directly influence education. This can be related to historical studies that discuss the intelligence levels of African Americans

through assessment measures, as well as research on "achievement gaps" between Whites and students of color.

It is also fitting to mention Derrick Bell's indelible contributions to the CLS and CRT paradigm. According to Tate (1997), one main purpose of his work was to contribute to intellectual discussions concerning race in American society through the use of narratives and stories to better understand an individual's social reality. Bell's scholarship contributes to the current analyses on educational policies that include school inequities, desegregation, admissions and financial aid, school choice, university recruitment, and school finance; all of which are instrumental to topics related to this study.

A major point of CRT is centered on race and its analytical underpinnings with normative principles in education, how it limits and discredits other ethnicities, and further asserts that racial privilege is still a dominant factor which has shaped laws and policies (Parker, 1998). Ladson-Billings (1998) elaborates that CRT utilizes the method of storytelling (narratives) to analyze preconceptions. It is through the narrative voice that experiential knowledge from a shared history with others to illustrate a world filled with racial hegemony is captured. The role of "voice" is a heavy focus in CRT and brings additional power to those combating racial injustices (Bell, 1989; Delgado, 1990). CRT scholars are attempting to interject minority cultural viewpoints, derived from oppressive history. Hence, a major goal of CRT is to eliminate racial oppression as part of a larger goal to eradicate all forms of oppression through the systematic inquiry of political dimensions of equity in education (Tate, 1997). Specifically in educational frameworks, CRT recognizes that racism and racist practices are deeply engrained in legal, cultural,

and psychological contexts. So, it is the role of CRT to examine these limits (based on race and/or racism as a practice) and their relationship to educational opportunity and equity for students of color (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Tate, 1997).

W. E. B. Du Bois was one of the pioneers who utilized CRT as a theoretical lens to investigate societal problems pertinent to the Black community. *The Philadelphia Negro* is an important text to mention here with regards to the use of CRT. Du Bois (1899/1996) conducted one of the earliest social scientific studies on Blacks in Philadelphia. He presented the social problems that this demographic faced in spite of other 'unassimilated' racial groups that do not experience issues related to poverty, crime, labor, and education. Correlated with census data, he described the environmental conditions, social class differences, color prejudices, and other factors. His use of statistical data and interpretation of graphs demonstrated the complexity of the Negro problem in society. He concludes that these social conditions were perpetuated by dominant forces, and not by the inherent occurrences and patterns of Negro life. His resolutions for social reform center on the Negro community taking an active responsibility to demand freedom from such inequitable conditions.

Du Bois's (1903) text, *The Souls of Black Folk,* also explains the experiences of Blacks in the South as a means to expose inequities in justice, education, and voting rights. Early on, Du Bois places great emphasis on the need to play a role in the American Republic so that Blacks could have an equal opportunity. He referred to a color line that separates racial differences, and provides a detailed account of the Freedman's Bureau. It is also important to highlight the original intentions of the bureau and its connection to the Civil War, and the overall politics of the nation. Du Bois (1903)

continues to discuss the importance of classical education as a means to develop leadership in the Black community. The Black church and the concept of religion and spirituality became a working formation of community leadership for Blacks. That is, ministry leaders were seen and treated as authority figures in the church and community; their perspectives on politics, education, and standards of living greatly influenced members of the congregation. To this extent, the goal of the HBCU in producing teachers and preachers is realized–students and graduates would greatly influence the educational and spiritual perspective of its community constituents.

Specific to this study, research has posited that PWIs pose race neutrality when positioned to accommodate students of color. There are, however, existent barriers that pose inferiority on the voices, viewpoints, and presence of racial minorities. To overcome this 'color-blindness' implementation of personal narratives, a heavy component of validity to this theoretical perspective is used to circumvent institutional racism. Parker (1998) elaborates that educational institutions avoid issues that are race-related because of its controversial nature. However, the development of CRT addresses racism and its influence on students of color in hopes that increased race-related discussions in education will lead to equitable experiences; in this particular case, how race impacts college selection.

Afrocentricity

Afrocentrism (also referenced as Afrocentricity) is the second theory used in the study. Afrocentricity also provides a racialized critique of society's historical and contemporary thoughts, ideals, and practices. In particular, this theory extends CRT because it centers distinctly on continental Africa's contributions to the world. While

there are a plethora of historians and academics who contribute to the discussion of

Afrocentricity in their scholarship, perhaps one of the most recognized is Dr. Molefi Kete

Asante. Asante has amassed the field with his numerous publications on Afrocentricity.

He provides a working definition for Afrocentricity in that it "is placing African ideals at

the center for any analysis that involves African culture and behavior" (Asante, 1998,

p. 2). He asserts that Europeanist views are continually pushed and inundated to all

blends of a people, despite worldly contributions from all ethnicities. Asante (1998) notes

that Afrocentricity challenges the ideas of mainstream social theorists (such as Marx),

and attempts to analyze the world through transcultural experiences rather than one

dominant discourse. Afrocentricity is a distinct paradigm, which supports both notions of

critical theory, but aligns itself as a separate theory. There are five characteristics of

Afrocentric thought as theorized by Molefi Asante:

1. The Afrocentric method considers that no phenomena can be apprehended adequately without locating it first. A phenom must be studied and analyzed in relationship to psychological time and space. It must always be located. This is the only way to investigate the complex interrelationships of science and art, design and execution, creation and maintenance, generation and tradition, and other areas bypassed by theory.
2. The Afrocentric method considers phenomena to be diverse, dynamic, and in motion and therefore it is necessary for a person to accurately note and record the location of phenomena even in the midst of fluctuations. This means that the investigator must know where he or she is standing in the process.
3. The Afrocentric method is a form of cultural criticism that examines etymological uses of words and terms in order to know the source of an author's location. This allows us to intersect ideas with actions and actions with ideas on the basis of what is pejorative and ineffective and what is creative and transformative at the political and economic levels.
4. The Afrocentric method seeks to uncover the masks behind the rhetoric of power, privilege, and position in order to establish how principal myths create place. The method enthrones critical reflection that reveals the perception of monolithic power as nothing but the projection of a cadre of adventurers.
5. The Afrocentric method locates the imaginative structure of a system of economics, bureau of politics, policy of government, expression of cultural

form in the attitude, direction, and language of the phenom, be it text, institution, personality, interaction, or event. (Asante, 2009, para. 8)

This theoretical framework has been most recently used as an agency for educational empowerment in predominately African American schools. Four elements of an Afrocentric Worldview that may help students to connect and to develop better relationships with one another are: (a) community, (b) spiritual/material connectedness of all things, (c) an understanding that history and time are circular and cyclical, and (d) the existence and importance of the Creator. Traore and Lukens (2006) assert:

From the fruits of Afrocentric research there could be a healing of the wounds of slavery, a growing strength in the struggle against oppression, a return to values of the heart and spirit, a revival of the role of education in the developing coping skills and enrichening the understanding of one's heritage . . . (p. xxx)

Gray (2001) highlights the intentions of Afrocentricity: "correct information that can be utilized in the work of transforming negative life situations in to positive life realities" (p. 23). In this way, Afrocentricity serves as a catalyst for bringing recognition to the HBCU for its lineage in providing access and opportunity to education for African Americans. Additionally, this framework allows for students to reflect on their experiences in education pertinent to their racial identities, guiding perceptions, and misconceptions about Black higher education.

Critical Race Afrocentricity

This study combines the two theories: CRT and Afrocentricity, to form Critical Race Afrocentricity. It is necessary to marry the two perspectives because each has considerable limitations paramount to the analytical needs of this study. CRT provides a racial lens to investigate participant responses and perspectives; however, this concept of race is not particular to the African American experience. Additionally, even the theory is an extension from Critical Legal Studies which emerged in the 1960s; CRT is more

centered on the current experiences of traditionally marginalized communities and therefore does not connect historical patterns of race to contemporary instances. For these reasons, Afrocentricity is utilized in the study; this theory can provide a lens specific to the contributions of African people while also connecting the contemporary with the historical.

However, Afrocentricity is also limited for the current scope of the study. Because Afrocentricity serves as a critique to Eurocentric ideologies that are imposed by mainstream society, there is a need to lighten the level of analysis for students' perceptions because of their age, experiences, and overall education. In other words, Afrocentricity may too readily deconstruct student perspectives as Eurocentric because of the students' inability to understand cultural and intellectual contributions of Africa and African descent people. In this way, CRT allows for participants' voices to be reflective of their experiential knowledge regardless of how it was shaped. Combined, the theories allow for a conceptual understanding of the racialized experiences associated with selecting a college or university, as well as providing a better understanding of how Black students perceive HBCUs in their historical and contemporary roles. Additionally, Critical Race Afrocentricity helps to investigate Black students' perceptions or misconceptions about Black colleges and how they impact the development and affirmation of racial identity.

It is important to capture the narrative experiences of African American students as they transition to higher education. Using a racial lens to depict experience with perception and juxtaposing continental Africa as the origin of intellectual thought and tradition, this framework captures contemporary perspectives on attending HBCUs. More

importantly, capturing their perspectives, ideals, and stories could serve as a counter narrative to literature that discusses factors influencing college selectivity, enrollment, and attendance. In this manner, voices of the marginalized become positions of authority in order to advance scholarship on the topic.

Research Design

Qualitative research addresses the social nature and meaning of reality in which generalizations cannot be made because of context-specific variables. Using inductive reasoning, methods and approaches for qualitative research include case studies, interviewing, observation, visual methods, and interpretive analysis (Lincoln & Denzin, 2005). In essence, the qualitative method acknowledges the fact that people are mutual influences on each other rather than isolated agents (Erickson, 1992). Qualitative studies that are not based on hypothesis testing are often regarded as descriptive studies or cases. However, description, interpretation, verification, and evaluation are the outcomes of qualitative research. Thus, Peshkin (1993) asserts that qualitative inquiries allow for new concepts to emerge, stories to be told, and for problem solving to occur. The inclusion of storytelling in qualitative research leaves room for interpretation, and thus remains part of the great debate amongst quantitative researchers.

Qualitative research sees objectivity as linked to an investigator's view of the world; facts cannot be divisible from values and agreement on results stem from a commonality of perspectives (Smith, 1983). Additionally, interpretation takes form in various methods. Lincoln and Denzin (2005) assert that all research is interpretive; research is ultimately based on a set of beliefs and interpretations that a researcher brings to a question. In contrast, for quantitative research, data collection may not be as

exhaustive, but instead, data sets may be provided to the researcher, or are already available through electronic mediums. Additionally, most qualitative studies take place in naturalistic or field-oriented settings to depict as much as possible about the natural or ordinary nature of the subject to be studied. In contrast, quantitative research is conducted under very specific conditions in order to establish treatment and control groups.

For the qualitative research method, data is deemed reliable and believable through a few different approaches. Heavily noted is the need for researchers to have a steadfast commitment to their theoretical perspectives. Brown (1989) notes that, "one puts aside motives other than the search for truth and suspends judgment as to whether certain states of affairs exist or whether certain norms are right" (p. 278). She further postulates that truth claims—information that seem objectively valid through the perspective of the researcher—must be reflective, critical, and have scientific stances. All of these factors are based on the interpretation of the researcher–which is the next subsequent point for discussion in good research. Brown (1989) also states, as it pertains to interpretive (hermeneutic) research, "if knowledge is to progress, (1) there must be objective standards for determining the truth of claims made in what is being interpreted and (2) there is need for criteria for appraising interpretations made of texts" (p. 278). Though postpositivist researchers (Phillips & Burbules, 2000) argue that there is never any work free from bias, many interpretivistic researchers would also refute that there is a high regard for the level of objectivity in their research. Smith (1983) argues that if research is truly objective, the findings must be acknowledged as the way they are– regardless of the interest of the researcher. He further notes that from an interpretivistic perspective, the issue of objectivity is nothing more than a social agreement and these

agreements are based on a commonality of the perspective. The ability to interpret

information objectively gives more clout to the qualitative researchers, and perhaps

serves as a justifiable explanation to carry on in research interests. Additionally,

techniques such as providing detailed descriptions through memos, establishing audit

trails, practicing reflexivity, and using triangulation of the data provide the reader with

rationale that data collection procedures and analyses are credible (Lincoln & Guba,

1985).

<div align="center">Case Study Method</div>

A case study is considered to be an investigation on a single unit, group, or entity

in search of relationship meaning between given context with aims to describe, explore,

and explain real-life situations. Case study is used in this investigation to capture the

perspectives of college-bound African American students. Rather than focusing on their

prior experiences as a phenomenological study would, this inquiry was focused on

perceptions about HBCUs, and whether the students would attend one. Case studies

traditionally have been used in the fields of medicine and business, as well as education,

to describe a phenomenon among a group of people or single case to be investigated.

According to Yin (2009), this type of research is a systematic way to organize and

present data based on in-depth analysis and interpretation. In most instances, case study

data is collected in naturalistic settings to provide the researcher with a real-world context

for the participant/subject studied.

More specifically for the descriptive case study design, Yin (2009) elaborates: "a

descriptive theory is not an expression of a cause-effect relationship, but covers the scope

and depth of the object being described" (p. 7). It is the goal of the researcher to better

understand African American high school students in order to seek remedy and/or

provide implications for institutions who are looking to increase their Black student

population as well as provide discussion about college choice to college-bound teens.

This type of research method has been used and popularized by educational researchers

particular to the field. Ladson-Billings (1994) conducted a case study with highly

effective teachers in urban student populations to write her book *Dreamkeepers*.

Similarly, Lipman (2004) conducted a case study in which she reviewed four schools in

Chicago in terms of student academic outcomes in her seminal work, *High Stakes*

Education. Merriam (1998) notes:

> *Descriptive* means that the end product of a case study is a rich, "thick"
> description of the phenomenon under study. *Thick description* is a term from
> anthropology and means the complete, literal description of the incident or entity
> being investigated. Case studies include as many variables as possible and portray
> their interaction, often over a period of time. (pp. 29-30)

Yin (2009) takes this notion one step further and claims that knowledge learned from

case study is different from other research knowledge because it is more concrete,

contextual, and more developed by reader interpretation.

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

The particular method used to conduct this study is semi-structured interviews.

Kvale (1996) notes: "The qualitative research interview is a construction site of

knowledge. An interview is literally an *inter view*, an inter change of views between two

persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest" in that the interview serves as site

of gathering and confirming knowledge about the particular topic at hand (p. 2). He

describes the nature of a semi-structured interview: ". . . an interview whose purpose is to

obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the

meaning of the described phenomena" (pp. 5-6).

In this interviewing technique, the researcher sought to interpret the current life experiences of African American teens, as well as gain a better understanding of their perceptions in attending or not attending an HBCU. Eder and Fingerson (2003) note: "One clear reason for interviewing youthful respondents is to allow them to give voice to their own interpretations and thoughts rather than rely solely on our adult interpretations of their lives" (p. 33). Additionally, interviews were individualized. Eder and Fingerson (2003) argue that the "power dynamic" that exists between children and adults can be eliminated or reduced if children are interviewed in groups rather than individual. They elaborate:

> The group setting is also important for minimizing the power differential between the researcher and those being studied. Power dynamics occur in all interview studies, in that the researcher has control over the research process as well as over much of the interview by virtue of being the one posing the questions. As noted previously, in studies of youth the researcher also has the added power associated with age. Both of these aspects can be minimized to some degree when interviewing takes place in group settings, as children are more relaxed in the company of their peers and are more comfortable knowing that they outnumber the adults in the setting. Also, there is less chance for a researcher to impose adult interpretations and language on the young people if they are interviewed collectively and have the opportunity to develop and convey aspects of their peer culture in their talk. (p. 35)

This researcher, however, interviewed participants individually for a number of reasons. First, individual interviews helped to capture organic, uninfluenced responses from their peers. The one-on-one interviews served to eliminate assimilation and/or conformity of perspectives if those participants in a group do not agree with what others share. Second, individual interviews allowed for participants to become more personalized with the connections of their thoughts to their families, friends, and individual perceptions. In this case, participants may have wanted to divulge information that was personal or specific to their reasons for attending a college or university. With

regards to personal information that could be shared, participants needed to have a safe

and judgment free space to elaborate on their responses. Eder and Fingerson (2003)

contend:

> Older children and adolescents have the developmental capacity to reflect upon
> their experiences in the manner needed to complete individual interviews
> successfully. By including single interviews in the researcher, the investigator can
> examine the participants' individual attitudes, opinions, and contexts and use this
> information to understand more fully the discussion occurring in the group
> interviews. (pp. 44)

Research Setting

For each participant, two interviews were scheduled and conducted in public

locations that can include: coffee shops, libraries, parks, and shopping malls, as deemed

appropriate and agreed upon by the participant and their parent/guardian. In particular,

interviews were conducted in neutral spaces where students were free from peer

distractions and influence when answering questions. Eder and Fingerson (2003) assert:

"In attempting to create a natural context for the interview, the researcher must also take

care to avoid creating situations that remind youth of classroom lessons based on

'known-answer' questions" (p. 36). Interviews were held after school hours or on the

weekends; whichever was most accommodating for students.

Sample Selection

Snowball sampling was the technique used to gather students to participate in the

study. A recruitment flier (see *Appendix A*) was posted in public places within the

vicinity of an urban city in North Carolina that included: libraries, coffee shops,

community bulletin boards, and neighborhood centers to solicit student participation. The

flier was also sent through a mass email to professional and personal networks of the

researcher. The flier specified if students were interested in participating, they were to contact the researcher.

Upon initial contact, more details, the recruitment script, and consent/assent forms were emailed or provided in person prior to collecting any data on the student (see *Appendix B*). Once the consent/assent form was received, the researcher contacted potential participants to complete the information sheet. This sheet requested basic information (that served as screening variables) such as grade-level, questions about the students' plans to attend college, and whether they received any type of college preparation or readiness (see *Appendix C*). Students were also required to provide proof of attendance at a North Carolina public high school by using a report card, transcript, or other official school documentation. This served as a screening variable for participants. Finally, the student needed to demonstrate their intentions to pursue higher education by providing a letter of acceptance from a college/university, application submission confirmation, or other related official document. This form of documentation also served as an identifier that the student was college-bound. From the information collected, students chosen to participate in the study were from a sample in upper grade levels (11th or 12th grade), had plans to attend college, and demonstrated proof of potential college attendance.

<div align="center">Data Collection and Procedures</div>

In order to gather necessary data, two individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12-15 students who were enrolled in North Carolina public high schools in Mecklenburg County (see *Appendix D* for the Interview Protocol). Data was collected from January 2013 through April 2014 during two individual interviews lasting no more

than 90 minutes per interview session. Additionally, each interview was audio recorded

using a digital tape recorder. The researcher also took notes (memos) during each

interview in order to record reactions or self-reflections about the interview. Finally,

reflexive notes were written immediately after each interview in an effort to capture any

additional rich contributions that may have occurred throughout the interview. Merriam

(1998) notes:

> These reflections might contain insights suggested by the interview, descriptive
> notes on the behavior, verbal and nonverbal, of the informant, parenthetical
> thoughts of the researcher, and so on. Post-interview notes allow the investigator
> to monitor the process of data collection as well as begin to analyze the
> information itself. (p. 88)

The procedures for the study are elaborated below. First, an interview time and

date were arranged with the participant. The participant and researcher met for the

interviewing session. It was confirmed that the researcher had received necessary

documentation in order to conduct the interview (consent/assent form and screening

information). While interview #1 was being conducted, the researcher chronicled any

pertinent data; following the interview the researcher made reflexive notes about the

interview. Next, the researcher transcribed the audio recording. Transcriptions were

completed using a software program that adjusts the speed of the sound recordings in

order to capture accurate depictions of what is being said. The researcher used a foot

pedal to pause/stop audio recordings in the process of transcription. Both of these

techniques provided reliability and validity of the data being transcribed. Kvale (1996)

notes:

> Transcribing involves translating from an oral language, with its own set of rules,
> to a written language with another set of rules. Transcripts are not copies or
> representations of some original reality, they are interpretative constructions that
> are useful tools for given purposes. (p. 165)

After completing the interview transcription, the participant was contacted to read and review the first transcription and conduct the second interview. Upon the second meeting, a member check was performed to ensure accuracy from the audio recording of the first interview. After the participant agreed to the accuracy of the transcription, the second interview began. The procedures set for the second interview were identical to the first. That is, during the interview, notes were taken and after the interview, the researcher documented reflexive notes. After the second interview, the researcher transcribed the audio recording and contacted the participant to schedule a date and time to convene for the second member check. After the participant consented to review the second transcription, he/she was asked to conduct a final member check on the combined transcriptions from both interviews via email. When this final member check was completed, the participant's involvement in the study was complete. The researcher thanked each participant for their time and contributions to the study; then combined all necessary data (interview transcriptions, memos, and reflexive notes) and began preparation for analysis and coding of the data.

In order to ensure the data was safe and kept confidential, it was stored in a location known only by the researcher. No other parties had or will have access to the raw data. The audiotaped records were only viewed by the researcher and were not used for any other purpose other than this study. Immediately following review of the audio, the digital files were electronically stored on a portable drive and placed in a secure location. Data collected from the interviews is confidential. Pseudonyms for student names were used at all times throughout the study.

Data Analysis and Coding

First, transcribed interviews were coded and themed using the HyperRESEARCH software program. Each unit of data was coded with the purpose of the study in mind. A unit of data can be as small as a word a participant uses to describe a feeling or phenomenon, or as large as several pages of field notes describing a particular incident (Merriam, 1998). Second, the researcher utilized the software program to search through the data for underlying themes related to the historical and social contexts of education for Blacks: HBCU as a mecca for cultural capital, affirmations of ethnic identities, Black collegiate experiences, college selectivity, and perceptions about attending an HBCU. Coding is the formal representation of categorical and thematic analysis (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Merriam (1998) elaborates that coding involves labeling of the text based on the content of the study, and this process is the beginning of building a theory.

Next, codes were condensed and organized into categories–these categories formed overarching themes for the study. In particular, axial coding was used for the formation of themes and categories. Holistic and deductive analysis was used to form categories. Rossman and Rallis (2003) share: "holistic strategies describe connections among the data in the actual context–a place, an event, a person's experience, a text" (p. 274). Additionally, deductive analysis allows the researcher to develop categories based on the literature and the theoretical framework of Critical Race Afrocentricity. Merriam (1998) adds: "Devising categories is largely an intuitive process, but it is also systematic and informed by the study's purpose, the investigator's orientation and knowledge, and the meanings made explicit by the participants themselves" (p. 179). These categories reflect the purpose of the research and answer the research question(s).

From the categories developed, themes also emerge with reoccurring words, concepts, or perspectives gathered from the data.

Trustworthiness

In order to ensure internal validity of the research process, a few measures were put in place: (a) triangulation of the data; (b) member checks; (c) peer debriefing; and (d) an audit trail. First, triangulation of the data includes the use of multiple sources of data throughout the data collection process. During the data collection process, participants provided multiple sources of data to the researcher. This data served as confirmation of grade level, intentions to pursue higher education, and in some cases, confirmed plans after graduation. Additionally, multiple forms of data (audio recordings, memos, and reflexive notes) were collected to capture the accurate depictions, responses, and perspectives of students. Second, member checks were conducted after each interview for each participant.

After the initial analysis of the combined interviews was conducted by the researcher, a peer debriefing occurred to recount the researcher's attempts to describe and analyze the data in order to achieve consensual validation. This process ensured dependability of the research. An audit trail was also conducted to manage record keeping and the researcher's reflexivity about procedures. This process also ensured trustworthiness of the data. In order to establish external validity, the researcher provides thick, rich descriptions of the data in the succeeding chapter.

Limitations

As reiterated from the beginning chapter, there are limitations to consider for the study. First, it should be recognized that each participant's background knowledge

regarding institution types (specifically HBCUs and PWIs) is varied, and therefore cannot be controlled. However, as part of the initial screening of participants to be included in the study, each was considered to be "college bound," which was an indicator that they had some knowledge about colleges and universities, and planned to or currently attended. Second, through the collection of data obtained from interviews, there may have been brief discussions on PWIs in order for participants to make comparisons or contrasts. However, it is important to note that it is not the focus of this study to make vivid comparisons between the two institution types. Instead, it is the primary aim of the study to provide descriptive detail and insights regarding attitudes and perspectives about attending an HBCU.

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

This chapter provided ample discussion on the developed theoretical framework of Critical Race Afrocentricity. Using this lens to investigate Black student perceptions on attending an HBCU, a descriptive case study research design is most fitting. This chapter also discussed the structure of the research design, rationale for the naturalistic inquiry and descriptive case study, an elaboration on the process of selecting participants, data collection, and analysis of the study.

The next chapter presents the findings of the study. First, the chapter will provide demographic data on each participant which includes their school information and current experiences that have shaped their perspectives in education (family influences, college preparation, and extra-curricular activities). Next, the five major themes are presented and elaborated upon using salient quotes pulled from the interview data. These themes address the issues of how students perceive attending an HBCU.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The previous chapter discussed the research method of the study. More specifically, this qualitative study utilizes Critical Race Afrocentricity to explore how African American college-bound teens perceive attending an HBCU. As noted, the case study involves interviewing 13 participants on their definition of the Black College experience, guiding perceptions on HBCUs, and people, places, or things that influenced their thinking about them. After two semi-structured interviews, the participants were able to review transcripts of the data collected for accuracy in meaning. Finally, the data was coded and analyzed. Chapter 4 presents the major themes from the students' narratives.

The study seeks to investigate African American high school students' perceptions about attending an HBCU. Additionally, the study attempts to understand, through student voice, how their connection to African American history and culture influenced their decision to attend an HBCU. The findings of the study are categorized based on the focus of the research question: *What are the perceptions of African American college-bound teens on attending a Historically Black College or University*?

Themes were formed based on interview data which included two interviews with each participant. These themes specifically highlight African American college-bound teens' narratives regarding the importance of the Black college experience, and perceptions about attending an HBCU. It should be noted that the names of each

participant, their schools, and faculty affiliations are changed to protect the identity of those involved. However, the names of the postsecondary institutions are provided as stated by the participants.

There are two parts to this chapter: Part I provides demographic and background information on participants and the schools they attend. Due to the context of this research study, it is important to capture preliminary information on each participant: demographics, the time in which college consideration began, colleges/universities applied to, and the college/university they decided to attend. Table 2 provides demographic information which includes: name of participant, gender, school in which they attend, college/university in which the participant plans to attend, and institution type. Table 3 provides preliminary data on the schools they decided to attend. Information on the school includes the following: name of the school, type/category, number of students enrolled, number of participants involved from the school, racial make-up of the school, percentage of students who are in college preparation courses, and the graduation rate for Black students. This information is also important because it provides context for the educational environment of each student and the access that they had to college preparation courses and programs.

In Part II of the chapter, five major themes that emerged from the data are introduced, elaborated, and discussed. The findings are presented utilizing Critical Race Afrocentricity as a theoretical framework to provide a lens for analyzing students' perceptions about Black postsecondary institutions. Additionally, key themes presented in the literature help to shape preliminary codes for data analysis. Through axial coding,

themes and their subsequent categories emerged to further inform the research topic. The themes that emerged were:

I.   The Black College experience: Going to School with People Who Look Like You, and Having Fun

II. Student Perceptions about HBCUs: "A Good Choice" for Black Students

III. Race is not a Key Issue in College Choice: Matters to Some, But not All

IV. Attending an HBCU: "It's Very Important to Me"

V.   Misinformed about HBCUs

Part I: Participants and Schools

Table 2: Participants' demographic information and college selection

Name	Gender	High School	College to Attend	Institution Type
Jacoby	Male	Newsome H.S.	Central Piedmont Community College (CPCC)	2-yr, public, community college
Brandy	Female	Newsome H.S.	Hampton University (Hampton)	4-yr, private, HBCU
Alexis	Female	Madison H.S.	North Carolina Central University (Central)	4-yr, public, HBCU
Tremaine	Male	Madison H.S.	Howard University (Howard)	4-yr, private, HBCU
Kayla	Female	Watts H.S.	North Carolina A&T University (A&T)	4-yr, public, HBCU
Sakeem	Male	Arnold H.S.	University of North Carolina School of the Arts (UNCSOA)	4-yr, public, university
Dawn	Female	Arnold H.S.	Queens University (Queens)	4-yr, private, university
Michelle	Female	Watts H.S.	Winston-Salem State University (Winston-Salem)	4-yr, public, HBCU
Winnie	Female	Arnold H.S.	Central Piedmont Community College (CPCC)	2-yr, public, community college
Courtney	Female	Newsome H.S.	University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG)	4-yr, public, university
Elijah	Male	Watts H.S.	Winston-Salem State University (Winston-Salem)	4-yr, public, HBCU
Tammy	Female	Newsome H.S.	Guilford College (Guilford)	4-yr, independent, college
Miles	Male	Newsome H.S.	North Carolina A&T University (A&T)	4-yr, public, HBCU

Jacoby

Jacoby is a graduating senior at Newsome High School where he has attended for two years since his transfer from Wendell High School. Jacoby plans to major in computer engineering when he enters college, where he has career aspirations to be an

Apple Engineer in California. Originally, he dreamed of attending Syracuse University

because he wanted to return to New York and play on the basketball team through an

athletic scholarship.

> Syracuse. I wanted to go there because, I should just, I've always been a big fan
> of the college basketball team and I wanted to play basketball there, because at
> first I wanted to stay there I wanted to move back to NY and attend high school
> there and graduate and try to see if I could get a scholarship to Syracuse.

However, since his final year, he has decided to attend CPCC to increase his grade point

average (GPA) and then transfer to A&T because it is more realistic for his college plan.

He elaborates on a conversation he had with a family member who currently attends

Syracuse University: "The one that went to Syracuse is like, you're not going to make it

to Syracuse, they told me like straight up. Judging by the grades I got now theys like nah,

that's not going to happen." Both of his parents have attended college so Jacoby feels

like, through casual conversations, they have adequately equipped him for postsecondary

education. He comments:

> My dad, when I talk to him, he's like yeah, "college is going to be a fun time,"
> right before I left in the summer time, because you know he lives in New York.
> He told me like college is going to be the funniest time of your life you just got to,
> you know, make sure you prepare because it's not for everybody.

> In terms of preparing for college, Jacoby mentioned that he participated in college

readiness programs as early as middle school, namely the Advancing Myself via

Individual Determination (AVID) Program. He comments:

> I took an AVID class back in middle school and we wrote, we wrote to the
> college and they sent stuff back and said their requirements and all that stuff and
> that was my first little taste of college, around seventh grade.

He adds that AVID helped him to learn about the different degrees that colleges/universities have to offer and how this affects one's financial future in terms of degrees attained. He elaborates:

> We filled out what are we going to do after high school, and what did we want to be when we grow up. They showed us how. We did activities, like money-wise, if you just have a high school degree and try to get a job, you make this much. If you get an associate's degree, if you get a bachelor's degree, you get this much, stuff like that.

Upon entering high school, the AVID program was not available to him as a junior because enrollment was only open to seniors. As he and a few other students mentioned, AVID was only available to upperclassmen. As a result, he was encouraged to participate in Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC), which is a character and leadership development program that is federally sponsored by the U.S. Armed Forces and available to high school students nationwide (U.S. Army JROTC, n.d.). Jacoby shares:

> I didn't really like [JROTC] too much, and there was no other classes I could get into. I wanted that class, but I couldn't drop any other classes to be put in that class. They put me in the basketball class, but I didn't want to drop that. It was like I was last priority, because I was only a sophomore at the time. They just did the seniors first.

Jacoby mentioned that even though other programs were available to prepare him for college during his high school years, he opted out because they were overcrowded with students. However, he is currently enrolled in two advanced placement (AP) courses this year; both of these courses will help him in the transition to CPCC.

Brandy

Brandy is a senior at Newsome High School and plans to attend Hampton to become a neonatal nurse. Beginning her tenth grade year, she transferred from another high school due to rezoning within the district. She elaborates:

My freshman year I went to Henderson High School, which was a predominately Black high school, like that one white kid was the one who stood out 'cause it was all Black people. Then I came to [Newsome High School] my tenth grade year 'cause they did the whole school zoning thing and then I didn't drive then so I didn't have transportation to school so I switched to [Newsome High School], which *was* like predominately white. So, yeah I hated [Newsome High School] at first, I wanted to go back, I didn't like it, I didn't know anybody. But now I got used to it, and then they did the transitions from changing like Wendell High School to come to [Newsome High School] so then it kind of got evened out a little bit with black and white. But overall I've enjoyed my experience at [Newsome High School] so far.

Bandy is Vice President for the Newsome High School Chapter of DECA; this program is a national membership organization that prepares students for careers in marketing, finance, hospitality, and management through integrated curriculum and practical, applicable activities (DECA, n.d.). She also participates in the Health Occupation Students of America (HOSA) and is a member of the yearbook staff. Brandy is enrolled in an AP Human Geography course and she feels the course has adequately prepared her for college. She shares:

Well, being that it's an AP class, which I'm going to get college credit for, he does stuff a little different, because it is an AP class. It's my level, like a college readiness class. He's not going to remind you that something is due tomorrow or that we have a paper due on Friday, because he says in college, the teachers might give you a syllabus, and he's not going to tell you that something's due on Friday. You need to pay attention to the syllabus all along. There's no, "Oh, I didn't read the syllabus. I didn't know this was due today." He's kind of hard and honest, but I know it's preparing me for how it'll be in college.

Brandy comments that her parents are adamant in talking about college even though neither one attended. She is most inspired by her older sister who currently attends UNCG and looks to her for advice about preparing. She elaborates:

Yeah, she was the first person to go. I just look up to my sister in a lot of ways because I'm 17, she's 23 and there's still like a little gap but like me and her are really close, like I'm always hanging out with her, and then like she gives me advice on stuff, and then she's just the first person to call. She tells me, you know like, what, say like I want to have fun. Like what I have to manage my time,

> balance time, I may want to go out one night but I have class the next morning, like she just tells me about my stuff so.

When making decisions on which college to attend, Brandy considered Howard as her first choice, Hampton as her second, and last, UNCG. However, the admission process and campus tour greatly influenced her decision to attend Hampton University. She recounts:

> I just did the application just because it was free. So, they gave me a decision like back in two weeks, so then I started doing my research on it, and then we went to go tour and I loved the campus. And then they sent me a $10,000 scholarship so I took it.

Alexis

Alexis is a senior at Madison High School and plans to attend North Carolina Central after graduating. She intends to major in pre-law and then enter the law school program. Currently, she is enrolled in Honors Anatomy and Physiology and Honors Chorus; both of which, in her opinion, have helped her to prepare for college. She shares:

> I mean with the amount of work they give us I guess that's somehow helping for college but I don't think like some of the other stuff is not really helping because like I think they probably like go off of the test, like they just teach you what's on the test and you don't learn outside of that very much. But other than that with the amount of work we do it's pretty much like college.

Additionally, Alexis has participated in the REACH club for the past three years. REACH stands for Reward, Educate, Achieve, Challenge, and Honor, and its purpose is to help students to develop initiative and leadership skills through service projects in the school and community (Madison High School, n.d.). The club also has a college readiness component that centers on helping students to increase their GPAs, explore colleges and universities (specifically HBCUs), and navigate through admissions and degree programs. She credits these experiences for helping her to prepare for college:

"They helped us with things like getting our resume together and what we would need for college, and then going to–what is that thing called, NCAA, stuff like that, go see other colleges and stuff like that."

For Alexis, conversations about going to college also came from family. She shared that her sister is currently enrolled at Central, and she has a host of aunts, uncles, and cousins who have attended both HBCUs and PWIs within the state. She elaborates:

> They just tell you, like, mostly they just tell you "oh you need to go to college, you're going to do something in life" and all that stuff. And I have one aunt, my aunt Kelly she stays in Charlotte, she tells me, like she helps me with all the college things like she helped my sister where she was by like taking her to Durham and like visiting the school and stuff like that. She is trying to help me now too, but, I'm trying to figure it out on my own.

Alexis only applied to two institutions: UNC Charlotte and Central. She considered UNC Charlotte because her close friend is currently enrolled, but ultimately decided to attend Central as a result of the law program and being closer to her sibling. Upon entering Central, she has plans to also participate in cheerleading–a neglected experience from her high school years. She comments:

> I want to be a cheerleader at NCCU, because here at this school its, well people say they hear about Madison H.S. they think it's like a Black school but I don't see that 'cause I think it's a White school and I see it as a White school because it is a White school and like this year is our first year having all black cheerleaders on the basketball cheerleading squad.

Tremaine

Tremaine is a senior at Madison High School where he serves as Student Council President, Senior Class President, and is a member of the track team. He shares that as early as middle school, he began to think more about going to college. Tremaine explains:

> That was the point when they started talking about high school and how that prepared you for college and how you really need to start thinking about college. That was the point where I was stuck on UNC Chapel Hill.

He elaborates that programs such as the Distinguished Young Gentlemen of America (DYG) and Campus Connections enhanced his understanding about college and the different institution types. DYG is a National Summer Academy annual initiative that is hosted by Florida A&M University (FAMU). In order to participate, male students in grades 9-12 must submit an application that consists of recommendation letters, an essay on their career goals, and a high school transcript that illustrates a minimum GPA of 3.0 (DYG, n.d.). Within the program, attendees participate in various workshops, sessions and activities that assist in creating the next generation of leaders through developing financial literacy, critical thinking, civic and social awareness, and life skills (DYG, n.d.). The following salient quote elaborates on his experience with DYG:

> It's actually a hard program to get into. There's close to 500 applicants from all over the US, and me and my friend, we both were the only people who made it in from North Carolina. It's basically this program–they call it an academy also, at Florida A&M University and it basically teaches you the life skills you need, and then they talk about the school a whole lot. They teach you things that you'll need in college . . . We did fun things. There are a lot of fun things that we did, but I got to stay in a dorm for the first time. I had to wake up extremely early all the time, but it was worth it. I learned a whole lot more about college and met a whole lot of people, a lot of connections.

Additionally, Tremaine boasts about his adventures in visiting the various HBCUs along the east coast as a result of his participation in Campus Connections. Campus Connections is a nonprofit organization that seeks to increase awareness and interest in HBCUs through campus tours and integrated Christian counseling (Campus Connections, n.d.). Tremaine elaborates on the program: "It takes about like 300 Black students to HBCUs so they realize that they're there. I got accepted to I don't know how many

colleges, but each one of the HBCUs was because of they introduced me to them."

Tremaine applied to and was accepted at various HBCUs that included: Howard, FAMU,

Winston-Salem, and Morehouse College. He also applied to—and was accepted to—

Wingate University, but ultimately chose to attend Howard and plans to study Political

Science to one day become a politician.

In terms of his current study load, Tremaine takes advanced courses in

mathematics and foreign language, but attributes his Honors Civics class as the main

course that has helped him to prepare for college. Interestingly, Tremaine shares that

negative school experiences surrounding race have also increased his motivation to attend

an HBCU:

> The negative side about this school is it's not very diverse. I feel like, like that's
> uh, you feel like you're, you're friendly with the people But you're the only black
> student in the classroom so there's always that awkwardness. Like, for instance
> we talk about civil rights movement or something like that and it's, "Troy what do
> you think about this?" And instantly it's all right we got the black point of view.

Tremaine adds that this was a major consideration when examining institution types,

specifically HBCUs versus PWIs:

> I'm pretty sure they'll even be a little bit better than they are here, but in the end,
> you're still the minority, and that's the entire point in going to an HBCU, is I'm
> tired of being the minority. For once, I'd like to be the majority, so that's mainly
> why. I mean, it makes sense.

Tremaine has an older sibling who is enrolled at Savannah State University, but also

shares that one teacher in particular, Mrs. Campbell, was instrumental in changing his

perspective about HBCUs. He elaborates:

> She's uh, one of the little bit of Black teachers we have at the school. She went to
> an HBCU. She almost went to like a major, like a PWI. But she decided to go to
> Winston-Salem State herself. Um, she actually is one of the reasons I want to go
> to an HBCU 'cause I didn't know what they were and I was that student that like
> "I'm definitely not going to an all-Black school." I called them all black schools

because I didn't know they were majority black schools or historically black schools but she, I asked her, I was like why did you got to an HBCU over NC State. Like Winston-Salem State over NC State, what's wrong? Umm, she told me the way she looked at it was, "if they didn't want me then, they can't have me now." I thought about that for a while and it still sticks in my head to this day.

Kayla

Kayla is a senior at Watts High School where she is cheerleading captain. Originally from New York, she once had aspirations to become a professional dancer; however, a leg injury redirected her career path. She shares that her transition to high school was difficult because she was expected to become a young adult:

> Then I got to high school, and I couldn't be a little baby no more. I had to grow up, and it was hard for me in ninth grade, because I had to do everything, and it wasn't just like the teacher was just going to love me. It got hard, and the classes were hard. I had one easy class, and that was my dance class. That was it, until I got injured.

She is enrolled in three AP courses: Environmental Science, English, and Psychology. Additionally, she participates in the AVID Leadership program at school. She attributes the courses and program as helping her to get prepared for college:

> My AVID class is helping, because it's teaching me how it is going to be in college, and then my science class, I'm guessing that's supposed to teach me, too, because we have work every single day. They'll give us five pages of work, come to class the next day – it's not even due the next day, but we get five more pages.

At her school, during Free Application Week, students were encouraged to apply to colleges because application fees were waived. In doing so, she applied to the following: Spelman College, A&T, UNCG, Clark Atlanta University, Central, Fayetteville State University, Pennsylvania State University, and Winston-Salem. During her interview, Kayla explained that she wanted to gain an out-of-state college experience, but she was unable to afford the tuition. She explains: "I really don't want to be in North Carolina for college. I wanted to be outside, but it costs a lot, because I got accepted there, but it costs

$20,000, because I'm out of state." Kayla's dream is to attend Spelman College. She

elaborates:

> For some reason, I always wanted to go to Spelman. I didn't even know anything about the school; I just knew I just wanted to go there. That's all I knew, and then when my mom took me to visit, I was like, "I want to be here. I really want to be here."

> Kayla shares that her parents also stress the importance of going to college.

Kayla's mother and brother are pursuing two-year degrees at local community colleges in

the area. In her immediate family, she will be the first to pursue a bachelor's degree. She

articulates that her dad is indifferent to the type of institution she attends, but she prefers

to enroll at an HBCU. Kayla explains:

> My dad, when I speak to him, he just wants me to go to college. He doesn't care what college I go to. I mean, he cares, but it's just like, wherever I want to go. But me, I grew up being around going to schools that were mostly African American, and that's where I'm comfortable at, because I'm not trying to sound racist or nothing, but I'm just not really comfortable when I'm around that, because I feel out of place.

At the time of the interviews, Kayla, who had a 3.0 GPA, was notified that she was

accepted into all of the schools she applied to but was awaiting decisions from Spelman

College and Pennsylvania State University. She later decided that she would enroll at

A&T to study psychology. Another major factor for her consideration of colleges was

financial aid; she stressed having difficulty finding scholarships either for her major of

study or based on GPA requirements. She comments:

> It was either I tried to find a psychology scholarship, but it wasn't in any state I was going to college in. I tried to find something just for me, but you had to have a 3-something. I only have a 3.0, and then I found one scholarship.

Sakeem

Sakeem is a senior at Arnold High School where he participates in various extra-

curricular activities that include dance and performing arts. Having attended Arnold H.S.

since ninth grade, he attributes his transition to high school and meeting new people as

one of the main reasons he began to think about going to college. He elaborates: "It's like

one of those things that you know you have to do, because people were like, Oh, I want

to go to this school and this school, and so I started researching different schools."

Sakeem is enrolled in both honors level and AP courses; he elaborates that these courses,

and more specifically, his AP History instructor Mr. Keith, have helped to prepare him

for college:

> It's so fast paced, and he expects a lot out of us. Like, we have to read every day. If you don't read, you don't know what's going on. So I have to take extraneous, extraneous notes. Yes very, 'cause I have to write everything down that he says. And he just goes by fast and I'm just like "Okay, can you slow down?" And he's like "college isn't going to slow down for you."

In addition to speaking with his peers about different colleges, Sakeem elaborated that his

older sister who is currently attending graduate school at East Carolina University (ECU)

also "drills" him on going to college.

Sakeem originally applied to eight colleges and universities–all within the state of

North Carolina. These universities included: A&T, UNC Charlotte, Appalachian State

University, ECU, UNCG, and UNCSOA. During the initial interview, Sakeem shared

that he was accepted into and planned to attend A&T to major in nursing, which would

be supported by a partial athletic scholarship in swimming, but he later acknowledged

that receiving a full scholarship to pursue studies in dance, he was convinced that he

should attend UNCSOA. Still, through his narrative, he expresses great interest in gaining

"the Black college experience," despite having early reservations about HBCUs. Sakeem

explains:

> At first I didn't want to go to an HBCU. I was like "I don't want to go there, that's not for me." But then I went to go see the campus, my mom was like, "you

need to just go and see the campus and see how it looks." So I went to UNCG and I was like "okay, this is a nice campus." While we were in the area we went to A&T and I just fell in love with the campus. Like everything, the feel, everything was great.

Dawn

Dawn is a senior at Arnold High School where she feels that attending college is timely, and it would provide a much needed change. She elaborates: "I've been here since sixth grade. So I'm definitely ready to go. Um, it's kind of just . . . I'm ready for a change. Like same people, same teachers, same walls. Like same hallway." She is actively involved in Students Preventing and Informing on Drugs and Alcohol (SPIDA); this youth organization is an entity of the county's Drug Free Coalition that supports causes to keep communities safe from drugs and alcohol (SPIDA, n.d.). Dawn also serves as the editor of the school yearbook. She also volunteers at area hospitals, is a member of Teen Volunteer Board at the Ronald McDonald House of Charlotte. This organization is comprised of high school juniors and seniors who lead events and activities for teens to get involved in service (Ronald McDonald House of Charlotte, n.d.). Additionally, she is a student leader in the Girl Voice Network; the program seeks to bring agencies, professionals, and other community affiliates together in order to advocate for services that are aimed at female youth (Girl Voice Network, n.d.).

Dawn is currently enrolled in three AP courses that include: Biology, Human Geography, and Statistics. She credits her biology course as the most beneficial in helping her to become college ready. Dawn comments, "It's a college-level course, so once we know what my college biology class is going to be like, it's not at a faster pace, but I get to understand what a college class would be like."

Dawn elaborates that it has been a long-standing family expectation that she attend a college/university.

> Well mostly my grandma because she got married at 17, so she always wants us to have the experience that she didn't have so it's always like "do your work." You know, if anything happens she's like "study, study" so that's always been what she tells me.

Dawn also shares that she, along with her peers, preferred to explore private institutions. She elaborates: "I just think, because Arnold is a small school, and private schools tend to be smaller and more student-focused."

In the initial interview, Dawn shared that she applied to Queens and High Point University; both universities seemed adequate because she preferred to be closer to home. Receiving early acceptances into both institutions, the full scholarship from Queens solidified her plans. After graduating high school, she plans to enroll to begin her studies in Biology to become a medical doctor.

Michelle

Michelle is a senior at Watts High School, but had recently transferred from Henderson High School due to rezoning within the district. While at Henderson High School, she participated in track and the international baccalaureate (IB) program. While she continues to run track for Watts High School, she is no longer a part of IB courses. Instead, she is enrolled in four AP classes: Statistics, English, Government, and Environmental Science. She elaborates that the AP Government class is helping her to prepare for college because the instructor is more personable: "He gives you a lot of information, and stories that he has, just personally, he gives stories about college, whenever he was in college and stuff. It's like, wow, that's what we've got to do."

Michelle shares that both of her parents attended and graduated from college so she feels knowledgeable about the transition she is about to undergo. But, she mentions that her dad is most adamant about having discussions with her about preparing to go to college.

> He's like, "You know you have to get your grades up. You know you've got to keep your grades up to go to college, and if you want to do this sports things, you're going to have to do it right." He tells me everything about college, and about how your freshman might be trying to get to know people, since you're the new person, if you have a roommate, trying to get to know them and stuff. Yeah, he tells me a lot.

Michelle's father has also been diligent in traveling to visit colleges with her. These experiences have also helped her to learn more about college. Michelle states:

> We were just going to visit different places, and he's like, "Oh, these are the colleges are around this area and these colleges are around this other area." When I went to the tennis camp, like I said, I went to Clemson. I stayed there for a week. I basically just got a whole tour of the campus and got everything about that, and then whenever my dad goes up to Greensboro for A&T homecomings or something, we go up there for activities and learn about those different colleges.

Michelle originally dreamed of attending FAMU to major in Physical Therapy, but feels that the long distance away from home will be a strain. She elaborates: "That's kind of a long stretch, too, because trying to get into college, and then getting over to Florida, coming here. That's a stretch." In deciding which colleges she would attend, she applied to Winston-Salem and Wingate University. Michelle has high hopes of attending Winston-Salem on a track scholarship. However, she shared that a breakdown in communication between her and the Winston-Salem State coach has limited her opportunities thus far. She comments: "She's really hard to get in touch with, and just trying to get a hold of her and trying to have a conversation about track."

Winnie

Winnie is a senior at Arnold High School and originally enrolled because of the school's magnet program in Dance and Performing Arts. She once aspired to be an international ballet dancer, however, since her father's passing, she has been less motivated to continue a professional career in the field. She spends most of her free time working part-time after school. She elaborates: "I used to love to dance. I think ever since my dad died, it made me just not want to dance. It really changed." She admits that she really did not give college heavy consideration after her father's death, but started thinking more about it in the eleventh grade. She now plans to attend CPCC to pursue a career as an Ultrasound Technician.

She is currently enrolled in AP English and Mathematics. However, she does not feel that these courses are helping her to better prepare for college, specifically in her major, since the school's educational focus is performing arts. She recounts:

> What I'm doing is ultrasound technician, so math will help me, but English, not really. To be honest not really, but high school is–well, our school is a performing arts school, so we didn't have nursing classes or regular classes a regular high school has, but we have majors, like dance, performing arts stuff. This school really is not teaching me to go into nursing and stuff.

Both of Winnie's parents graduated from college and her brother currently attends a community college. She shares that her mom is diligent in continuing the conversation of her going to a college/university. Winnie states:

> She wants me to go to college and stuff. She was mad at first, because at first, at one point, I was like, "I'm not going to college, I'm not doing two years, I'm not doing nothing." She was really, really upset with me about that, and then I was like, "Okay, maybe I will do something a little more than work, maybe a class or two won't hurt." I was like, I'm going to go to a two year college, and she was like, "That's good, a lot of people do community college." I was like, I'm going to go to a two-year college. I like doing ultrasounds with the baby systems, so my

mom was like, "Why don't you go to school for sonography?" and that's what I did.

Courtney

Courtney is a senior at Newsome High School and currently works part-time at a golf club. She is enrolled in two AP courses: Human Geography and Government. She shares that these classes are helping her to prepare for college, but other classes, such as her Algebra II course is also beneficial. She elaborates:

> My Algebra teacher, my Algebra II teacher, she really prepared us for college. She gave us the course load, and she didn't slack on us. Some of my teachers, they don't really care, but also my AP Human Geography teacher, he's preparing us for college as well, I guess because AP's like a college-level course.

Additionally, Courtney feels like counselors and resources at schools are helpful in providing students with information about colleges. She shares, "Ms. Crosby, our counselor, she's really good. She's always on it. She gives out packets and stuff, like scholarship letters, everything." Courtney has family members who have attended college, but they did not graduate. She elaborates that this is the main reason why her mother is so persistent with her going to and completing college. She recounts: "She pursued a major in business but didn't graduate, so she has always pushed me to graduate and finish college."

Originally, Courtney wanted to attend the UNCSOA to pursue a career in dance, but similar to Kayla, she suffered a leg injury which ultimately rerouted her career goals. Courtney applied to three universities in the state: UNCG, Elon University, and UNC Charlotte. UNCG has been her preferred choice since learning about the school in middle school. However, Elon University is also a top contender for her because of the reputable law school program. Lastly, UNC Charlotte is considerably close to home for Courtney.

Courtney elaborates that she decided to apply to the aforementioned colleges mainly because of her experiences in black public schools. Courtney explains:

> Since I was little, my mother always got me in white schools, so that's what I'm used to being around. Now I go to [Newsome High School]. When I first got there, it was a predominantly white school, and now it's black, but that doesn't bother me at all.

However, she shares her interest in attending an HBCU or predominately Black postsecondary education setting: "I prefer to be around black people. I wanted to go to an HBCU, but my mother, she's like, the funding is different and it's harder to get money, because you're not a minority, stuff like that."

Ultimately, Courtney received acceptance and a full scholarship to UNCG and plans to enroll to pursue a Political Science degree with a minor in Finance. She attributes her decision to attend UNCG to the fact that she was offered a scholarship to attend this institution. Courtney explains:

> UNCG, they're offering to pay my full tuition for all four years . . . and partly because I'm a minority and partly because of my grades, and I wouldn't have gotten that same scholarship if I had went to a–well, I could have, but it wouldn't have been as much money.

Elijah

Elijah is a senior at Watts High School where he is a member of the Honor Society and the quarterback for the varsity football team. Elijah was also excited to mention that his peers voted him as King for the Senior Prom. He is currently enrolled in two honors courses: English IV and Pre-Calculus. He feels that these classes are adequately preparing him for college work. He elaborates:

> I need Math in college, so my pre-calculus class is really like the next step to college. The extra math you have to take, I'll really have completed all my math, but that's the extra one you have to take, so I'll be on a college level, when I go there.

Additionally, Elijah participates in the AVID Leadership Program and has been active

since the tenth grade. He shares:

> We take our classes of the week, we take a question, something we didn't know, put it on this piece of paper. It's called a TRF, and it's telling, like, your point of confusion, what you know and the things that you need help on, so that really helped me in the end. In Leadership, we work on time management. Really, right now we're at the computer lab, doing a college toolkit, that's going about finances, personal information and just things you need to get to college.

Within the program, he also serves as a mentor to incoming students. He remarks: "I have

two mentees, from my leadership class. I have to go talk to them. They play football too,

so basically, I teach them about football and how to act in school." Elijah also shares that

his teachers are very supportive in helping him to stay focused on attending college:

> They just say they are more ready for me to go to college than I am. Like, I am ready to go to college but they are on my back every day, "Did you do the application, did you go do your FAFSA? Have you talked to any college, any of the college coaches?" because they know I play sports. So they've really been on my back about it.

> Early on, Elijah planned to attend Oregon University–mainly because he liked the

football team. He elaborates:

> Because the uniforms, the football teams in uniform . . . They got the best uniform . . . Its lime green, silver, black and yellow . . . They get new uniforms. They get like 30 uniforms a year . . . Because the co-founder of Nike went to Oregon and they have a big Nike factory south of Oregon, so they get all new uniforms and stuff.

However, more recently, he applied to Winston-Salem, Shaw University, A&T, UNC

Charlotte, and Central. These institutions provided application fee waivers during Free

Application Week at his school. In the interviews, Elijah claimed that he had also applied

to—and was accepted to Yale University. Although this is questionable, ultimately, he

was accepted to Winston-Salem on a full athletic scholarship. Elijah will pursue a

Bachelor's degree in Health with an emphasis on Sports Medicine, where in the future, he

desires to become an athletic trainer.

Tammy

Tammy is a senior at Newsome High School and currently participates in the

school chapter of the NAACP, DECA (a marketing organization), and Habitat for

Humanity. Habitat for Humanity, in the school campus chapters, partners with the local

Habitat for Humanity affiliates to build and rehabilitate home, fundraises and advocates

for affordable housing, and educates others in the community (Habitat for Humanity,

n.d.). Additionally, Tammy has been diligent in her college preparation; she is currently

in two AP courses: Human Geography and English. Combined, she has earned 23 credits

in college preparation coursework. However, she feels as though the school overall is not

as aggressive in helping to prepare students for the transition to college. She elaborates:

> Newsome High School doesn't really do a lot of college stuff. We might have an
> assembly and they'll be like, "Okay, make sure you fill out your FAFSA, make
> sure you do this and that, and if you have any questions, go on this website," but
> they don't really sit me down and have you like, "Okay, here's a list of colleges,
> here's majors that they major in." They don't do a career aptitude or anything like
> that, not really.

The lack of proper advising was an issue that was raised by Tammy. Tammy continues:

> They'll ask "Where are you going to college?" But they don't really help or get
> into depth with anything. They'll just ask you about. If you say you don't know,
> they'll be like, "Well, maybe you could look up blah, blah, blah, or they might
> give you an idea, but they don't really sit down and be like, "Okay, let's do this
> and this and this." You'd have to specifically ask, and they may or may not get
> back to you.

Tammy shares a very close kinship with her family; her mother and grandfather

are college graduates–they both serve as major inspirations for her to attend and graduate

from college. Tammy and her family began to discuss college more seriously after her

tenth grade year. She recounts: "All the way up until tenth grade, I thought college was just something that happens after high school. Junior year, when they started getting more into it, I was like, oh."

The colleges/universities Tammy applied to include the following: Guilford, A&T, North Carolina State University, Georgia State University, and Greensboro College. The rationale for applying to Guilford, A&T, and Greensboro College were that they were "close to home" and "good schools." Ultimately, she decided to attend Guilford; however, she mentioned that she may consider transferring to an HBCU after her first year. She aspires to become a nurse and then matriculate to a graduate program for a master's degree in nursing.

Miles

Miles is a senior at Newsome High School and participates in the Marching Band, Habitat for Humanity, Fashion Club, Jazz Club, and Step Team. Since his start in high school, Miles has been placed on a college preparation track; he has accrued 27 hours in Honors and AP coursework. Miles discusses how the structure of his school is already similar to a college experience in that students must be responsible for themselves. Miles states:

> Depending on the way our high school is, they kind of treat it kind of like a college. You know how you go to college and you're just like, "I'm here for myself," no one's going to tell you have to turn in your homework, you have to do this and that. Teachers want us to get in that, "I'm here for myself," in high school. That's what our high school does . . . Yeah, you'll come back with your progress report, "How did I get a zero on this?" "You didn't turn it in." "You didn't tell me." "Oh. I told you the due date." They say, "In college, you guys are so used to being babied, having your teachers go, 'Okay class, do your homework, don't forget to bring your homework. Okay, give it to me.'" They're not going to do that.

Miles has a host of immediate family members who have attended and graduated from college. The idea of going to college has been discussed over his entire lifespan. He elaborates that his mom is the person who inspired him to pursue college:

> It was the week before December. It was December, November, October, those three months. She said, "Miles, its only three months. I want you to come home, straight home, and just fill out applications. That's all I'm asking. If you don't fill out applications, do college essays. That's all I'm asking, for three months." I go, "Mom, I'm a social butterfly. How am I supposed to do all this?" She goes, "It's just for three months. Just give it to me for three months." I was like, "That makes sense. Not really." I was like, "Okay."

Even though he applied to over thirty colleges/universities in the nation, Miles was very adamant about the school in which he wanted to attend: A&T. He received an early acceptance to the university and plans to major in Electronic Technology.

Table 3: *School demographic information (2012-2013)*

Name of School	School Type/ Category	# of Students Enrolled	# of Participants from School	Predominant Racial Demographic	% of Students in Advanced College Preparation Courses	Graduation Rate for Black Students
Newsome High School	Regular, traditional 9-12	1,598	5	Black	11%	90.6%
Arnold High School	Magnet, traditional 9-12	983	3	White	7%	>95%
Watts High School	Regular, traditional 9-12	1,820	3	Black	2%	80.3%
Madison High School	Regular, traditional 9-12	1,603	2	White	5%	>95%

Part II: Themes

The second part of this chapter presents the findings that emerged from the analysis of the data. Through individual interviews, the participants provide narratives

regarding their perceptions about attending an HBCU. The thick, rich descriptions provided from the interview data explain the responses of the participants in their own voice. The research in this study aimed to address how African American college-bound teens perceived HBCUs and whether they would attend one. Critical Race Afrocentricity allowed for the analysis to be centered on race and the intellectual contributions of African and African American history and culture in the experience of education. Five primary themes emerged:

I. The Black College Experience: Going to School with People Who Look Like You, and Having Fun

    Subthemes: Being Exposed via Campus Visits

                  What the Media Tells Me About Black Colleges

II. Student Perceptions about HBCUs: "A Good Choice" for Black Students

    Subthemes: Learn More about African American History and Culture

                  Better Academic Performance

                  Sense of Pride in Graduating

                  HBCUs as Party Schools

                  Job Opportunities are Questionable

III. Race is Not a Key Issue in College Choice: Matters to Some, But Not All

    Subthemes: Race is Not That Important

                  Issues that Matter When Deciding on a College

IV. Attending an HBCU: "It's Very Important to Me"

    Subtheme: Reasons Why I Consider HBCUs

V. Misinformed about HBCUs

During the interviews, each participant was asked to share their perspectives about HBCUs and the factors that influenced whether they would attend. As a part of screening applicants and also during the initial conversations prior to the interview, the participants provided basic demographic information about their high school, classes, and what colleges they were considering (see *Appendix C. Student Information Sheet*). During the course of the interviews, questions were (as illustrated in *Appendix D. Interview Protocol*) focused on students' perspectives on HBCUs.

In Their Voice: What is an HBCU?

Before presenting the themes that emerged from the study, it is necessary to define what an HBCU is according to the participants. In their voice, HBCUs are defined and categorized as "historically Black," "majority Black," and an "environment for Black people." The participants shared that HBCUs were established primarily for the sake of educating African Americans. For example, Jacoby states, "Basically, the colleges that were around like back in the day were just for Black people really, like a lot of African Americans went." Dawn extends this definition by stating: "Well, I think it's a school funded primarily for African Americans, but anybody can attend."

According to the participants, HBCUs were created because African Americans were not allowed to attend other institutions due to legislation that restricted racial integration. Miles elaborates, "At an HBCU, it's just basically more of it was known for a historical reason, and it was founded for a historical reason, which has something to do with someone that was African American or Black, so to say." Since their inception, HBCUs have been viewed as institutions of higher education for African Americans. In this way, Sakeem notes:

> To me an HBCU is like, I don't want to say, I guess I always thought that HBCUs, they try to help Blacks get into college because not everywhere is going to accept a lot of Black students as an HBCU would.

Sakeem's comments relate to the importance of HBCUs in providing African Americans educational access and this sentiment applies to all respondents.

Participants also recognize that HBCUs are majority Black schools. On the issue of what is an HBCU, Brandy shares, "My own definition would just be majority of the population is African American." Most of the participants equate the racial demographics of these institutions to their current and past role in serving African American students. Kayla recounts: "I would compare an HBCU–basically, to my whole life . . . because it's like I've been going to an HBCU all my life, HBCU elementary, middle, high school." Elijah added that HBCUs are: "Your average Black high school with more leeway."

Additionally, the participants felt that the HBCU was an environment for Black people. In this way, they provide an atmosphere that is fun, social, and accommodating for African American students. Michelle comments, "Environment. I think they're happy students, people that feel at home, like they're comfortable. I guess just having an environment where everyone can get to know about the history of Blacks." Dawn adds: "I think of like a fun college experience . . . being around people that are just like you. Just everybody's the same I guess . . . like a family reunion." In this way, participants also connect the Black college experience as one that is centered in developing a sense of community for its constituents.

In their Voice: What is a PWI?

In addition to explaining what an HBCU is, the participants also define a PWI. Participants articulate that PWIs are majority White institutions that are popular and

commonly known. For example, Sakeem comments: "I think it's just like, White people going there, or you know like, majority of Caucasian people going to that school . . . it's a small percentage of other races." Tammy adds: "Isn't that colleges that are predominantly white and they scare all the minorities away?" According to the participants, PWIs primarily accommodate the racial needs of White students and while other ethnic groups are present at PWIs, African Americans are a minority.

The participants also characterize PWIs as commonly known or popular schools. Alexis shares:

> Like [UNC Chapel Hill] and pretty much just the main schools everybody knows about, like . . . some people don't know like what [Central] is or where it is but if you say something like [Duke University] or [UNC Chapel Hill] they'll know like exactly where it is and, what their mascot is, 'cause like, they're mostly seen on like, television for like, their basketball or anything else they have.

Similarly, when commenting on what a PWI is, Elijah adds:

> They get more exposure because a PWI, they get the chance to play on TV and ESPN and stuff, and you also have [Winston-Salem], who goes to the championship every year, and they don't get to play on TV until they go to the championship, but you've got the PWIs still losing real bad, and they their game on TV every day.

In Their Voice: Institutional Differences between HBCUs and PWIs

The participants also shared their perspectives on the institutional differences between HBCUs and PWIs. First, the participants comment that in terms of admission standards, they believe PWIs are more selective and therefore are elite institutions. Tammy notes that, "Admission standards, it seems like predominately White colleges are harder to get into, a lot harder to get into." Similarly, when identifying how these institutions are perceived, Miles adds:

> You can't get into PWI's, because you're not white to uphold that standard, of getting a 4.0 plus . . . you have to have more extra-curricular activities, a better

GPA, a better SAT score, a better ACT score. The way I see it is you have a bigger plate to stand up to, because a lot of these IB kids are coming out with 4.8s, 4.7s.

Kayla also comments:

To me, I feel like the predominately white schools have higher standards, like higher GPAs, higher grades for classes, higher everything . . . I feel like their standards are not as high, even though African Americans can have high standards. But I just feel like [HBCUs are] just not that high.

Her comments, along with Tammy and Miles, may be connected to the negative portrayals in the media regarding HBCUs, or the underlying assumption that Black colleges have automatic acceptance policies. This topic is discussed further in the final chapter.

Next, students share that they feel that HBCUs are more relaxed and social. In this way, HBCU campuses provide students with greater opportunities to partake in campus activities, bond with colleagues, and interact with other students. Tremaine recounts:

At a PWI I feel like the only time that everyone is social with each other is at a social event such as basketball games, football games, umm, something has to be happening. While at a HBCU, nothing has to be happening at all for everyone to come together and do something. I've seen where they're all meeting and there's like and, I don't know, like, every HBCU I've been to there's like this room with like pool tables and all this other stuff. And it's always packed with black people; I'm like okay I can get use to this. They're all just hanging out, like they probably just met but, it's just that family, they come together. There's a family difference.

Courtney adds: "I think HBCUs are a little bit tighter-knit. Like, everybody feels like they're more connected to each other, like more a little family, and predominantly white schools." And this sentiment is shared with Brandy who elaborates that:

I just feel like the, the atmosphere, would just be different. Like, I don't want to say this is like a biased way but I don't know, I just feel like black people are just more like you know laid back, there are some really you know like strict, not saying I'm not going to be on like top of my work or anything, but like, just kind of laid back. I feel like predominately white institutions are more like strict, uptight on your work . . . I guess how people think that black people are just loud,

or how they may interact with their friends and like you know just try and party and be all crazy or people are always like you know, every time black people get to the party stuff always gets you know messed up or shut down or gets crazy. Versus at PWIs I guess, they just know how to act and behave. And they're not going to get crazy and the cops aren't going to get called.

In sum, according to participants, HBCUs and PWIs display vast differences both academically and socially. In other words, PWIs are associated with catering to White student populations and being highly selective and academically rigorous, whereas HBCUs are defined as predominantly Black environments that are more socially accommodating for its students. It should be noted that the participants' HBCU and PWI definitions and perceived institutional differences are based on interrelated issues. Some of the participants are speaking first-hand from visiting various institutions and experiencing the environment. On the other hand, some of the participants are deriving their information from people that they have talked to; this can include teachers, counselors, family members, friends, and alumni. Lastly, students are also defining these institutions based on what they have seen and heard in the media (this includes movies, social mediums, television, and news). All of these factors contribute to and/or influence how students define and perceive these institutions.

The next major question to be asked is, "What does the Black college experience mean to students?" In the following section, the students' perceptions about the Black college experience are addressed. Within this section, the major theme of *Going to School with People Who Look Like You, and Having Fun* will be elaborated through the participants' voices. Additional subthemes including *Being Exposed via Campus Visits* and *What the Media Tells Me about Black Colleges* will also provide context for participant perspectives on the educational experience of these institutions.

Theme I: The Black College Experience: Going to School with People Who Look Like

Me, and Having Fun

When asked, "What is does it mean to have the Black college experience?" the

major theme of *Being Around People that Look Like You, and Having Fun* emerged from

the data. Alexis comments that being around others and "do[ing] different things" are part

of the Black College experience: "I guess being around people that look like me and also

just, having pride in my school and being able to go out and have fun I guess, and do

different things." Similarly, Winnie states that the Black college experience is:

> Being with, going to school with your own race. Saying I went to a black college,
> and I still got a degree just like a white college, like if I was a white person. I still
> have the same degree as them.

She continues by sharing how the Black college experience provides more personable,

shared experiences for students. She comments:

> The people, they probably know what you're going through. You probably know
> you're in the same boat with them. If you went to a white college, you're telling
> them, "I can't just get a job like you can," and stuff. My name is different from
> yours. Our skin is different from yours as well, so the black college, you probably
> have the same feelings as them, compared to a white college.

Courtney recounts her perceptions of the Black college experience as being a part of a

Black community: "I don't know, just experiencing the black community . . . just being

around other black people, trying to get the same education you trying to get." Tammy

adds, "HBCU, in your mind, you feel like its home, because you're around other people

that look like you, so it's like a big family or whatever." Both Courtney and Tammy

acknowledge the element of community in a Black college setting. Dawn shares, "I guess

just to be around other black people, I guess, I don't know. Um, I don't know, I guess

that just, that campus life is just different from like white schools that; they just want that

experience." Sakeem adds to this notion of being around other Black students. Sakeem

states:

> I think that it's more connected. Because everybody, most everybody is the same
> race so they can relate to each other. So it's not going to be like differences, I
> mean of course they'll be like differences as backgrounds, where you came from
> but everybody has the same, like, building block I guess 'cause we're all the same
> color so it's more like a family.

Brandy comments that students who are able to relate to one another are a direct

advantage of attending an HBCU. She posits:

> I see attending an HBCU as an advantage because, one, I'm surrounded by people
> of my race, that are all, maybe not accomplishing the same career goal as me but
> we're all there for you know kind of the same reason; to get an education, to get a
> job, to be successful in life. So I think that's just like a big achievement as the
> whole African American race, as a whole I mean 'cause you know like, a while
> ago, like a long time ago, you know, we weren't even allowed to like go to school
> so now that's there's historically black colleges and universities and black people
> are all together, getting an education, trying to do something with their lives and
> be successful and you know make a lot of money the same as the white people,
> and like I think that we're just trying to better ourselves and be on the same level
> and so, I see that as a great advantage as just attending an HBCU.

In addition to 'being around people who look like you,' the participants also felt

that the Black college experience was about having fun. Kayla shares that the Black

college experience entails new freedoms: "To do everything you couldn't do at home.

That's what I feel. Everything your momma will not catch you. That's what I think people

mean." Dawn adds that: "It's more fun. . . I think maybe music playing. I don't know,

more upbeat, lively. A white school may be more uptight." Courtney also elaborates that

this idea of having fun is something that she has seen through media; she explains, "I

have no idea, but [BET goes] around to different HBCUs. I mean, they have events and

stuff like that, I guess to celebrate the Black culture and stuff." Michelle also shares that

being in an environment that allows students to make friends is what the Black college

experience is all about. She explains:

> It's mostly like saying they mostly want to be around people that I guess they can be more friendly with, or making easier friends, making friends more easily, just trying to get how you would see a full college experience on TV. I guess that's what they would be relating to, or movies, whenever you see a predominantly black college on a movie or something. They'd be like, "Oh, I want to do that, because I want to be like that, or I want to be included in an environment like that," or they might hear from their friends, and say that they really liked it just because of the people they hung out with, or something like that.

Similarly, Elijah mentions the extracurricular activities and social events make the Black

college experience fun. He comments:

> I have to say, besides studies, it was talking about the bands, the sports-wise, and if you go to a PWI, they then don't really play good music. That's probably a black experience, too, and then you've got the NCAA for PWI, and then you've got the CIAA.

However, one participant (Jacoby) explains that he does not believe that a Black College

experience exists: "I don't believe there is one. I just think there is a college experience.

College, wherever you go, college is college." While this participant was the only student

who felt this way, all of the other participants were able to articulate their definition of

the Black College experience, which centered on the major theme of *Being Around*

People Who Look Like You, and Having Fun. Related to the issue of having the Black

college experience, participants share how being exposed through campus visits helped

them to understand what occurs at HBCUs.

Being Exposed via Campus Visits

The participants were able to articulate how they perceived the Black college

experience to be through their visits to various institutions. It is fitting to mention

Tremaine first in this particular subtheme because of his extensive travels to most of the

HBCUs along with the East coast. He shares his insight on some of the institutions he

visited.

> Junior year, the first time I went to some of these colleges, some of them really
> pointed out to me, like Howard and FAMU, those, I loved them, and then there
> were just some, like [Albany State University], that I was there but I wasn't really
> there. [Fort Valley State University], that was another one of them, but then senior
> year, when I came back, nothing had changed but my view on college had
> changed. So, they moved up ten notches. "Maybe I will go here. I'm still going to
> apply. I'm going to apply here, because I can be accepted. If I get accepted, I
> might think about going here." [Tuskegee University] was another one. I thought
> that campus was beautiful junior year, but I didn't think about going there. My
> view, I think it wasn't the HBCU, because I knew I wanted to go to an HBCU, but
> which HBCU is what changed. Being a senior and knowing the time was coming,
> it was time to get past all the little things and just think about the big picture.
> HBCUs, they're all beautiful.

By having access to and being able to look at the varied HBCU campuses, Tremaine was

able to identify common characteristics among the institutions. Additionally, he became

better informed on what requirements he needed to achieve in order to attend the school

of his choice. Brandy discusses her visit to Hampton and how it influenced her decision

to attend a Black college. She shares: "Hampton is the only HBCU that I've visited . . . I

love their campus. It's really pretty to me, so I can see myself fitting in there. I think I

will like it."

Michelle's visit to A&T sparked an interest to explore more campuses.

Specifically, she examines the student population, transitions to adulthood, and the ability

to meet new people as components of the Black college experience. She comments:

> Of course I've visited A&T. I'm getting ready to visit Winston-Salem, actually,
> and I've been to Pembroke. The campuses are nice, I like them. It doesn't seem
> like a lot of people. I just like the different environment, like how it's different
> from high school. You have more freedom. Like, you're more independent, and
> then it's not like going to class every day, where you've got to worry about
> practice 5:35 in the morning, and then you've got class at 7:15 and then you don't
> get out until 2:15, and you're just sitting there all day in class. There's more
> freedom to do leisure stuff . . . You have more people that are able to talk to you,

that would be more outgoing, to talk to different people. You just have, if you were to say hey to random persons, they'd be really nice. They'd start random conversations about stuff.

Miles adds to this sentiment by sharing his experience when visiting A&T. He comments:

> I mean, I didn't really like it, I like loved it. It was a good time. Like, I think it was really cool. Like, how everyone's not the racial profile that everyone sets it for. Like, going to A&T, I'm like, "Oh, I'm going to see a bunch of hood rats and it's going to be interesting," but it's different. Like, it's all types of people there, and these people sit down and talk to them and actually intellectual, not like, "Oh, yeah, I go here." It's just like, they're really smart, too. So I always see here, I live and breathe Huntsville, Charlotte, but when I go to an HBCU, it opened up my spectrum. It's almost like, "Oh, this is interesting. There's others in there, the same but different, but the same, but again different." It's just like, "Oh, okay." We stay the same, but we still change.

Miles' visit helped him to dispel guiding notions about the university and reaffirmed his interest in pursuing a Black College experience. Additionally, the visit helped him to see the racial and intellectual diversity that exists on the campus.

However, one student shares that his visits reinforced earlier perceptions about HBCUs being in "bad" locations and in dire need of renovations. Elijah comments on his visit to A&T and how it helped him to eliminate this school as one of his possible college choices. Elijah explains:

> It's really clustered because they have [Bennett College], I think, the all-girls' college. Then they've got UNCG right there, so I thought that was too much going on. I think the schools need to be separated, more spaced-out, to get a better focus. I would rather like to drive somewhere, to get to my fun and my partying and everything, other than just walking straight out my dorm.

He also shares that location combined with lack of campus amenities influenced his perceptions about Black colleges. He elaborates on the visit to Shaw University:

> It's a place I don't want to go . . . because it's like the hood. It's more like the hood, and I, I'm real big on sports, and still, if I'm in college, I need to have a college field and all that. As far as Shaw, they practice at a high school. They don't have their own field.

Elijah asserts that the look of an HBCU can greatly influence a person's perceptions on

the Black college experience. The next subtheme explains the role of media in African

American students' perceptions about the Black college experience.

What the Media Tells Me about Black Colleges

For the participants, the role of the media also influences their perceptions of the

Black college experience. The participants explain how movies, social media and things

in the news affirm both positive and negative things they have heard about HBCUs. Most

commonly referenced, the participants discussed how *Drumline*, a film produced in 2002

that featured a college freshman's entrance into the marching band and his experiences

adjusting to college life, influenced their views on the Black college experience.

Courtney elaborates on watching *Drumline* and wanting to have a similar college

experience because of the positive light in which the Black college was showcased. She

comments:

> I knew it was about A&T, but I know there's different A&T's all across the country. That made me want to go to A&T right there. That's the real reason I want to go to A&T, because of that movie. I don't know, it just really promoted a black school, like there was nothing wrong with that school, everything was good. It was really positive. There wasn't anything bad about it. They also had a [White student]. He got a minority scholarship, because he was a white person on the band, at A&T, but he went there because he lived down the street. It was just a really positive movie.

Sakeem adds that while he was very young when he first saw the movie, *Drumline* still

influenced his thinking about the Black college experience. He recounts:

> When I saw that movie I was like "they look like they having fun." They love it there; they love it at that campus. So I mean, I guess the thought did cross my mind there but I didn't, I didn't really think about it because when I saw that movie I was like I don't know, 4th or 5th grade ? No it couldn't have come out in 4th or 5th grade, I don't know. I was young so I wasn't really thinking about college, but I mean I was like "Oh, they look like they having fun." And I asked my mom "what college was that?" she was like "oh, it's A&T."

Similarly, Michelle discusses how the movie, *Drumline*, helped her to see the social environment at HBCUs and how students bond together. She shares:

> I guess it gives somewhat of a black experience of an HBCU. Because it shows all how they hang out, how all the black kids hang out together, and what they may do in certain situations, and how they might bond, socially and stuff. I actually liked the whole movie, but I think I liked how the band worked together, in a family-type way, everybody became cool.

Another movie that was frequently discussed among the participants was *Stomp the Yard*. This film was released in 2007 and shadows an entering freshman's journey through pledging in a fraternity. The movie centers on the rhythmic, artistic, group movements of stepping as a major aspect in Black Greek-letter organizations which are popularized at HBCUs. Jacoby shares that the movie helped him to debunk early perceptions that HBCUs were "ghetto," because the movie captured "the culture" of a Black college. He adds:

> I see how colleges are, I see how fraternities are and I'm not ready to go for fraternities but it's actually, it's the culture it's the culture I can relate to and it would be more easier to adjust to. Definitely portrayed it more better than thought they would because usually, usually it wasn't too ghetto, because that's what friends have told me.

Similarly, Winnie provides insight on how one scene in the movie was extremely influential for her because it showed African American historical figures who had attended and graduated from an HBCU.

> You learn–when he went inside the–I don't know what it's called, but when he went inside where all the Greeks are at, and he saw Coretta Scott and Rosa Parks, when he saw all that, I was like, "Wow, all these people went to a black college." I never would have known that. I didn't know they went to college and stuff, and just seeing it was a black college, it was like, "Oh." They didn't make it like it's ghetto, shooting, fighting and all of that. It didn't make you feel, if you went to a black college, I have to watch my back.

Both Jacoby and Winnie are able to reconstruct their views on what a Black college experience is as it relates to the movie's depictions of HBCUs. However, there are instances in which the media presents Black colleges in an undesirable light and, according to students, this further reinforces negative perceptions. Brandy elaborates on how social mediums, such as Twitter, depicted Black colleges as party schools. She shares:

> I think there was an incident with partying or something like that, and some girl might have gotten really drunk and her picture was, like, surfacing, I guess, on the internet. So that's a negative thing, but on the positive side, a lot of them are doing well in college and are on the Dean's list or something, so they promote that on Twitter as well. It doesn't, like, change the way I feel about them, but it does kind of just make me take a second look at it, like why does everybody have something so negative to say about it, because then again, I don't really let it phase me, because it's kind of like people on the outside, looking in. They're not there every day, going to school there. They don't know what it's like. That could just be a one bad day at that school, and it's just made public. You don't know the everyday life of the school. You're just an outsider, looking in. Everybody can base their judgment just off of that, when they don't really know what's going on. I don't really let it affect me. I mean, I don't think every institution is perfect, but I don't like how some of the media just . . . I don't like how they just target it to, I guess, HBCUs, because the same thing could be going on at a predominantly white institution that might not just be blown as big, just because they're not black, they're white.

Brandy recognizes how HBCUs are type-casted as party schools and places where social deviance occurs, but if the same behaviors were to occur at a PWI, media attention would be minimized. Tremaine adds to this sentiment when recalling what he learned from the news in regards to a hazing incident at FAMU. Tremaine explains:

> All I've heard really is with FAMU and their band and the hazing. Like I said before, they're not going to get all the credit they can. [UNC Chapel Hill] does this; great. [University of South Carolina] does this; great. [North Carolina State University], they've got this much money so that they could try and find a cure for this; great. But HBCUs, the first thing that happens–and HBCUs do the exact same thing. They get funding for this and that, but the only thing you're really going to hear is, "Oh, they got in trouble for hazing. This person died." Well, it happens every year at a lot of PWIs, and you will never hear about it.

Dawn adds that these negative perceptions exuded by the media, guide her parent's thinking about the Black college experience, and whether they wanted her to attend one. She elaborates:

> I heard about the lockdown at A&T. I think they thought the guy had a rifle, but he had an umbrella with a strap. I remember my mom texted me, and he was like, "You still want to go to A&T?"

In sum, the majority of the participants perceive the Black college experience to be an environment in which they can relate to others because they share the same culture. Additionally, since there is a shared culture among students, the students feel that the Black college experience is also about getting an education in their mind, and working hard as well as having the freedom to grow into a more mature person. Visits to HBCU campuses have helped the participants to reaffirm and dispel existing notions surrounding what a Black college can offer them in terms of academic, social, and cultural settings. Movies, social media, and news also play an important role in how students depict a Black College experience to be. Similar to campus visits, the media can serve as a pendulum for guiding perceptions about HBCUs; students can either perceive the experience as culturally invigorating, a place to learn, and personable, or they can see the institutions as stereotypical party schools in undesirable, dangerous locations.

Theme II: Students' Perceptions about HBCUs: "A good choice" for Black Students

The second major theme that emerged from the data centered on students' perceptions regarding whether or not they would attend an HBCU. When asked about their viewpoints regarding attending an HBCU, the participants explained that these institutions were "a good choice" for Black students. Sakeem comments:

I think that most people should attend a HBCU. Well, most black people . . . I think that for me, and my opinion, I think HBCUs are a good choice, first choice, in my opinion. They help you get into college where places might not accept you. I think that they're a-okay with me.

Miles elaborates that HBCUs build upon one's cultural identity which, in his opinion, is

vital. Miles explains:

You're missing out if you don't attend. I think you're open to more options because they take one thing that you have in common, which is blackness, and then they build upon that.

Tremaine shares that HBCUs should be experienced by Black and White students to help

both demographics to see cultural differences that exist among both groups. He

elaborates:

I think it's a great thing. I think, most black students should do it, some White. I think all, I think they all should. I feel like that's an experience all black students should do, be their area primarily, I mean of majority white, go to majority black . . . to see if there's a difference . . . .culturally.

Tremaine suggests that Black and White students should swap educational settings so that

they learn more about each other's culture. Overall, the participants postulate that they

perceive an HBCU to be a good choice for Black students to attend.

Learn More about African American History and Culture

Additionally, some of the students also connected their perceptions about HBCUs

to learning more about African American history and culture. Even though Courtney will

not be attending an HBCU, she explains that she would be privy to learning more about

African American history if she were to attend one of these institutions. She comments:

I would learn more about the history. It's a lot of unknown history that we didn't know about, in the black community. When I was at Arnold H.S., we had an African American cultural class. It was taught in a class, and it was a class about African Americans. I feel like, at an HBCU, they would have more of those than at a predominately White college.

Similarly, Tremaine elaborates on one of his visits to an HBCU. Through his trip, he

discovered much about historical figures who had attended the college. He shares:

> Everywhere you go at an HBCU they have dates here and there and eventually
> you learn them by heart. For instance, at [Morehouse College] they have a huge
> Martin Luther king statue, simply because he went to that school. And they have a
> museum on campus of every person who has contributed to the college. White
> and black, and you learn about the history of it. And it's just they teach you a
> whole lot more, about you.

Michelle adds to Tremaine's comments about HBCUs' historical value by noting the

museums and readily available information about African Americans that is provided by

these institutions. She states:

> Because you might have some history around the campus that might be placed in
> different areas, like the museums around it or something, that you could learn
> yourself, that you could learn about historically black people and stuff like that,
> instead of going to a white college. They tend to have information about African
> Americans and you can't really–I'm not sure how to explain it. I don't know. It
> would be different, because having it come from someone else, that's not of the
> same race, it would sound different, I would say.

Sakeem also reflects on his visit to an HBCU. He shares how the history of the institution

further influences him:

> A&T had so much history in itself. Like the lunch counter sit in . . . I think that
> they can teach you about like, thriving and going the extra step and all that
> courage and stuff.

> Participants also share how HBCUs provide an enhanced cultural experience for

its students. Tammy shares that attending one of these institutions would make her feel

great pride about her culture. She elaborates:

> I'd like to be able to say I went to an HBCU. I think saying that kind of–part of it
> is like I'm saying I'm proud of my race and my heritage, and I'm going to a place
> where it was historically people like me. Yeah, it's still a college and everything,
> but it's also got that extra with it.

Similarly, Sakeem explains that there are positive aspects of attending an HBCU that are

related to developing greater cultural awareness. He explains:

> I think every, I mean I don't think that everybody should but, I think that, for the
> people who are so stuck on like culture and like "Oh, I want to learn more about
> black culture" go to the HBCU. That's where to get the black culture, they will
> know where you been. They don't, like a . . . NC State don't know where you
> been, there might be white teachers there, you don't know, they don't know our
> life, they don't know what we been through.

Similarly, Michelle discusses how HBCUs allow for students to get to know each other.

> I think that it'll be a good experience, honestly. I think that, like I said at the
> beginning, you get to know more of what your culture is, and how other people
> act, I guess, and just trying to get to–I don't know, I guess just trying to get to
> know different people that you may clique with, or I may clique with, whatever.

The participants posit that HBCU environments provide them with access to learning

more about African American history and culture. In this way, HBCUs provide cultural

capital to its students.

Better Academic Performance

As a related cultural issue, some participants mention how HBCUs could provide

them with better academic support systems than PWIs. Tremaine elaborates:

> Classrooms are smaller, teach, I mean. There are large classes. Howard is huge,
> FAMU is the biggest HBCU in the nation, but the classes are a lot smaller and
> you would get 1 on 1, they know you by name. While at PWI you may be number
> 346.

Similarly, Brandy adds that the HBCU learning environment is less intimidating for her

because she feels like everyone is "on the same level." She shares:

> In my opinion sometimes I feel like, for instance like even now in high school I
> feel like, I'm not intimidated by you know people of other races, but if it's like me
> and like a white girl in my class, I don't know just feel like she might do better on
> the test or something. I don't know, but if it's just black people I just feel like
> we're all equal, we're all on the same level, we're just all the same, you know.

Next, Kayla discusses how she perceives that the learning environments at HBCUs are

more supportive to a student's emotional needs and in doing so, she would feel more

academic support in these institutions. She comments:

> Because I feel like–I'm very laid back. People tell me I'm too laid back, but if I get
> pushed too hard, I'm going to quit. Like, I don't mean to, but some things I cannot
> handle. I'm very emotional, and I know if I go to a school where I'm being pushed
> too hard, I'm going to start crying and I'm going to go home. I will not finish if
> I'm too emotional to handle that. I didn't want to go to a predominantly white
> school because I know it's going to be too challenging for me, and I'm probably
> going to drop out.

However, one participant reveals that even though these institutions would be good for

Black students to attend, they should not feel obligated to go; "to each his own." Dawn

elaborates: "I think to each his own. Like, if that's where you want to go, that's where

you go. But if you don't, you don't."

A Sense of Pride in Graduating from an HBCU

In addition to believing that HBCUs were a good choice for Black students, the

participants also felt that there was a sense of pride in graduating from HBCUs. For

example, Tremaine explains:

> I would be extremely proud of myself if that's what you're asking. Like, what
> would I think of myself? I would think that's a great achievement 'cause HBCUs
> are, I mean they may be looked down upon my white people but they are no joke.
> So, say I got my degree from here or there. It's still something to be extremely
> proud of.

Tammy shares her thoughts on graduating from an HBCU in relation to her prior

educational experiences. She comments:

> To me, it's kind of like there's power in numbers. If you come–I would feel good
> coming from a school that is historically Black, because I had such a bad
> experience in a school that was historically White, and I was one of only two
> black kids there, so it would mean a lot to me to go to a school that is–used to be,
> at least–for black people. I don't know, I just think it's a little more sentimental
> than going to just a regular university, like [North Carolina State University]. If I

didn't go to an HBCU I don't think I would feel as proud. I would still feel proud I got my bachelor's degree and I got this and whatever, but I think going to an HBCU is definitely something sentimental to me, and it's kind of more embracing myself and my people more.

Similar to Tammy, Michelle also elaborates that while she will be happy to graduate from any college or university, she would feel an added sense of accomplishment in finishing at an HBCU because of the historical importance these institutions hold. She shares:

I'd probably feel accomplished, for one, because you've made it through four years of college. I mean, who wouldn't feel accomplished? Like, I feel–yeah, I'd just say accomplished . . . Yeah, I got the experience to go through it and actually experience four years of being with people in an HBCU and the history and background and stuff about that campus.

Miles sums it up by stating, "I'd be stronger for graduating from an HBCU." In this way, he feels like the HBCU has more to offer him not only in regards to his academic self, but also in personal development.

Additionally, some of the participants who had a family member that attended an HBCU, placed greater emphasis on the importance of graduating from a Black postsecondary institution. Michelle shares:

I mean, [my dad] would probably be like, "Yeah, you're accomplishing," you've got the experience of a historically Black college and stuff like that, but I think he'd be proud.

Similarly, Courtney relays how meaningful it would be to her family if she graduated from an HBCU. She states:

I think it's important to my family, my grandmother was the only one who went to an HBCU out of my family. I think it's important to her because she always pushes me to go to Johnson C. Smith. She just wants me to go to a black college. She doesn't know anything about Greensboro. You know, they don't really talk about those colleges among the black community, so she just wants me to go to a black college, because that's what she knows. She went to college in the 60s or the 70s, and it was hard to get into a white school back in those days, so now she's like, "Go to a black college. That's where you're going to fit in best at, so just go there."

On the other hand, some students expressed indifference about graduating from an HBCU. They explain that the mere fact of graduating is a sense of accomplishment that they will have regardless of the institution. Dawn expresses that where she attends school is not important to her, but completing the degree is what matters most. In that, she does not feel biased in the type of institution she would like to graduate from. Dawn explains:

> I mean, I would be proud of myself for graduating from anywhere, but I think I would be–well, I would look at what did I accomplish when I was there, and then, if I didn't accomplish something that I had wanted to, then I'd probably be upset with myself, but if I accomplished everything that I thought that I would in college, then it wouldn't matter, because I still did community service or whatever, that I want to do in college. It wouldn't matter where I am, just as long as I accomplish those goals that I want to.

This indifference about HBCUs is also shared by Courtney who comments: "[I would feel] that I'm smart, just for graduating college," and Jacoby who recounts: "It doesn't really matter to me, as long as I get my education."

HBCUS as Party Schools

While most participants felt that attending an HBCU would be "a good choice" and provide them with a sense of racial pride, some felt that HBCUs were perceived as party schools and in light of this, they questioned the opportunities they might be denied with an HBCU degree. Tammy explains:

> I feel like a lot of people get an image in their head of a [PWI] and they see some random white girl going, "hey guys, let's go study," and then they see the black college and it's like, "hey, let's go party."

Similar to Tammy, Kayla adds that this negative perception continues to permeate the reputation of HBCUs.

> When people think about HBCUs, I think they feel like all they think about is partying. There's more to it than just partying. When you go to an HBCU, you've still got to go to school. You've got to do your work still. I don't understand all of

that. Yes, if I go to A&T, that's considered a party school. It's a school with a lot of African Americans. I'm still going to go to class. You still need to go to class. We can party on the weekends, but you still have to wake up and go to class. I don't like how people think of HBCUs as all of them are party schools, because not everybody parties like that. People actually have goals in life and want to do something.

Next, Sakeem discusses how HBCUs have to continuously work to dispel the notion that they are a party school. He elaborates:

HBCUs have to work ten times harder to receive recognition. They're already the whole Black school. It's like they're not doing anything. You just have to keep your grades up and feel like you belong. You can do it, because people are already saying that, "Oh, they just want to party and everything."

Job Opportunities are Questionable with HBCU Degrees

Additionally, many of the participants were concerned about the currency of an HBCU degree in the workforce. Brandy explains the concerns she has about attaining an HBCU degree. She comments:

Some people may look down upon HBCUs, and that could, like, hinder some job opportunities, because some employers may still have not accepted the fact, you know, or still not, like, fully open to everybody being equal. I don't know. So, they might look down upon someone going to an HBCU, so it could affect some job opportunities in the future.

Similarly, Winnie adds that when compared to a degree from a PWI, an HBCU degree has less value. Winnie states: "In terms of getting a job, the education. They're going to treat [graduates of PWIs] better." Courtney provides a scenario in which she examines how her degree from an HBCU would compare to one from a PWI. She elaborates:

Like, my manager I have now, it's two hostesses, me and this other girl named Porscha. If Porscha went to [UNC Chapel Hill] and I went to A&T and we both came back and applied for a job as the financial director or something like that, I feel like she would get the job because she went to [UNC Chapel Hill]. My boss, he'd be like–okay, you know, you have the same degree, you know you graduated with honors, but I feel like he wouldn't give me the same opportunity as he gave her.

Similarly, Alexis explains the perceptions regarding HBCU graduates in the workplace.

She explains:

> Like, I guess they would have like, different like, bias against like, a black institution like somewhere like [Fayetteville State University] or something like that they might think like, she's like, ghetto or something like that, especially if I work for like an all-white company or something like that, then they might do that but I don't know about everybody they might not be like a person to judge off of something like that but, if they are, then maybe they'd be something like that. Or if I went to a white school, and I worked at a black company, they might think like I'm super smart or something like that or really educated.

Elijah shares a conversation he had with his parents about attending an HBCU versus a

PWI, and the anticipated outcomes of both institutions. Elijah comments:

> When I got accepted to [Yale University], my parents really wanted me to go there, and when I told them I wanted to go to [Winston-Salem], they were like, "Why are you picking [Winston-Salem] over [Yale University]?" I was like, "I always wanted to go to an HBCU." They said, "But you got this opportunity to go to [Yale University] and your life will be pretty much set after going there." I said, "My life will pretty much be set after going to [Winston-Salem], too." After I said that, they said, "Well, you know what you want to do, so pursue your dreams."

Interestingly, Kayla argues that while degrees from PWIs may seem superior to HBCU

degrees, she adds the type of HBCU should be taken into consideration. She explains:

> I feel like, if it's an ivy league HBCU, they would think higher of me. Like a known HBCU, something they know about, not like one of those schools like [Johnson C. Smith University], maybe. A lot of people don't know about that. They know about Spelman, things like that. They know about A&T.

Similarly, Dawn shares the same sentiment. She asserts that the type of HBCU could be

more telling of success after graduation. She elaborates:

> I think if it was a like a historical black college I graduated from, I think they would look at the quality of the school. Maybe. I know like sometimes people are like, if you graduate from like Morehouse or Howard or something, like "oh, you went to like that type of HBCU." And then like the other ones are classified as "oh, that type." So I think it would depend on the school maybe.

Both Kayla and Dawn's comments allude to the ways in which HBCUs are ranked among colleges (this will be discussed in the final chapter). In this way, according to students, some HBCUs are seen as having standards equal to PWIs.

In sum, this theme provides insight regarding the participants' perspectives that HBCUs are "a good choice" for Black students to attend. In addition to learning more about African American history and culture, the participants recount that students' academic performance might better in these institutions. Next, the participants shared that there is a sense of pride associated with graduating from HBCUs because of the historical intellectual tradition of the institutions. However, students also recognize that Black colleges are perceived as party schools. This negative perception makes it difficult for participants to determine if graduating from an HBCU will hold greater employment opportunities. In this regard, perhaps some students felt that race would not be a key factor in their decision about which institution to attend.

Theme III: Race is not a Key Issue in College Choice: Mattered to Some, But Not All

In the study, the majority of participants indicate that race was not a major consideration in their college choice. Jacoby explains this issue when commenting on whether race was important in his decision making. He states: "No because I don't feel like me being black–as long as I'm getting an education, as long as I'm where I want to be at, it shouldn't matter just because I'm Black." Sakeem adds to this sentiment: "Really, [race] doesn't affect me. I could see myself at any school, but it just has to be the right feeling." Furthermore, Courtney mentions: "I feel like I can go to any college I want and excel." It should be reiterated that Jacoby, Sakeem, and Courtney are not attending HBCUs after completing high school. Additionally, each of the participants indicated no

preference in which institutional type they were applying. Therefore, they applied to both PWIs, HBCUs, and in the case of Jacoby, community college.

Interestingly, there are students who plan to attend HBCUs for the previously discussed reasons of being around people that look like them, learning more about African American history and culture, and being in a more supportive academic setting. However, these students note that race was not a heavy consideration in their decisions in which college to attend. Michelle notes, "Me, personally, no [race doesn't impact me]." Brandy adds:

> Um, not really, I chose to attend an HBCU because I just feel that it will better you know fit me. I don't know, but I, I'm not the type of person that's going to feel out of place if I'm surrounded by white people and I'm the only black person so I don't think that would affect me, yeah.

Similarly, Alexis discusses the issue of race in her decision of which college to attend:

> I don't think it impacted my decision, because, I mean, I don't really look at race so hard, like most of my friends are white, so, you know, plus, see I don't like being around black students here or anywhere else, but they're just like, sometimes more inappropriate, or do like, do mean to be upset or mad or something, I just find it pointless. And they just, they make fun of me anyways… It's really stupid. They say I talk like I'm white and I act like I'm white so it just doesn't, I guess that's where I fit in.

Although the participants mention that HBCUs were a good choice, race was not the key issue for them in deciding which college to attend.

Race is Not That Important

The students also share that race is not that important, because other issues must be considered when deciding which college to attend. Tammy shares: "It's more about what's the best college for you." Sakeem reiterates:

> I don't think that it's that important um, I does, I mean to me I, it's all about how the campus feels. If I don't get a good vibe from the campus, I don't see myself

there. So I mean it's, for some people it's important, it's not that important to me. It's just about getting a good education.

Michelle adds that as long as one gets to college, "that's just important enough." She shares:

> I wouldn't think that it's extremely important, because going to any college is important, just to go to college. Depending on where you go, it doesn't really matter, because you're getting a college experience itself. I think that's just important enough.

Miles comments that the institution must be a good fit for the student and the decision to attend should not be solely based on the racial make-up of the institution. He elaborates:

> I don't see it as being important versus going to an HBCU or PWI. The way I was brought up, it's not really clouded my judgment, but altered it, so I just see it as, "You have to go to college." If it's an HBCU, then hey, damn. You've got to go to college.

Brandy explains:

> It's not like super important to me, like if I ended up ant UNCG, or UNCC somewhere that wasn't a historically black college, I wouldn't feel that, yeah it's just, it's not that important to me, not like in a negative way.

These responses from the participants are perhaps related to the belief that we are living in a post-racial society. While it can be argued that integration and other affirmative action legislation has helped to shape this perspective, it can also be contended that the struggle for equal rights and social justice continues. The issues of Black identity, White superiority, and living in a post-racial society are revisited in the final chapter.

While most of the participants believed that race was not important to them in determining what school to attend; two students felt that race was important. When commenting on race as a consideration in what school to attend, Kayla shares:

> My race, because it's just–like I said, it's just all I've really known. Everything I've done, it's with people with my race. Even in dance school, even though the owner was Indian, most of the people that went there was African American. It's just,

everything I do, whatever my mom puts me, in just what it is . . . I rather be around people I'm familiar with, comfortable with, and that's Black people.

Similarly, Tremaine discusses how the racial demographics of his high school have influenced his college choice. He expresses:

Like, being black every person speaks for the race if that makes sense. If I go out and do something they're not going to say "oh Tremaine" they're going to be like black people. Oh black people do this; black people do that. Not Tremaine did this, but black people do this.

He continues:

Like I was saying before, at this school, everyone may say race isn't really a big thing. I mean, it isn't something you really think about every day, but to be honest, it is, because in the back of your head, that's what you think about all the time. The first day of school, "Oh snap, I'm the only black person in this class, too." But at an HBCU, I know I'll walk in and be like, "Hey, I'm equal to everyone else. My opinion matters just as much." If a teacher doesn't like me, I know it's not because I'm black. I mean, everyone else is black. I mean, that thought has to be something else. If a teacher doesn't like you at this school, then maybe she's racist. Maybe so, but then again, maybe she may just not like me because I talk too much or something like that, like a realistic reason.

It should be noted that while race was not an overwhelming important issue in the students' choice regarding what school to attend, other questions remain, such as what issues actually influence their decision in what school to attend. However, at the conclusion of this study, at least seven of the participants had made their decision to attend an HBCU and the remaining decided to attend majority White institutions.

Issues That Matter When Deciding on a College

In lieu of race, other issues such as financial aid and scholarships were more heavily weighted by the students in their choice of school. Elijah comments: "Money is the main thing. Because the more money I get on scholarship, the less that has to come out of my pocket." Jacoby adds, ". . . how much the money, the school will be able to give me to go to school, like financial aid." Similar to Elijah and Jacoby, Dawn shares

that a scholarship can greatly influence one's decision on which to attend. She comments:

"When I got the scholarship from Queens, I was like, I'm done." Brandy considers the

overall cost of tuition and the financial aid she will receive. She elaborates: "I'm still

liking Hampton, because I also have a scholarship there. I have to just look at all my

aspects, but then NC State is in-state, so then it also might be cheaper." In this way, she

considers in-state colleges as being more financially viable for her education.

Additionally, the reputation of the institution is also an influential factor in the

general consideration of which college to attend (this might be different for HBCUs).

Courtney shares how she looks at the reputability of the program within her field of

study. She remarks: "It has to be on the list of the best schools in America . . . [Elon

University], I know they have a great law program." Winnie adds to this sentiment when

considering which college she will transfer to after completing her studies at CPCC:

"Maybe Winston-Salem. I heard it was a really good school." Dawn considers the

reputations of HBCUs in comparison to PWIs with regards to the promise they hold for

getting accepted into advanced programs. She elaborates:

> Like myself, I, I looked into it and I thought about it but, I didn't know, like if I had gone to a black school and then graduated, would people have looked at me differently? Would I have been looked down on? Like if I say like I went to maybe [Johnson C. Smith University] or something, and then I tried to go to medical school, you know. Would I get denied because I went to a historical Black college? So that's something I had to look at and consider, and that's why I didn't apply to one . . . [I chose Queens] especially because of the program I wanted to go into but also because I would be used to the school.

In addition to the financial aid package and overall reputation of the institution,

some participants also consider the look and feel of the campus in deciding which college

to attend. Jacoby references the aesthetics of the institution as being important to him. He

elaborates: "I like the look. I don't like ugly dorm rooms. Everything just has to look like

me, like I would go there. I would have to put myself there." Dawn adds to the issue of

how the campus speaks to her: "I really like [Queens] campus, all the clubs and stuff and

all the stuff I want to join."

In sum, participants indicated that race is not a key consideration when deciding

which college to attend; however, others contend that it is important and weighted in their

decisions. Race was not the salient issue in determining what school to attend; however,

many of the participants still saw the value in HBCUs, which they believe may better

support their academic growth.

Theme IV: Attending an HBCU: "It's Very Important to Me"

In the next theme, some of the students share that attending an HBCU is still

important to them. Kayla explains why she has decided to attend an HBCU.

> It's very important to me [to go to an HBCU]. Like, I don't really care about a
> predominantly white school. I really don't. Like, if I have to choose between–they
> say Central is a bad school, and that's an HBCU, then [UNC Chapel Hill] is
> predominantly white, even though they say Central is a bad school, I'm going to
> go to Central. I'm not going to go to [UNC Chapel Hill].

Brandy adds that in spite of the negative portrayal of Black colleges in the media, she

views attending HBCUs as "a positive thing." She elaborates:

> I look at HBCUs as a very positive thing. The fact that you know, black people
> are all coming together to be educated and you know. It's not like a bad thing that
> some people may look down upon; you know that we're not doing our work,
> we're lazy but I mean, we're, we're doing the same thing they're doing at a
> different school. It's just we're all the same race, I don't really see why people
> make it such a, a big problem.

In ranking the importance of attending HBCUs, Elijah shares: "On a scale of one to 10, I

would put it at a seven because I feel you need to have fun, but you also need to be in

books, so that's why I put it at a seven." Additionally, Tremaine shares that the Black

experience is something he looks forward to passing down to future generations, mainly

his own children. He recounts: "It's extremely important . . . 'cause, I feel like it's

something you need to learn. Something in, you learn it so you can instill it in your kids."

Courtney relays the historical value in attending HBCUs as why it's important to attend.

She comments:

> That's pretty important, actually, to me, because like I said, we didn't have schools. We created our own schools, and I feel like it's important for us to go to those schools and keep promoting it, and even as we come out as alumni, we can give back to those schools and we can help them out, the future people coming up.

Next, Tammy discusses how being able to relate to others because of cultural similarities

is a desirable experience that an African American can receive at a Black college. She

shares:

> It's not a matter of racism or anything, it's more of a you feel more comfortable when you're around people you feel like you can relate to, so if you're black and you're in the same culture or you're in the same background, you can relate to them and that's who you want to be around. A white person may not feel comfortable there, because it's like, "There's all these black people. I can't really relate to them." We eat different things, listen to different music. Things like that can make a difference. Some people don't care, but I feel like an HBCU is just mostly black, where it's like they won't accept any other race, it's just historically, that's just always who comes here.

> However, other students echoed thoughts of indifference about attending HBCUs.

The issues they raised were concerned about very little perceived diversity, "bad"

location, and limited resources for students. Perhaps some of these responses are related

to limited exposure and miseducation about HBCUs. For example, Sakeem argues that

there is limited diversity in an HBCU. He explains:

> It's a bunch of black people. But, I mean, that's not bad. Um, you can have like drama between one particular race. Like I think if you have just one specific race, people going to get, I don't think they'll get tired of seeing black people, but I think they just get tired of people's ways.

In addition, Michelle mentions her concern about diversity at an HBCU.

To a slight degree, about knowing different people other than just black people, like I said earlier. You've got to get to know everybody, whether you're white or Hispanic or Indian or whatever, just getting to know other people, other than just people you hang around with.

Jacoby, Alexis, and Elijah felt that some HBCUs are located in undesirable areas. Jacoby explains: "Some of the colleges, they be like, they're in rural areas with trees and like out of the way, it's like nothing around it." Alexis shares:

I heard that some colleges are in bad areas, so people die a lot. Even people around the Durham area, my sister told me that two people got shot. So it could be more dangerous to be on a HBCU campus than somewhere else.

Also, Elijah explains how some locations pose danger to college students. He asserts:

Well, the violence and stuff that's up there, because where Winston-Salem is located is really a bad area where a lot of people get killed and stuff by the locals, like at clubs and stuff . . . it's right there in the hood. A local can just walk onto campus whenever they want to, or when you go to a club, we get on the shuttle bus and go to the club, the locals will be at the club, too. The locals really be hating on the college kids.

While the students raised concerns about the diversity and the location, also the lack of resources was a concern. Courtney explains this issue further: "Again, the money, like to fix up the dorms or something, they might not have the same money that White schools want to get from the state or anything, from anybody." Jacoby adds: "Besides the scholarships, the less money, less money to pay for [the college]."

Reasons Why I Consider HBCUs

Even though some participants were indifferent about attending an HBCU for reasons related to limited diversity, location, and limited funding, the majority of participants were still interested in HBCUs. Mainly, the feel of the campus (comfort, aesthetics, and sense of community) helps students to envision themselves attending.

Brandy shares that it is important that the college environment and feeling "comfortable" are important to her–this is why she would consider and HBCUs over a PWI. She shares:

> Like, it could have been that I could have toured Hampton's campus and hated it, and then toured UNCG's campus and loved it, even though Hampton's an HBCU and UNCG was a predominately white school, I think it would just be somewhere where I feel comfortable, I guess, so the environment, I guess would probably influence me as to where I would go.

Additionally, some participants note the aesthetics as considerable elements in attending an HBCU. Elijah comments: "Well, it was between–my mom went to Livingstone, so she always wanted me to go there, but as I looked at Livingstone campus and stuff, and compared it to Winston-Salem campus, it was clean." When considering the size of the campus, Michelle adds, "I [want] to be in a bigger scene, other than [Wingate University], because [Wingate University is] really small." Alexis and Courtney consider how the school will provide elements of community through campus life activities. Courtney shares: "I feel like the classes would be a little more tightly knit, because I know all the teachers at HBCUs aren't Black, even though it's a black school." Next, Alexis comments: "A good influence would be to do what they do and have like the different little activities and things."

Other participants explain that the location is important to them when considering an HBCU. Jacoby shares: "The location of the HBCU is important." Brandy elaborates on the reasons why she decided to attend Hampton. She explains:

> Hampton is in, you know, it's right by the beach. I think that's a good location. My friends want to go to Howard, I've never been to Howard, but people tell me Howard is in the hood, so, yeah, that might influence some people from, even though it's a really good school, but you know location is a big thing for some people.

In sum, the majority of the participants express that an HBCU is important to them because they relate attending these institutions with a "positive experience" in which they can establish bonds and make connections with other people like themselves. Additionally, some participants articulate that limited diversity, location, and limited funding for resources had an adverse impact on their attitudes about attending an HBCU. However, when considering reasons why they would attend an HBCU, the students explain that the feel of the campus and location are important to them.

Theme V: Misinformed about HBCUs

The final theme that emerged from the findings was *Misinformed about HBCUs*. Within this theme, the participants share how lack of information about HBCUs may have influenced their perceptions about attending. Sakeem recounts:

> I mean, it doesn't influence me one way or another, because at the end of the day, I have to make my own decision. But she (mom) should have told me, so I would be in the know. I don't like to research stuff, so she should have just told me. I wouldn't have to research. But it was fun, researching about my own. Now I can tell my kids about HBCUs.

Similarly, Brandy elaborates on her conversation with her mother regarding how she felt when various questions from the interviews were posed. She recounts:

> I told [my mom] I was coming to do an interview with you, and then she just asked me how it went and how I felt about it and I shared with her some of the stuff. Like I just said to you, how I found out that I didn't really know that much about HBCUs, and I felt like I wanted to do some more research on them, so I can just be more informed. I want to be one of those people who, like, know their school. Like, if someone's asking something about Hampton, I want to talk about it. I can give you the answer. Like I want to know my school's background, this, that, when it was founded. Like, I want to be that type of person that knows their school.

This issue of wanting to know more about HBCUs and being competent to answer questions about Black institutions is also shared by Michelle. She elaborates:

I have those moments all the time. I feel like I can know more about certain things, about college. Some things, like I didn't know until you asked and then it made me want to know. I know more about how to access certain things and stuff.

Winnie explains her miseducation about historical icons and their participation with

HBCUs. She explains:

America has shown that only white people can really go to college and everything. They have portrayed Martin Luther King, Coretta Scott–in a way, it has shown Martin Luther King really as a leader, and somebody that wanted to help people. You wouldn't really think he went to college and everything. I didn't ever know he would go to a black college.

Similarly, Tammy recounts how she will need to realign her miseducation about HBCUs

with factual knowledge. She explains, "I do think that a lot of what I've been told may

not necessarily be true, and that I have to do my own research, before I believe

stereotypes and ideals."

Connecting to this phenomenon about miseducation and lack of information about

HBCUs, the participants reveal that the issue of counseling and advising in high school

contributes to misconceptions about these institutions. Michelle explains: "The college

advisor, Mrs. Stevens, she doesn't really say much about [HBCUs]." In addition, Sakeem

shares: "They tell us about the different colleges, but they don't give a background story,

like when we had a college fair, I think A&T was there." Winnie explains that her school

provides a lot of information about colleges, but rarely does it pertain to HBCUs. She

elaborates: "No, all I hear about is White colleges, really. It makes me feel sad that they

won't show you can go to a Black college, that it's the same education as going to a

school like Appalachian State." Brandy elaborates:

[My counselor] you know she'll say like "HBCUs stand for historically black colleges and universities," the population is you know predominately African American but, not really in detail. Maybe she just didn't want to be biased towards a certain type of institution. She is black, my guidance counselor, and her

daughter actually goes to [Creek Ridge High School] and her daughter is going to A&T. I'm friends with her daughter. She's a senior, so I don't know. It's just a guess, maybe she doesn't want to be biased towards HBCUs, because her daughter's going to an HBCU, so she doesn't want to seem like she was rooting for HBCUs, or some people might want to go to predominantly white schools.

Tammy explains the lack of advisement and counseling about HBCUs in her high school: "Ms. Delmar's White, so she doesn't [talk about HBCUs]." Given these issues, there should be greater efforts made among high school counselors to provide students with information about HBCUs.

In sum, the participants share that they feel less informed about HBCUs than other institutions. Many desire to know more about HBCUs and to receive better high school counseling about these institutions, but as a possible result of all the messages they receive about college, HBCUs are a lesser discussed topic. Winnie explains that her high school demographics (majority White school) determined which schools were promoted. In these ways, some of the participants may have been miseducated about HBCUs. Additionally, some students like Tammy, received information regarding Black colleges and may have held negative perceptions based on misinformation she received from her parents.

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

In conclusion, the first part of this chapter provides a demographic description of participants and schools in which they currently attend. This is particularly important because it provides background knowledge and insights to the educational experiences of the participants in the study. The second part of this chapter provided an elaboration of the findings through five major themes. Combined, these themes help to answer the

research question posed for the study: *What are the perceptions of African American college-bound teens on attending a Historically Black College or University (HBCU)?*

The final chapter provides a discussion on the major themes. Using the theoretical framework of Critical Race Afrocentricity, the chapter makes connections between the findings and existent literature. Additionally, the chapter discusses implications for future research on African American students' perspectives on HBCUs. Finally, the chapter provides recommendations for policy and institutional practice in order to advance the conversation about HBCUs in the postsecondary education arena.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The aim of this study is to explore the perceptions of African American students regarding HBCUs. In doing so, Critical Race Afrocentricity allows for a conceptual and theoretical understanding of the racialized experiences associated with selecting a college or university, as well as providing a better understanding of how Black students perceive HBCUs in their historical and contemporary roles. Additionally, Critical Race Afrocentricity helps to explain Black students' perceptions or misconceptions about Black colleges and how a racialized perspective possibly influences school choice.

It is important to capture the voices of African American students as they transition to higher education. This framework helps to explore students' perspectives on attending HBCUs by using a racial lens to uncover the perceptions of African American students, while positioning continental Africa as the origin of intellectual thought and tradition. The driving research question for this study is as follows: *What are the perceptions of African American college-bound teens on attending a Historically Black College or University (HBCU)?* Based on the participants' voices, five major themes emerge:

I.   The Black College Experience: Going to School with People Who Look Like You, and Having Fun;

II. Student Perceptions about HBCUs: "A Good Choice" for Black Students;

III. Race is Not a Key Issue in College Choice: Matters to Some, But Not All;

IV. Attending an HBCU: "It's Very Important to Me"; and

V. Misinformed about HBCUs.

This chapter is organized by an elaborate discussion on each of the major themes. Next, implications of the study provide recommendations and suggestions for continuing and increasing Black enrollment at HBCUs through recruitment initiatives, alumni networks, and public policy reform.

Theme I: The Black College Experience

In the study, the majority of the participants discussed that the Black college experience was about *Going to School with People Who Look Like You, and Having Fun*. The participants revealed that the Black College experience was related to being around other African Americans, which creates a greater sense of community, and enjoying themselves while in school. The notion of going to school with "people who look like you" is important because students relate the Black college experience to being in the social and cultural majority. From the Critical Race Afrocentric perspective, these students' sense of belonging helps to nurture positive identities through having a shared cultural experience. In HBCUs, these students are no longer "silenced" or marginalized. Instead, they are at the center of the educational and cultural experience (Hilliard, 1995). In the classroom, these students are comfortable with interacting with each other because of the shared culture and environment which is empowering and liberating (Asante, 1998; Traore & Lukens, 2006). In these institutions, participants can feel affirmed and embraced in Black cultural traditions (Davis, 1998).

The literature discusses how HBCUs serve as a mecca for cultural capital and identity development (Cokley & Chapman, 2008); this is reaffirmed in the findings

(Davis, 1998; Fleming, 1984; Franklin & Savage, 2004). Students who attend HBCUs look to these institutions to help reinforce their cultural identities and provide them with an experience that a PWI can never offer them. In this sense, Obenga (1992) and Clarke (1977) posit that African intellectual tradition existed before the development of European civilizations. This heritage, which crossed over the Atlantic Ocean, continues to permeate Black institutions of higher learning. For example, in the case of the first university in the world, the University of Waset, also called the Grand Lodge of Luxor, there was a tradition of education that Europeans came to admire and learn from (Diop, 1974). The Greek historian, Plutarch who wrote the book *Parallel Lives,* provides biographies where he explains that Thales, Plato, and Pythagoras all came to Egypt/Kemet and consulted with the teachers and priests (as cited by Scardigli, 1995).

Nevertheless, since most Black institutions are modeled after White institutions as Anderson (1988) notes, this information hardly enters HBCUs. As a result, the information about pre-colonial Africa and its continuity to the African American experience is hardly reflected in the curriculum in Black schools, which may reproduce the miseducation that Carter G. Woodson (1933) noted. Particular to the scope of this study, it is important to note that participants connected more to social and cultural perceptions of attending an HBCU–as influenced by the mainstream media, friends, and family. Perhaps this further supports the notion that they are in a sense miseducated about the intellectual contributions of continental Africa and ancestors from previous systems of schooling, as well as ideologies that are imposed from the media and mainstream populations (Du Bois, 1903; Means-Coleman, 2002; Sun, Cooks, Rinehart, & Williams, 2002).

Regarding the Black college experience, the students had a general sense of race consciousness in knowing that these institutions were created for African Americans (Bell, 1992; Clarke, 1977; Gray, 2001). In spite of the White on Black race relations in the United States, these students may have had a general sense that there were schools that were created for Blacks (HBCUs), and ones that were created for Whites (PWIs). Although most of these students are far removed from the Civil Rights period of the 1960s and 1970s and school desegregation; the resegregation of America's public schools is an issue that they may certainly be familiar with. In particular, students expressed how district rezoning, majority-minority populations, and school academic resources were different within the same district. That is, predominately Black schools were in poor neighborhoods and predominately White schools were in nicer, richer parts of the city. Students were not oblivious to the educational inequities that existed within their own schooling experiences. Their assertions are validated with literature that elaborates on structural inequities that exist in public school education (Bell, 1992; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Kozol, 2005; Parker, 1998; Schwitzer et al., 1999). Many of these participants attended either majority Black high schools or in some cases, majority White high schools, and so the element of race made an impression on them that indeed, HBCUs *are* for Black students.

Additionally, participants were able to elaborate on the cultural climate differences between HBCUs and PWIs. In particular, when asked about social and cultural differences that could exist between HBCUs and PWIs, Dawn shares: "[HBCUs are] more fun . . . I think maybe music playing. I don't know, more upbeat, lively. A white school may be more uptight." This statement extends the notion that PWIs are not

concerned with being culturally accommodating for Black students and minorities in general. This assertion further supports findings in the literature regarding racial isolation, disconnectedness, and feelings of marginalization that Black students experience at PWIs (Schwitzer et al., 1999; Wallace & Bell, 1999). From a Critical Race Afrocentric perspective, the element of race serves as an influential factor for Black students' collegial experiences and regardless of the institutional setting, the world is looked through a racialized lens (Bell, 1992; Clarke, 1977; Du Bois, 1899, 1903; Turner, 2002).

Campus Exposure

Additionally, some of the participants (Tremaine, Courtney, Brianna, and Elijah) mentioned how they were able to capture what a Black college experience was by visiting HBCUs. It should be noted that there were few opportunities for college campus visits provided by their high schools. Students were able to visit HBCUs through external organizations and/or family members. Understanding their access to information about HBCUs is also important in analyzing how students perceive attending an HBCU would be. On another note, students commented that they saw themselves "fitting in," having "more freedom," and being around people who were "actually intellectual." In this sense, the exploration of HBCUs helped participants to see the value of these institutions by feeling a sense of cultural and racial belonging in a comfortable learning environment with educated Black people. It seems that with increased exposure to HBCUs, students are able to dispel initial perceptions about these institutions.

However, some of the participants recognized that the campus visit(s) reinforced negative perceptions about HBCUs. For example, Elijah discusses his campus visit to

Winston-Salem State University and explains that the neighborhood was dangerous and "raggedy." Elijah shares, "Well, the violence and stuff that's up there, because where Winston-Salem is located is really a bad area where a lot of people get killed and stuff by the locals." Elijah's comments about the location of some HBCUs are actually based on the realities of United States' race relations, neighborhood segregation, urban sprawl, and the disappearance of jobs in urban communities. These issues have deeply impacted African American neighborhoods and the institutions that serve these communities (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Du Bois, 1899; Kozol, 2005; Parker, 1998).

The neighborhood effects that Ainsworth and Wiggan (2006) note helps to explain how community gentrification of neighborhoods has disproportionately affected urban cities and their schools. In particular, two of the schools included in this study had been rezoned within the last decade as sanctioned by the district. As mentioned before, participants were able to articulate that redistricting lines had adversely affected the schools in which they were to attend and ultimately, their educational opportunities via academic course availability and college readiness programs. Additionally, some of the HBCUs in which the participants referenced were also adversely affected by urban sprawl and the increase in crime and poverty, which resulted in diminishing the neighborhood in which the HBCU occupied (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Kozol, 2005).

However, these institutions of higher learning still bring additional cultural capital to the neighborhoods through their faculty, staff, and student populations, partnership endeavors with community leaders, and cultural events and activities that serve to further unite the HBCU with neighborhood constituents (Bourdieu, 1977; Davis, 1998; Franklin & Savage, 2004). Since students may not be aware of the financial constraints that hinder

many HBCUs, there are implications for public policy to reexamine the role that federal and state reductions in funding has had on student enrollment at Black institutions of higher learning. Private HBCUs face even more financial challenges due to limited external funding and diminishing contributions from Black alumni (Gasman, 2006).

The Role of the Media

The role of media is also particularly important in this study because it has served as one of the primary influences in how students perceive HBCUs, and how they understand the Black college experience. Participants in the study mentioned two movies (*Drumline* and *Stomp the Yard*) in particular. For example, with regard to *Drumline* and *Stomp the Yard*, participants acknowledged that the movies showcased HBCUs in a positive light by demonstrating how relatable, personable, and family-oriented the colleges were. It is fitting to mention that the aforementioned studies support the notion that African American identities can be forged through the navigation of positive media depictions (Means-Coleman, 2002; Sun et al., 2002; Wood, 2002). However, it can also be argued that these movies are only demonstrations of the social side of HBCUs and do not accurately depict the historical and intellectual traditions of these institutions.

There are possible negative consequences of the media in showcasing the experiences of marching bands and fraternities, because these movies reinforce negative perceptions of HBCUs as party schools instead of institutions of academic excellence (Cantey et al., 2012). One participant (Winnie) recognizes a scene in *Stomp the Yard* that effectively captured the historical legacy of HBCUs with its acknowledgement of the leaders and important people who attended the institution. This minor scene in the movie stood out to Winnie. For her, it demonstrated how HBCUs serve as a constant reminder

of the lineage and inherited right that Black people have to education (Clarke, 1977). This clip was intentional, but perhaps not as impactful to moviegoers because it was only a brief instance where ancestors were paid homage.

Related to African and African American heritage, Asante (2009) and Delpit and Dowdy (2002) note that the Eurocentric view of Blacks or the "othering" of African Americans in particular, by the dominant group has negative consequences in terms of how Blacks may view themselves or social institutions that are intended to serve them. Those involved in this study have indeed participated in this assertion by making comments centering on PWIs and HBCUs having vast institutional differences−whereas the PWI reigns supreme. In this light though, the students' interests in attending an HBCU was still sparked by *Stomp the Yard* and *Drumline* in a way that at least exposed them to Black institutions. This may have been an unintended consequence of two popular films that were originally intended to showcase the social side and entertainment activities of Black colleges. Perhaps the directors and producers wanted to illustrate the cultural differences that exist between HBCUs and PWIs, but with regards to Greek life and band life. Indeed, there is a paradox that exists between "Black Greeks" and "White Greeks" and "show bands" and "concert bands." Until the production of these blockbusters, this was an area of college life that cinema or the main screen had not explored from an African American perspective.

Courtney, who mentioned BET, which is one of the primary outlets where African American teens receive their socialization about the world, discussed the program *106 & Park,* which occasionally showcased Black colleges. However, when the program is taped at a Black college (generally twice a year), it is always related to entertainment.

More specifically, Hip Hop and R&B artists perform while disc jockeys (DJs) play music and entertain a crowd of college goers. There are also celebrity hosts that facilitate random activities such as talent shows, trivia games, stepping, and strut or dance competitions.

In this sense, Black television programs such as *106 & Park* may be less relevant to the positive aspects of the exposure that African American teens receive about HBCUs. The 1990s television programming of *A Different World*, *The Cosby Show*, and Spike Lee films (which carried a social and educational theme related to Black colleges) are long gone. Movies such as *School Daze* [1988] which celebrated and critiqued Black colleges for their social and cultural traditions, *House Party 2* [1991] which highlighted college affordability and the school-work balance, and *Higher Learning* [1995] which exposed race relations at PWIs, are not known to – or may even be an afterthought to the newest generation of Black students. Perhaps these movies are too dated for college-bound teens to reference and relate to. However, these selections are among the few that attempt to capture more fully the Black collegian experience. However, there are more recent movies, such as *The Great Debaters* [2007] and *In the Rough* [2014] that showcase students from HBCUs who have made an indelible impact on American history.

As a related issue, Elijah, a student in the study, discusses how HBCUs receive little sports coverage while conversely, PWIs are highlighted in the media. He expresses that the games of Division I schools are aired on ESPN regularly. However, only championship games of HBCUs are showcased on sister stations of the major network. The whole phenomenon of Black athletes playing for Division I institutions provide

PWIs with greater media exposure and branding in positive ways, which promote more awareness and popularity among Black college-bound students, while concurrently diminishing the athletic programs and the branding that HBCUs would otherwise receive. Sponsorship of Black star athletes who play in Division I athletic programs also helps contribute funding to PWIs that again, HBCUs would have otherwise received if these students were attending them.

In spite of the low level of exposure that HBCUs receive in the popular media, many of the participants had a base-level understanding about them. They stated that these were schools for African Americans–and concluded that they were "good" schools for Black students. This speaks to Critical Race Afrocentricity in that participants are racially conscious about their education, and how HBCUs schools can promote cultural awareness and racial identity development. It is noteworthy to restate Tremaine's viewpoint here. As Tremaine asserts:

> I think it's a great thing. I think, most black students should do it, some White. I think all, I think they all should. I feel like that's an experience all black students should do, be their area primarily, I mean of majority white, go to majority black . . . to see if there's a difference . . . .culturally.

From a Critical Race Afrocentricity perspective, Tremaine is recognizing the value in the Black intellectual experience. Although he is only a teenager, he like many of the other participants in the study, sees these institutions as having continued relevance in today's society. This salient quote illustrates that there is still a need for race-based institutions, specifically HBCUs, in order to provide an experience that will center on developing one's ethnic identity.

In this sense, Tremaine connects the historical beginnings of HBCUs (during a time period where African Americans were viewed as being less than human) to modern

day contexts where it can be argued and proven that the educational experiences of

African Americans are that of the same. In other words, race relations in higher education

have not substantially changed despite the Civil Rights victories of the 1950s and 1960s.

Additionally, Tremaine furthers the notion that perhaps others should experience Black

colleges to gain a better understanding of 'the other.' In this way, he recognizes how the

cultural capital of HBCUs can serve other populations.

Theme II: Student Perceptions about HBCUs

The participants generally believe that HBCUs will provide them with greater

cultural awareness than they would receive at a PWI. While many White and Black

institutions still privilege Greek life (fraternities and sororities), and Eurocentric curricula

and experiences, the students recognize that HBCUs are more likely to provide them with

a non-Eurocentric education. This finding is supported by the existent literature that

discusses how HBCUs are a place that builds cultural capital and provides a nurturing

environment for the development of positive identities (Asante, 1998; Bourdieu, 1977;

Cokley & Chapman, 2008; Davis, 1998; Rucker & Gendrin, 2003) and greater cultural

awareness (Davis, 2004; Franklin & Savage, 2004; Traore & Lukens, 2006). Relating to

Critical Race Afrocentricity, participants recognize that these postsecondary institutions

have something unique to offer: an educational experience that celebrates African and

African American intellectual tradition, thought, philosophies, life, and customs (Asante,

1998; Diop, 1974). Again, this theme exemplifies the students' racial consciousness in

consideration of postsecondary institution type and its impact on selectivity and college

choice (Bell, 1992; Turner, 2002; Wallace & Bell, 1999).

However, at many HBCUs, Critical Race Afrocentricity and the historical education that links back to continental Africa was perhaps never a central part of the educational canon of HBCUs. This extends to the Washington and Du Bois debates on the aims of education for African Americans (Wiggan, 2011). Washington was well known for his ideals surrounding education for Blacks as a means for economic progress and technical training. Washington argued that literate Blacks in the industrial fields would contribute to more skilled laborers, and not pose a threat to racial hierarchy. With this approach, benevolence from Northern philanthropists was intended to establish a new class of workers. In contrast, Du Bois responded that social, political, and economic equality must remain at the forefront. In staunch support of liberal arts education as a mechanism for creating Black intellects, he believed that educated Blacks would foster racial harmony and uplift against inferiority models, and while some would be educated in the arts, he accepted the notion that the industrial and universal education would help the masses. In recognition of how some HBCUs were founded and who advocated for their progression (as mentioned in the beginning chapter), it is important to remember the ideological claims and forms of indoctrination that are associated with their support.

In this sense, the miseducation phenomenon addressed by Carter G. Woodson (1933) is an ongoing issue. Woodson (1933) elaborates on the indoctrination and ideological domination public schooling has and continues to impose on African Americans. Furthermore, this might be a more widespread problem that is connected to White supremacy ideology. In this way, nationally, the highest ranked institutions generally have the lowest number of minority students. This signals to citizens and students alike, that Black spaces are of lesser quality and lower value. Participants also

concluded that White institutions were less welcoming, and announced that Blacks were not their priority in recruitment and enrollment. This study suggests that HBCUs still make African American students their priority.

In this light, the students' comments about the limited employment opportunities they might be afforded with an HBCU degree can be viewed in terms of the ideology that White students get better opportunities in college and employment than Black students. Furthermore, the sparse representation of Black minorities, who are graduates of PWIs as opposed to HBCUs, in majority White jobs reifies the notion that even if a Black person is hired, preference is given to White college degree holders. This may indirectly suggest to college-bound African American students that they will receive more returns on their college degrees if they attend PWIs. The aforementioned literature also discusses the consideration of employment opportunities in relation to institution types for Black students (Dillon, 1999; Tobolowsky et al., 2005).

The differences in the institutional returns on college degrees when buttressed with the backdrop of anti-Black race relations in the U.S., may explain why the participants said that race was not important to them in their school choice. As a related issue, the students prove conclusively that the issue of race relations is still alive and well. It was not their primary factor in college selection, but it was on their minds in terms of their personal performance as college and employed Americans. Perhaps on the surface, the notion of a color-blind society or ideology may very well suggest that racial parity has not been attained. Rather, they highlighted that the location, funding, and reputation of the school were key considerations. Notwithstanding, the lack of racial emphasis in the students' school of choice, overwhelmingly, most of the participants felt

that it was important to attend an HBCU because of the history, culture, and the potential to perform better academically.

Notwithstanding that many Black students are choosing PWIs based on their popularity and reputation, many of the students in the study believe that they would do better or have better academic performance and greater support if they attended an HBCU rather than a PWI. This finding is consistent with the existing research on higher education performance and indicators for success among Black students (Albritton, 2012; Fountaine, 2012; Obenga, 1992; Outcalt & Skewes-Cox, 2002; Thompson, 2008; Torres & Massey, 2012). Similarly, students recognized that they could possibly have different experiences dependent upon the support systems offered and utilized from the two institution types. This finding is similar to Schwitzer et al. (1999) who found that in PWIs, White faculty members had fewer interactions with their Black students. The lack of interactions between White faculty and Black students in PWIs is further complicated by the fact that Black students clearly recognize that White institutional branding had more currency than HBCUs did in the labor market. From a Critical Race Afrocentricity perspective, cultural hegemony and White privilege in the workplace are ongoing phenomena that influence some students' decisions to attend PWIs.

Therefore, HBCUs must play a greater role in preparing students to negotiate race relations and employment dynamics in the American social landscape. Additionally, HBCU graduates need to be more visible in telling their post-HBCU experiences and how they climbed the ladder based on the skills acquired from HBCUs. It is crucial to understand the culture of youth and how they perceive information obtained through the

media. Giroux (1994) explains how educators must contend with the challenges of meeting the needs for this generation of students. He shares:

> Within the next century, educators will not be able to ignore the hard questions that schools will have to face regarding issues of multiculturalism, race, identity, power, knowledge, ethics, and work. These issues will play a major role in defining the meaning and purpose of schooling, the relationship between teachers and students, and the critical content of their exchange in terms of how to live in a world that will be vastly more globalized, high tech, and racially diverse than at any other time in history. (Giroux, 1994, para 8)

Giroux (1994) recognizes that educators will need to craft pedagogies that are responsive to the needs of diverse learners. The teachers who are able to effectively teach diverse populations add to the institutional value of their schools.

In this way, the participants in the study noted that there is a sense of pride in graduating from an HBCU because of the historical reputation and connections to the Black community. The HBCU underpins not only students, but families and generations past who can recount the educational disparities that African Americans experienced. However, Black schools are perceived as inferior when compared to their institutional counterparts and this assertion was also found within the study. The participants questioned if HBCU degree holders will be able to find a job as easily as PWI graduates. For example, Brandy's comment that, "some people may look down upon HBCUs, and that could, like hinder some job opportunities," resonates with the notion that White privilege has currency in the American job market. This is similar to Dancy and Brown (2008) who found that African Americans perceived PWI graduates as having greater employment prospects in the labor market. Dancy and Brown (2008) also elaborate that graduates from PWIs were more interested in their careers and obtaining greater financial gains and opportunities for them, whereas graduates from HBCUs were more community-oriented and sought to make lasting improvements for Black Americans.

From a Critical Race Afrocentric perspective, students recognize the racial stigmatizations between the institution types. It is possible that they are willing to undergo possible racial isolation, and marginalization at a PWI for the sake of 'getting a good job' after graduation. These perceptions could be based in part by the fact that there is a slightly higher percentage of Black HBCU alumni unemployed than Black non-HBCU graduates–and among women, there were lower salaries for service-related professions (Redd, 2000). However, it should be noted that HBCU graduates have similar after college experiences to non-HBCU Black graduates (Redd, 2000). Notwithstanding these statistics, participants could also be influenced by popular culture, family, and friends that HBCUs are not as academically prestigious as PWIs.

Theme III: Consideration of Race in College Choice

An undercurrent issue that came out in the student narratives was that race was not a key issue with them in their college choice; however, race did matter for some of the students. This idea of the declining significance of race, as put forth by William Julius Wilson (1980), must be debunked here. Wilson (1980) proposes that we are living in a post-racial society where the need for racial uplift among minority communities is no longer necessary. While there have been progressions in the fight for racial equality, there is still much more work to be done–especially in educational spaces where racial inequities persist(Bell, 1992; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Tate, 1997). For example, African Americans in the 21st century continue to be overrepresented in the prison industrial complex, out of school suspensions and expulsions, and overrepresented in special education placement for low cognitive abilities. Additionally, Fenning and Rose (2007) performed a study on the overrepresentation of African American males in exclusionary

discipline. Their reports concluded that school suspensions and expulsions that resulted from disciplinary infractions were majorly represented by students from vulnerable populations–that is, children of poverty and those with academic difficulties. More recently, Lewin (2012) reported from the National Forum on Educational Statistics (NFES) that African American students are falling subject to harsher discipline policies with increased implementation for zero-tolerance policies in larger school districts. Therefore, race continues to be an institutional problem which creates barriers for minorities in general, but specifically for African Americans. Nevertheless, generally, when considering what institutions to attend, the students in the study gave priority to an institution's academic reputation, the availability of scholarships, and the look and feel of the campus. However, when considering an HBCU, the students talked about the feel of the campus first and the location.

Theme IV: The Importance of Attending an HBCU

Some of the participants shared that the two main reasons why they would consider attending an HBCU were based on the feel of the campus and the location of the school. These findings are consistent with the current scope of literature that discusses factors that influence college choice (Bell, 1992; Freeman, 1999; Freeman & Thomas, 2002; Gyapong & Smith, 2012; Kim et al. 2009; Pitre, 2006). In particular, Brandy explains how the collegiate environment is a very important consideration when deciding to attend an HBCU. She elaborates: "So the environment, I guess would probably influence me as to where I would go." Additionally, institutional aesthetics are important to students. Jacoby expressed how the campus needs to be somewhere "where [he] can see [himself] there." Upon visiting a few college campuses, Elijah recalled how the

amenities and the overall architecture was a major influence in deciding if he were to attend the college. Courtney and Alexis elaborate on the feel of the campus fostering a sense of community for students. Second, the location of the campus is an important issue for students. In particular, Brandy highlighted some students decided not to attend Howard University because it was "in the hood."

While it can be argued that these are tangible reasons that could influence students' perceptions regarding their possible attendance at an HBCU, it should be noted that these reasons do not measure up to the issues that matter when deciding which college to attend for the majority of the participants. On the contrary, when the participants identified issues that mattered when deciding on which college to attend in general, the availability of scholarships, academic reputation, and the look and feel of the campus were the key determinants. However, with the special case of considering an HBCU, the first two determinants of (funding and academic reputation) were not the main priorities.

In this way, the participants are not considering institutions on a level playing field. Perhaps, they think that the location and environment are more important to them when deciding to go to an HBCU. Maybe this can be attributed to the perception of these institutions are known as being party schools and places to have fun. A related issue is the perception that HBCUs do not have appropriate funding and accredited programs (as mentioned by Courtney and Jacoby), which is a key concern that is often reported in the media (Gasman, 20006; Gasman & Brown, 2011).

Additionally, the students' comments may be suggesting that they were not expecting HBCUs to have strong academic reputations as they did with PWIs, but viewed

these institutions as social spaces where they can enjoy greater freedoms around "people who look like them." More specifically, students could not articulate much about the specific academic returns an HBCU could provide them; however, they postulated that given the increased support they would receive, they would perform better academically. In a general sense, these students could be implying that they recognize HBCUs as supportive educational institutions, even to a fault. Kayla mentions explicitly, "I didn't want to go to a predominantly white school because I know it's going to be too challenging for me, and I'm probably going to drop out." However, in the same breath, Kayla characterizes herself as being "laid back" and not wanting to be "pushed too hard"; she asserts that these are chief reasons why she wants to attend an HBCU–because HBCUs will allow her the support she needs and at a reasonable pace.

As mentioned, some of the participants perceive PWIs as having higher standards and being more elite in comparison to HBCUs. Tammy elaborates, "Admission standards, it seems like predominately White colleges are harder to get into, a lot harder to get into." In this statement, Tammy alludes to the notion that PWIs are more selective, hence being better than HBCUs. This perception is echoed by other participants who identify admission standards and academic reputation as principal institutional differences that exist between HBCUs and PWIs (Freeman, 1999; Freeman & Thomas, 2002; Gyapong & Smith, 2012; Kim et al. 2009; Pitre, 2006). This finding is similar to Tobolowski et al. (2005) who found that an institution's reputation is a heavy consideration in college choice. Additionally, connecting back to Black athletes and the media, Braddock and Hua (2006) found that high school athletes also reviewed the institution's athletic reputations as an influence in which school they will attend. The

participant Elijah is fitting to mention here; while he will be attending an HBCU on a full athletic and academic scholarship, this institution was his second choice to a PWI with a more reputable name that was beginning an athletic program. As noted, these findings are relevant in the discussion on the growing population of Black student athletes and their enrollment at PWIs versus HBCUs.

Given this issue, from a Critical Race Afrocentric framework, it can be postulated that the students internalized low expectations of Black colleges, which were perhaps remnants of low expectations they may have encountered through their previous Eurocentric high school education (Asante, 1998; Watkins, 2001). Many of the students noted that in their high schools, they received insufficient advising and information about these institutions. Particularly, if they attended a majority White high school, their school counselors were less likely to mention HBCUs, or even have any resources on these institutions. In fact, the students who actually went on Black college campus tours did not go on these tours with their high schools, rather they were exposed through personal networks of family, friends, or community and church organizations.

Specifically, Tremaine seemed to have the most experiential knowledge about HBCUs from a church-related organization called Campus Connections. This is reminiscent of Anderson's (1988) discussion on the historical and now−the contemporary role of independent Black churches in helping to support higher education for African Americans. However, in the 21st century, financial support of HBCUs through independent Black churches has been dwindling and is not as strong as it was in the Reconstruction Period and the first half of the 20th century (Franklin & Savage, 2004; Wiggan, 2011). The lack of support of Black institutions of higher learning by the 21st

century Black church has had a negative effect on the financial wellbeing and enrollment of Black intuitions of higher learning. In this sense, some of the participants perceive PWIs as having higher standards and as being leading intuitions, whereas they saw HBCUs in terms of being underfunded, under supported, and being in poor neighborhoods (as mentioned by Courtney, Jacoby, and Dawn).

Implications of the Study

Based on the findings of this study, most Black students continue to have generally positive perceptions about HBCUs (Davis, 1998, 2004; Pitre, 2006). However, there is perhaps a greater need for the federal government to increase its involvement in providing funding for these institutions, both private and public (Fester et al., 2012; Gasman, 2006, 2007; Gasman & Bowman, 2011; Matthews & Hawkins, 2006). Furthermore, independent Black institutions such as churches and other organizations should increase their contributions to HBCUs (Anderson, 1988; Gasman, 2006, 2007; Wiggan, 2011). The students in the study who had gone on a Black college tour, did not do so with their high schools. Therefore, this suggests that there is also a need for better training of college counselors and high school administrators relating to HBCUs (Gyapong & Smith, 2012). Furthermore, it is recommended that each HBCU partner with at least 50 high schools to help supply the institution with a continuous pipeline of new students. These partnerships should seek to enhance the students' college readiness and their exposure to college-level courses (Freeman, 1999; Freeman & Thomas, 2002). HBCUs should target Black high schools more strategically to ensure that they have ongoing student enrollments. Additionally, social media, popular press, and television

programming are places where HBCUs can embed themselves to create greater visibility and exposure to potential students.

It is also recommended that Black alumni associations should play more active roles in their involvement in HBCU recruitment initiatives and fundraising for these institutions. Courtney's grandmother and Michelle's father graduated from HBCUs; however, the majority of the students in the study would be first generation of college-goers. In this sense, if these students become HBCU graduates, it would create deeper intergenerational transmissions of educational capital to future generations and the Black community in general.

For HBCUs, the students identified that one of the unique characteristics of these institutions was that they offered greater exposure to African American history and culture. This exposure is not permeated in the classroom; students experience history and culture best by being physically present and active on campus. This is something that these institutions must continue to offer and express more deeply through their curriculum, pedagogy, and service to Black communities. In this way, these institutions can help to transform urban communities in America in the 21st century, as they did in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In spite of the important role that HBCUs have played and continue to play because of integration, accreditation issues, and diminishing financial resources, the future of HBCUs still remains uncertain in the 21st century.

Limitations of the Study

While this study focused on the perceptions of college bound African Americans in the Southeastern corridor of the United States, similar studies are needed to capture the voices of Black teens in different regions of the United States. As Wiggan (2007, 2008)

notes, high achieving African American students have been understudied. Additionally, while Freeman (1999) was the most closely related study, more investigations are needed to better understand what African American students' perspectives are concerning HBCUs.

Summary

In conclusion, the findings of the study reveal that college-bound African American teens' perceptions about attending an HBCU are generally positive. Additionally, students weighed heavily finances and program availability in their consideration of which type of institution to attend. Also related to the literature is the notion that students recognize how culturally enriching and academically supportive HBCUs are for African American students (Albritton, 2012; Fountaine, 2012; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Outcalt & Skewes-Cox, 2002; Thompson, 2008). However, these characteristics alone are not enough to shape their opinion about attending an HBCU. Students reveal that with regard to attending an HBCU, their decisions are further constrained by broader social, institutional and workforce dynamics, which privilege PWIs over HBCUs and reflect the continuing influence of White racial privilege despite popular claims that the 21st century is a post-racial society.

Notwithstanding this, the students felt that they could potentially perform better in a majority-Black institution of higher learning, but funding was a key issue for them. Therefore, when given the option of going to an HBCU or a PWI, beyond financial considerations, the students appeared to have preferred an HBCU. Yet, these students were forced to think through their future prospects and which institutional degree would better enhance their life chances. Here and again enters White privilege, and the issue of

being a minority in a majority White country. This too perhaps suggests that HBCUs are still important in helping students to understand and mediate against institutional barriers and challenges they will face in the society, and in the realm of employment. Sakeem's comments, "I think HBCUs are a good choice, first choice, in my opinion," resonates that these institutions still play an important social role for African Americans in the 21st century.

This study contributes to the field of literature on African American students' perceptions about attending college and more specifically, an HBCU. Since the Freeman study (1999), there has been limited research on how Black students perceive higher education institutions and what factors enable them to attend. The current study provides insight on how campus aesthetics, family/peer influences, institutional characteristics and media depictions of collegiate institutions (particularly for HBCUs) serve to either encourage or deter Black student enrollment.

However, there are questions that remain to be answered which provide rationale for future research. There is a need for longitudinal studies on Black students that span from their high school to the completion of their undergraduate degrees. These studies would provide more research on a teen's perceptions in comparison to their actual experiences in a postsecondary institution.

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APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT FLIER

Share your Perspectives on Choosing to Attend a

HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY

Are YOU:

African American?
High School Student?
Currently enrolled in a public North Carolina school?

WE WANT YOU!!!!

As part of a research study that will be conducted as a dissertation project in affiliation with The University of North Carolina at Charlotte, we are recruiting African Americans enrolled in a North Carolina public high school to participate in two individual interviews that will allow them to share their beliefs and attitudes about attending a Historically Black College or University (HBCU).

If you are interested in participating, contact **Lakia Scott** at

APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

As part of a research study that will be conducted at The University of North Carolina at Charlotte, we are recruiting African American students enrolled in a North Carolina public high school in to participate in two individual semi-structured interviews that will allow them to share their beliefs and attitudes about attending a Historically Black College or University (HBCU). A HBCU is a college or university that caters to the African American student population, but welcomes people from all ethnic groups to enroll and attend.

HBCU institutions were, in pastime, the only means for African Americans to have access to and attain higher education degrees (Anderson, 1988). However, after the Reconstruction Period (1865-1877) and landmark legislation, there was a push for racial integration in schools and universities, and school choice and the availability of opportunities greatly influenced the number of African American students who chose to attend HBCUs. Today, there is total of 105 historically Black institutions across the nation since 1837 (Jackson, 2001; National Center for Education Statistics -NCES, 2009). The U.S. Department of Education only recognizes ninety-nine institutions, however, due to national accreditation standards set. NCES (2012) reported that there are over 330,000 students enrolled in HBCUs; however, only 78 percent account for the African American student population; which is a decline in overall Black student enrollment since earlier decades with the Black student population accounting for nearly 90 percent of the schools (NCES, 2009). Added, the total number of African Americans enrolled in U.S. accredited institutions is approximately 3 million, but only 9 percent of those students are enrolled in HBCUs.

Additionally, with financial issues, accreditation concerns, negative media attention, and overall lower enrollment ratings, much attention has put today's HBCUs in jeopardy. From the historical context of education for African American students that is premised in HBCUs, there is a need to examine contemporary perspectives on their significance. This study seeks to examine the perspectives of college-bound African American teens on attending a HBCU.With dwindling enrollment ratings for HBCUs, this study seeks to investigate if HBCUs serve as a mecca for cultural capital through the perspectives of college-bound African American students. It is important to understand important factors that may contribute to the shaping perspectives of Black teens on attending HBCUs: (1) racial identity and development; (2) a HBCUs cultural capital; and (3) current issues facing HBCUs.

Students that agree to participate will be asked to take part in two-individual in-person interviews outside of school that could last up to 2 hours. These interviews will take place January 2013 through December 2013 and will be scheduled at the convenience (time, date, and location) of the student and their parents. This study has nothing to do with your school and teachers at the school. Students will not receive a grade for participating in the study. The study will not affect your grades in school. The interview will be audio recorded so that I confirm I have an accurate account of what was said during the

interview. I will store these recordings in my locked office in a locked cabinet until the study is complete. After the study is complete, I will destroy all the recordings by deleting them.

If you choose to volunteer to participate, you will be provided with the see parental consent, student assent and student consent forms (your teacher, administrator, or school front office will have them available). If you are under 18 years of age, a parent/guardian will need to consent to your participation. If you are 18 years of age or older, you will need to simply complete the student consent form. We will then contact you at a later date and set up an interviewing time that will be most convenient for you.

Your participation in this study will not affect your participation with school in any way. The decision to participate in this study is completely up to you. There are questions that will be asked about your race/ethnicity and cultural background. If you decide to be in the study, you may stop at any time or you can choose not to answer particular questions if you feel uncomfortable doing so. You will not be treated any differently if you decide not to participate in the study or if you stop once you have started.

All of the documents and data collected in the interviews will not contain information that can identify you. The findings for the study will be used for a dissertation project and will also be used subsequently to further inform the field of educational research surrounding Black student perceptions on choosing to attend a HBCU. If you decide to be in the study, you may stop at any time. You will not be treated any differently if you decide not to participate in the study or if you stop once you have started. Your name will not be used in any part of the study to protect your identity.

APPENDIX C: STUDENT INFORMATION SHEET

Name: _____   Pseudonym Assigned: _____

Grade Level: _____   Phone Number: _____

Age: _____   Email Address: _____

Name of High School Attending: _____

Extra-Curricular Activities (if any): _____

Do you plan to attend a college or university? (Please circle one.)   YES   NO

If you answered yes, please list colleges/universities you are considering and why:

_____

_____

_____

_____

What is your "dream college" to attend? _____

What is your anticipated major in college? _____

What do you hope to become after graduating from college? _____

Have you received any type of college preparation or readiness?   YES   NO

If you answered yes, please list who/what helped you to prepare for college:

_____

_____

Are there any members of your family who have attended or currently attend college? If so, please list them, the college in which they attend/attended, and their profession.

_____

_____

Is there anyone in particular who has inspired you to attend college? _____

Is there anyone who has attended college that has inspired you? _____

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview 1:

Section I: The Importance of the 'Black College Experience'

1. Do you know what a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) is?

2. How is a HBCU different from a Predominately White Institution (PWI)?

3. Do you know anyone who has attended a HBCU? If so, did you talk to them about their experience?

4. Have you ever visited a HBCU?

5. Did anyone from your family attend a HBCU?

6. How does your race impact your decisions in attending college?

7. What does it mean to have the 'Black College Experience?'

8. In your opinion, how important is it to go to a HBCU?

9. Do you think attending an HBCU would help you to learn more about African American culture? Why or why not?

10. Do you think you would academically perform better at a HBCU? Why or why not?

Section II: The Perception and Attitude about attending a HBCU

11. What's your general opinion about attending a HBCU?

12. Have you seen anything on TV that tells you about HBCUs?

13. Do you know of any cultural differences that could exist at a HBCU and a PWI?

14. Do you know of any academic differences that could exist at a HBCU and a PWI?

15. Do you know of any social differences that could exist at a HBCU and a PWI?

16. Can you give me any reasons why you think attending an HBCU would be an advantage?

17. Can you give me any reasons why you think attending an HBCU would be a disadvantage?

Interview 2:

1. Have you learned or heard of anything else about HBCUs since we last spoke?

2. Have you visited any HBCUs since we last spoke?

3. Do you know of any famous people who have graduated or attended HBCUs?

4. What's your general opinion about attending a HBCU?

5. Do you know of any differences that could exist at a HBCU and a PWI?

6. What influences your decision about attending a HBCU?