A CRITICAL INVESTIGATION INTO THE MEANING(S) OF A HIGH SCHOOL BRAWL

By

JILL CHRISTINE MCNEW

Bachelor of Science

John Brown University

Siloam Springs, Arkansas

1998

Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate College of the
Oklahoma State University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the Degree of
MASTER OF SCIENCE
December, 2000

A CRITICAL INVESTIGATION INTO THE

MEANING(S) OF A HIGH

SCHOOL BRAWL

Thesis Approved:

Thesis Advisor

Dean of the Graduate College

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to my thesis advisor, Dr. Pam Bettis. She has been a source of great encouragement and a true mentor throughout my thesis process and my time at Oklahoma State. I would also like to thank my Major advisor and committee member, Dr. Christine Moseley, who has provided precious support and direction as I entered the field of Science Education. Special thanks goes to Dr. Pam Brown, who joined my thesis committee on very short notice and contributed valuable insight and thoughtful analysis to my work, and also to Dr. Jeffrey Weld, who provided many opportunities to add to my training, and who would have contributed to my thesis committee had I not taken so long to complete my study. Thanks also to Dr. French and Dr. Ewing in the College of Arts and Sciences, and Dr. Holt in the Center for Science Literacy who provided meaningful experiences by allowing me to assist them in teaching their undergraduate courses.

Additionally, I would like to thank my immediate and extended family, and my friends, all of whom have heard more than they ever wanted to know about race riots over the course of my thesis process. They have been extremely patient and helpful, and provided support in a variety of ways.

Finally, I would like to thank the students and faculty of Heritage High school, who, in sharing painful memories and guarded opinions, were extremely generous and made it possible for me to inquire into this sensitive area.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background

> The incident began when a boy made a derogatory remark to a girl just before lunchtime April 20 [1993], Principal Connery said. The remark was not a racial slur, he said. When the boy returned from lunch, the girl and her friends confronted him. 'A riot ensued,' Principal Connery said. 'I'm not going to sugar-coat it' (Hobrock, 1993, p. A4).

The above quote presents a simple description of a complex and multi-layered event that took place at a multiracial high school, Heritage High, in a Southern Midwest city in 1993. The inflammatory comment was reportedly directed by a Native-American, male student toward an African-American, female student and is itself much disputed. Local newspapers originally referred to the comment as a "racial slur" but the school board later refuted that description. However, the brawl that ensued was "apparently divided along racial lines" (Containing Violence, 1993, p. A12).

According to the Winfield World, the incident involved approximately fifty students and three hundred onlookers. A police officer at the scene reported that "there were some weapons involved, but I don't know the

number yet and we're still out trying to find them." There were reports of students launching cinder blocks at people, and "one student was hit with a pipe" (Swindell & Gilroy, 1993, p. A1, A3).

The fight resulted in the arrest of one student and the suspension of ten for the remainder of the school year. Police responded to the brawl with motorcycle and horse patrols and the sheriff's gang unit (Swindell & Gilroy, 1993, p. A1, A3). One teacher, who went out to the parking lot to break up the fight, took a baseball bat with him to protect himself from the brawling students.

Immediately following the riot[1], students were detained in their fifth hour classes "to avoid students mingling in the halls so soon after the fight" (Swindell & Gilroy, 1993, p. A1, A3). The brawl also resulted in an extreme tightening of security measures at the high school for the remainder of the year.

> As a result the school added security. There is also a greater presence of uniformed Winfield police officers before and after school and during lunch. Students aren't allowed to leave class without an adult escort. Teachers also are patrolling the halls. Parents suggested closing the campus at lunch. [Principal] Connery said the school doesn't have enough personnel to close the campus. Parents also suggested offering a class on the history of America's racial diversity, adding metal detectors and adding a discipline committee to the site-based management committee (Hoberock, 1993, p. A4).

In the days following the brawl, a handful of editorials appeared in the Winfield World calling the incident a riot and blaming it on various

---

[1] See discussion on p. 3 for explanation of word choice used to describe the event.

elements: society, the media, racial dissension, a lack of sufficient discipline in the public schools, and the students themselves bringing in problems from home.

In this study I attempt to bring together a variety of differing understandings and descriptions of the incident at Heritage. Using critical theory as a lens through which to view the occurrence, I investigate the incident itself and the environment surrounding it both in time and place. My objective was to uncover how the brawl came about, the various meanings that it had in the lives of participants, and how it has affected the school and the people involved.

Riot/Brawl/Fight

The term that should be used to characterize the event was intensely contested by my participants. The Winfield World referred to the incident as a "brawl," while The Gazette, a local paper aimed at the African-American population, termed it a "riot." Participants also differed in what they called the event, and the words they used represented their understandings and interpretations of the incident. Because the words used to describe an event also play a role in defining that event, I carefully considered what to call the incident and have applied the terms used by my participants, "riot," "brawl," and "fight," where appropriate to the particular speaker or discussion. Because the term "brawl" was most frequently used in print and video media, and because I view it as the term

which represents the middle of the two extremes, I used it when the particular discussion did not lend itself to one particular description. Further, I believe that the term allows the reader more conceptual room to form their own definition of the event. Finally, in the conclusion section I revisit this original decision to use the term brawl and argue for a different one based on the data.

Research Questions

In seeking to understand the Heritage High brawl and the context surrounding it, I centered my study around four central research questions:

1st. How did various students, teachers and administrators understand the brawl?

2nd. What was the historical, social, economic, and political context that surrounded and contributed to the incident?

3rd. What factors did participants see as having contributed to the brawl?

4th. What changed in the school and those involved as a result of the brawl?

In seeking answers to these four questions, I gained a more thoughtful perspective on the causes, processes, effects and meanings the brawl.

Literature

Although no documented studies directly addressed the specific issues of a school race riot, several different strains of research provided insight into the brawl at Heritage. First and most obvious, I searched the literature investigating various aspects of school violence and its ramifications (Fatum & Hoyle, 1996; Astor, 1998; Noguera, 1995; Anderson, 1998; Furlong, Chung, Bates & Morrison, 1995; Bettis, 1996; Towns, 1998; Peterson, Pietrzak & Speaker, 1998; Cousins, 1997; Price & Everett, 1997; Toby, 1994; Baker, 1998; Hyman & Perone, 1998; Gold & Chamberline, 1996; Soriano, Soriano & Jimenez, 1994). Second, I looked to the literature on race and class issues in schools and society to determine how these factors may have played out in the occurrence of the brawl (Wilson, 1978, 1988, 1996; Quillian, 1995; Bobo & Hutchings, 1996; Pride, 2000; Kozol, 1991; Ogbu, 1987; Welch & Hodges, 1997; Pinderhughes, 1997). Next, I explored studies pertaining to large-scale race riots, their causes and consequences, and the circumstances surrounding them (Spilerman, 1970 & 1971; Olzak, Shanahan & McEneaney, 1996; Olzak & Shanahan, 1996; Bergesen & Herman, 1998; Baldasarre, 1994; Ellsworth, 1982; Jones Parrish, 1998). This strand of research proved informative, elaborating conditions that often lead to such events. Next, to understand some specific comments made by participants about their perception or resentment of news coverage of the

events at Heritage, I investigated a few important works on the media and its ability to frame events in particular ways (Tuchman, 1978; Bennett, 1996). Finally, I investigated research on memory and the way people construct reality to make sense of the various stories and interpretations of an event (Schutz, 1961; Berger & Luckman, 1966; Holzner, 1968; Goffman, 1974; Coulter, 1989; Teski, 1995).

Methodology

In investigating the Heritage High brawl, I employed the method of a qualitative, historical case study. Because my goal in this project was to uncover participants' understanding of the deeper meanings of the brawl, a qualitative methodology was required. The historical case model was the most suitable to the situation of the brawl because it was an historical event, and easily bounded. By using a variety of data sources, I employed methodology of both case study and historical research:

> Thus, the case study relies on many of the same techniques as a history, but it adds two sources of evidence not usually included in the historian's repertoire: direct observation and systematic interviewing. ...the case study's unique strength is its ability to deal with a full variety of evidence – documents, artifacts, interviews, and observations – beyond what might be available in the conventional case study (Yin, 1994, p. 8).

I gathered data from two primary sources, interviews with participants in the school at the time of the event, and media documentation of the event and the context. The majority of my data about the Heritage High brawl came from participants in the school at the

Significance

Much research has investigated civil disturbances, particularly race riots throughout the history of the United States. Theories have been proposed to aid our understanding of the intricacies, causes, and implications of such events. No such studies have been done to investigate, in depth, these sorts of incidents, which happen periodically in schools.

It is important that school incidents, such as the Heritage High brawl, be investigated in a similar manner so that a greater understanding of the culture and environment of the school and how wider social processes and issues work themselves out in these microcosms can be developed. "Many commentators have suggested that one potential positive outcome of civil unrest would be new ways of thinking about and renewed commitment to addressing problems of poverty and racial inequality" (Baldassare, 1994, p. 112). The Heritage incident, because it was inextricably involved with schooling, provided insight into how race, ethnicity, social class, gender and violence operated in schools.

> Critical researchers begin from the premise that all cultural life is in constant tension between control and resistance. This tension is reflected in behavior, interaction rituals, normative systems, and social structure, all of which are invisible in the rules, communication systems, and artifacts that constitute a given culture. Critical ethnography takes seemingly mundane events, even repulsive ones, and reproduces them in a way that exposes broader social processes of control, taming, power imbalance, and the symbolic mechanisms

> that impose one set of preferred meanings or behaviors over others (Thomas, 1993, p. 9).

Studying the context and descriptions of the Heritage High brawl, I found that the event contained many similarities to larger-scale riots and that existing theories of civil disturbance could be utilized to aid in understanding this incident. Theories that attempted to explain large racial disturbances helped me to identify possible structural factors within the school that might have contributed to the incident. Research also provided insights into various social and structural factors in the school such as social stratification, racism, tracking and open lunch, and how these might have contributed to both the fight itself and the way that it was resolved and remembered.

Theoretical Framework

I looked at the Heritage High brawl through the lens of critical theory to discover the power structures and forces inherent in the events.

> The term critical describes both an activity and an ideology. As social activity, critical thinking implies a call to action that may range from modest rethinking of comfortable thoughts to more direct engagement that includes political activism. As ideology, critical thinking provides a shared body of principles about the relationship among knowledge, its consequences, and scholars' obligations to society... [Critical thinking] challenges the relationship between all forms of inquiry and the reality studied and sustained (Thomas, 17-18).

Critical theory called for questioning and analysis of the groups present at the school and the power struggles inherent in their relationships. It also

allowed for a focus on issues of race and social class and how these factors worked together to create stress and tension between different groups in the school population.

Findings

My findings were divided into three primary sections. First, the context of the brawl was vital to understanding the climate in which it occurred. To understand any event, we must first reflect on the climate in which it occurred. The time and place of the Heritage incident provided a fitting backdrop for the events that happened there. Second, the realist tale combined the most cogent, direct participant accounts of the events of the riot and the fight that led up to it, into a comprehensive, telling story. This account provided a general framework for describing the events of the Heritage High brawl, and furnished a basis for comparison of more deviant accounts. The third section, the analysis, presented my evolving understanding of participants' views and perspectives on the brawl and it's causes and meanings.

Summary

In the following sections I have laid out the elements of my entire study, from implementation, to research methods and strategies, to analysis and conclusions. The incident of the Heritage High brawl encompassed a complex and multilayered event, and the body of this work

describes the results of my efforts to peel away the layers of assumption and confusion surrounding the event. These efforts resulted in a deeper understanding of what happened on April 21, 1993, and what these events meant to participants in the school.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

I found no literature that directly addressed race riots, or incidents of group violence in schools. However, I did locate research from five different areas that contributed to my understanding of the data. First, because the Heritage incident was inextricably linked with schooling, I looked to the arena of school violence for understanding how schools and researchers framed and addressed violence occurring on campus (Fatum & Hoyle, 1996; Noguera, 1995; Anderson, 1998; Furlong, Chung, Bates, & Morrison, 1995; Bettis, 1996; Towns, 1998; Peterson, Pietrzak, & Speaker, 1998; Cousins, 1997; Price & Everett, 1998; Anderson, 1998; Toby, 1994; Baker, 1998; Hyman & Perone, 1998; Gold & Chamberline, 1996; Soriano, Sorianl & Jiminez, 1994). This area proved less helpful because few studies addressed group violence or riots, and when these topics were addressed, they were treated as anomalies, not to be understood. Next, I looked to various studies involving how students and professionals dealt with issues of race and social class in schools to help me understand the power relationships inherent in these social dynamics, and how these played out in the Heritage High brawl (Wilson, 1978, 1988, 1996; Quillian,

1995; Bobo & Hutchings, 1996; Pride, 2000; Kozol, 1991; Ogbu, 1987; Welch & Hodges, 1997; Pinderhughes, 1997). This was by no means an exhaustive review, as the topic is addressed extensively in the literature. I looked particularly for the application of race/class dynamics leading to prejudice, unrest, and violence.

The third strain of research that I sought for perspective and comprehension of the Heritage incident involved studies that investigated larger scale riots, their causes, meanings and significance (Spilerman, 1970 & 1971; Olzak, Shanahan & McEneaney, 1996; Olzak & Shanahan, 1996; Bergesen & Herman, 1998; Baldasarre, 1994; Ellsworth, 1982; Jones Parrish, 1998). This arena proved helpful in that the main theoretical explanations and predictors for riots in cities fit closely with what my participants observed at Heritage. Riot research theories provided ways to understand causation of large fights and reflected some of the assumptions made by participants about the causes of the Heritage riot.

Fourth, based on some comments of my participants, I sought a few key sources of research that explained and described the ways in which the media and the events of the brawl worked together to shape one another (Tuchman, 1978; Bennett, 1996). This strand of research helped me to secure my grasp of the ways that participants reacted to the media coverage of the event and how that shaped their individual perceptions of the events of 1993.

The final literature source I utilized was that of social psychology. It provided insight into how people understood and remembered the event (Schutz, 1961; Berger & Luckman, 1966; Holzner, 1968; Goffman, 1974; Coulter, 1989; Teski, 1995). This literature helped explain the variance in the stories that I was told, and how the brawl meant so many different things to the different people involved. This was also a less than exhaustive review, as research in social psychology is vast. I did look to several seminal works that directed my analysis and some studies that directly addressed memory as it related to violent incidents.

These five strands of research contributed in different ways to understanding the Heritage High brawl. By focusing on a particular incident of group violence in a school setting, like the Heritage High brawl, I have brought historical case study methodology to light on school violence. Similar methodologies have been used to investigate outbreaks of mass violence in the public sphere; two examples are Baldassare's (1994) study of the 1992 Los Angeles riots, and Ellsworth's (1982), Johnson's (1998) and Jones Parrish's (1998) studies of the historical riot in Winfield. The Heritage High brawl was unique because it involved such a large population of the school (although the number of participants in the brawl were debated, most authorities agree that over 15% of the student body was present). The significance of such a large-scale event encouraged its investigation, and historical methods proved appropriate.

School Violence in the Literature

The issue of school violence has become a very political one; thus the literature on school violence reflected the divisions and disagreements present in any controversial issue. Studies approached school violence from several angles. The first group of studies that I reviewed attempted to add to a general understanding of the causes of school violence. Fatum and Hoyle (1996) and Astor (1998) tried to understand school violence from the student perspective, and Noguera (1995) and Anderson (1998) looked at school structure to investigate schools' vulnerability to violence, and how these problems could be addressed. Other studies addressed the various effects of school violence. Furlong, Chung, Bates, & Morrison (1995) studied how student-victims were affected by school violence, Bettis (1996) discussed the impact of violence on the school community, and Towns (1998) investigated the impact of violence on student performance and behavior. Petersen, Pietrzak, & Speaker (1998) discussed the frequency of violent outbreaks, and Cousins (1997) showed how perceptions and biases about certain subcultures affect understandings of violence. A few articles reviewed existing research in an attempt to make some sense of violence in schools (Price & Everett, 1997; Anderson, 1998; Toby, 1994). The largest body of literature set out to propose solutions for the problems of school violence (Baker, 1998; Hyman

& Perone, 1998; Gold & Chamberlin, 1996; Soriano, Soriano & Jimenez, 1994).

All of these authors alluded to the primary factors that contributed to violence or provided a better understanding of violence in schools. School factors such as architectural factors and demographics (Anderson, 1998; Price & Everett 1997), behavioral demands that were ill suited to the age groups or backgrounds of student populations (Baker, 1998), intrusive abuses and inappropriate discipline strategies (i.e. criminalization of student offenders, actual verbal and physical abuse of students) implemented by school personnel (Hyman & Perone, 1998; Noguera, 1995), and cultural insensitivity and discrimination on the part of school personnel (Soriano, Soriano & Jimenez, 1994) were proposed as correlates of school violence. Other studies suggested that community factors such as perceptions of violence in differing contexts (Cousins, 1997), and the prevalence of violence and loss of a sense of community surrounding schools (Towns, 1998; Bettis 1996) were contributory to the level of violence in the school. Another group of studies showed how student victimization or involvement in school violence could be tied to specific factors: perpetrators suffering from conduct disorders (Gold & Chamberlin, 1996), students' differing perceptions of violence (Fatum & Hoyle, 1996), perpetrators' lack of desire and motivation to succeed in schools (Toby, 1994), certain descriptive characteristics of most common victims (Furlong, Chung, Bates & Morrison, 1995), and the level of moral

reasoning of which children were actually capable (Astor, Meyer, & Behre, 1998). One study written by Peterson, Pietrzak, & Speaker (1998), pointed out that school violence was probably related to all of these factors, but this study also added that media contributed to levels of school violence.

In the majority of the literature reviewed, authors proposed changes that should be made in school environments to relieve the problem of violence. Proposed solutions to the violence problem included changes in three major areas. The first group of suggestions were school facility or faculty changes within the school, like school size and design (Anderson, 1998), curriculum and teacher training (Peterson Pietrzak, & Speaker, 1998), and punishment and discipline policies (Hyman & Perone, 1998). The second group suggested ideological changes in the school culture: the building of a meaningful community in the school (Baker, 1998; Noguera, 1995), increasing student responsibility in the school (Peterson Pietrzak, & Speaker, 1998; Fatum & Hoyle, 1996; Gold & Chamberlin, 1996), and creating a culturally sensitive environment within schools (Soriano, Soriano, & Jimenez, 1994; Cousins, 1997). The final group of suggested changes involved political/social changes outside the school. They included restructuring the family and regulating the media (Peterson, Pietrzak, & Speaker, 1998), and placing a national emphasis on appropriate, nonviolent behavior (Gold & Chamberlin, 1996).

Race/Class Conflict Literature

Throughout my project I investigated literature relating to race and class issues in both schools and society. These studies aided in my analysis and understanding of the hidden meanings of the fight at Heritage. This research area is enormous, and this overview is by no means exhaustive, but it does include some important and current works on race and class in schools and society.

To review issues of race and class in urban society I looked to William Julius Wilson's various works, beginning with his (1978) The Declining Significance of Race. In this book Wilson outlined major periods of American race relations from the end of slavery through the 1970's. He concluded that in recent years, economic class, not race is the more salient determiner of social advancement.

> The recent mobility patterns of blacks lend strong support to the view that economic class is clearly more important than race in predetermining job placement and occupational mobility. In the economic realm, then, the black experience has moved historically from economic racial oppression experienced by virtually all blacks, to economic subordination for the black underclass (p. 152).

Wilson's 1988 book, The Truly Disadvantaged, described social changes affecting the inner city and it's residents. He discussed problems of dislocation and other social ills, which emerged in the urban ghettos. He also analyzed public policy approaches to inner-city problems. In his 1996 study, When Work Disappears, Wilson provided a detailed description of the plight of the African-American population in the inner-cities, as white

flight and deindustrialization moved jobs out of urban areas and increased unemployment, disenfranchisement, and isolation in urban ghettos. Particularly pertinent to my study were his observations of the effect that these forces had on the attitudes and behaviors of inner-city residents.

> In short, regardless of the mode of cultural transmission, ghetto-related behaviors often represent particular cultural adaptations to the systematic blockage of opportunities in the environment of the inner city and the society as a whole. These adaptations are reflected in habits, skills, styles, and attitudes that are shaped over time (Wilson, 1996, p.72).

Wilson's foundational works conferred clarity on the workings of race and class in society and particularly in urban areas.

Next, I looked to three articles that attempted to explain the reasons and sources of prejudicial attitudes in our society. Quillian (1995) studied prejudicial attitudes in Eastern European countries. He framed prejudice as a "function of economic conditions and the size of the subordinate group relative to the dominant group" (p. 586).

Bobo and Hutchings (1996) attempted to extend earlier explanations of racial prejudice by studying perceptions of threat as driven by feelings of racial alienation. They investigated four perspectives, all based on competition theory of racial conflict, which influence racial bias and prejudicial attitudes. They found that perceptions of competition and threat were based on subjects' racial identity and the ways that they understood society. They also tied their findings about sources of prejudicial attitudes to racial unrest; "Accordingly, it is the socially learned

feelings of dislike and aversion, as well as the stereotypes that undergird such feelings, that occasion racial conflict" (p. 954).

Finally, Pride (2000) examined various social policies targeted at addressing racial inequality, particularly in view of white opposition to the implementation of equalizing or desegregating initiatives. He found that while policies aimed at desegregating institutions, schools in particular, were theoretically supported by the majority of Americans, the implementation of these policies was frequently opposed particularly by white Americans on the basis of personal self-interest (p. 221).

Next, I looked to various sources for information on race/class relations specifically in the arena of schooling. Jonathan Kozol (1991) described the hopeless conditions of inner city schools throughout the nation. I found his description of Cincinnati's school system, which is much like Winfield's in its magnet school organization, particularly relevant and telling:

> Among the city's magnet and selective schools are some remarkable institutions... within the public system it is not known if a child from [a less distinctive neighborhood school] has ever been admitted there. Few of these children, in any case, would have the preparation to compete effectively on the exams that they would have to take before they get in. Long before they leave this school, most of their academic options are foreclosed (p. 233).

Ogbu (1987) explained the different ways that minorities perform in school based on the historically significant circumstances that have governed the group's identity and their responses to these forces. He concluded that involuntary minority (i.e. African-American and Native-

American) students have a greater tendency toward school failure based on three factors:

> They have greater difficulty crossing cultural boundaries due to an oppositional cultural frame of reference and oppositional identity; there evolved a folk theory of getting ahead in which schooling competes with and may be adversely affected by other survival strategies; and their distrust of white people and skepticism make it harder for them to accept and follow school rules and standard practices that enhance academic success (p. 334).

Thus, school success or failure is tied to group identity and identification with the goals and structures of schooling.

Welch and Hodges (1997) applied deprivation and difference models of racial relations to explain race relations in terms of African-American minorities' identification as outsiders to the academic mainstream:

> The pervasive societal structures of marginality and difference, then produce the outsider/insider position occupied by some disadvantaged adolescents within schools, even as they contribute to the perceptions of these students as 'others' whose cultural deprivation or cultural difference, depending on the theory places them 'at risk' for failure in schools (p. 28).

In 1997 Pinderhughes looked at racial relationships among inner-city youth in New York. In his depiction of youth culture, he described a unique, challenging and inherently social world; "The adolescent world is a world of acceptance and rejection. Identities are formed in relationship to membership in peer groups" (p. 50). He centered his study around peer groups united by neighborhood and racial identity, and their attitudes in relating within and across individual groups.

> Just as structural factors alone do not result in ethnic and racial conflict and violence, racialized ideologies provide only a piece of

> the puzzle. For ethnic and racial conflict to occur, these ideological messages must be incorporated into a belief system that forms the basis of a group identity (p. 13).

Studies on race and class issues in schools and society provided insight into the power relationships inherent in these issues and how they might have played out in the events of the brawl.

Riot Literature

Because the Heritage event was termed a race riot, I looked to the research on riots for further understanding of how they occur. This body of research could be divided into two primary chronological stages. The first stage occurred in the 1960's, the time when race riots were the most prevalent of any time in U.S. history. At that time three popular models emerged as ways of understanding the occurrence of riots.

> It has been suggested that the disturbances were planned and represent conspiracies; that they were basically random occurrences in which all cities shared an identical probability of experiencing a disorder; or that communities with particular structural characteristics are more prone to racial violence than other cities (Spilerman, 1970, p. 627).

These models served as widely accepted explanations for such events, but little research was done to substantiate, or support their conflicting claims. Spilerman (1970) consolidated arguments explaining racial violence into five main theories, which continue to represent the body of our understanding regarding race riots:

1st. Social Disorganization – proposed that riots occur when many individuals in a community are weakly associated with the social structure.

2nd. Deprivation – proposed that riots occur as uprisings of the extreme lower classes in response to devastating poverty.

3rd. Relative Deprivation (later referred to as Competition) – a spin off of deprivation theory, proposed that riots occur when a large economic differential exists between two closely associated social groups.

4th. Expectational – explained that riots occur when large numbers of individuals see their current state of affairs as very different from their desired state of affairs. This theory differed from others because it proposed that the discontentment resulting in race riots was caused by "psychological adjustment to an improving state of affairs" (Spilerman; 1970, p. 640).

5th. Political Structure – proposed that riots result from unresponsive municipal political structures.

After analyzing and critiquing these five theories, Spilerman disputed all of them and argued that riots could only be predicted based on the sum of measures of the "disorder proneness" of each individual in the community.

> The susceptibility of an individual Negro to participate in a disorder does not depend on the structural characteristics of the community in which he resides. As for the community propensity, it is an aggregate of the individual values – the larger the Negro population, the greater the likelihood of a disorder. Little else appears to matter (p. 645).

Spilerman followed up his work in 1971 with a critique of the widely accepted Deprivation explanation. The deprivation model of rioting explained that racial violence occurred as an African-American revolt against intolerable economic conditions affecting a large and racially specific population. His findings in this study supported other factors that "override the impact of material situation of Negroes as a potential source of unrest." These were more generalized factors, which affected African-American populations throughout the nation (p. 440). Again his argument centered on larger minority populations being more prone to rioting, despite their social and economic situation. Spilerman's studies reflected an inherent racial bias. By predetermining minority or "Negro" blame for racial violence, he subverted all arguments allowing for other contributory factors. Also by arguing that riotous behavior can be predicted by the size of the minority population, he promoted fear of concentrated African-American populations.

Following Spilerman's studies, a lag emerged in both the research on and the occurrence of race riots. This lag continued until the highly publicized LA riots of 1992 awakened renewed concern and interest in race riots and their causes, and opened the door for the second stage of riot investigations.

In 1996 Olzak, Shanahan and McEneaney published a study that tested theories suggesting that rioting was caused by residential

segregation and racial deprivation. They began by providing a new definition of race riots:

> ...race riots share key characteristics of being larger in scale than other forms of collective events, involving major instances of violence, and always involving a claim of racial discrimination, revenge, or injustice' (p. 602).

They found that a significant increase in the likelihood of race riots can result from a relatively small increase in Black/White contact:

> As interracial contact between Whites and Blacks increases just one standard deviation, the rate of race riots increases by sixty percent when compared to cities where Black-White residential contact was average... The pattern of results shown here suggest that the dynamics of residential segregation and it's decline spark race riots (pp. 607-8).

Later that year, Olzak and Shanahan published a follow-up study with the goal of extending Spilerman's analysis of the importance of the size of minority populations, and a theory explaining race riots as the result of economic competition. This theory argued that when populations of differing racial backgrounds came into competition for scarce resources, the economic competition that ensued increased racist attitudes, racial tensions, and racially motivated violence[1]. In this study Olzak and Shanahan included a larger range of riots, spanning a much greater period of time. Again they concluded that increased contact between race groups led to riots, but in this study they utilized Competition theory to explain conflict in specific historically homogenous neighborhoods, or "niches".

---

[1] Wilson (1978) described two explanations of racial antagonism based on economic competition: the Marxist theory, and the split labor-market theory. He concluded that working class whites

> An increase in niche overlap has important consequences for conflict: when groups come to occupy the same niche, the historically more powerful or advantaged group attempts to exclude competitors. When the less powerful resist these attempts, racial conflict and violence ensues... Competition perspectives add that forces that break down racial barriers also encourage competition among formerly segregated groups (p. 937).

Bergesen and Herman (1998) applied similar logic to the specific situation of the 1992 Los Angeles riot and expanded the argument to a multi-ethnic perspective. They concluded that, "defensive response to in-migration is part of the process of ethnic succession, particularly when succession occurs rapidly. Thus, hyper-ethnic succession can lead to collective violence" (p. 52).

Four extensive studies investigated the events of particular race riots: Baldassare's (1994) look at the Los Angeles riots, and Ellsworth's (1982), Jones Parrish's (1998), and Johnson's (1998) descriptions of the 1921 riot in Winfield. All of these studies elaborated on incidents that helped to contextualize the Heritage riot. Baldassare's book proved helpful in that it used theories of racial isolation and overlap, as well as instigation by the Rodney King verdicts, to explain the occurrence of the Los Angeles riots. The 1921 riot was primarily blamed on White racism and the success of the separate African-American population in that city, incorporating some aspects of competition theory. Also, Ellsworth's (1982), and Baldassare's (1994) studies approached riots using the

---

"have been largely responsible for those forms of imposed racial stratification that are designed to eliminate economic competition" (p. 8).

methodology of a qualitative case study, and both lent a contextual framework to the events of the Heritage High brawl.

Media Literature

I looked briefly to literature relating to the understandings of media coverage to make sense of my participants' reactions to the news accounts of the fight. In their reactions to media accounts, participants displayed the reciprocal relationship between media or news representations of the Heritage High brawl, and their individual perceptions, understandings and memories of those same events. This review included only two studies that helped clarify this relationship. First, Tuchman (1978) explained the relationship between news and reality in the following way:

> News simultaneously records and is a product of social reality, because it provides news consumers with a selective abstraction designed to be coherent despite its neglect of some details (189-90).

Bennett (1996) reflected on the dilemma of whether the media shapes reality or the reality shapes the media: "Our reality is mediated in ways that make it hard to decide whether life imitates the media, or the media imitate life (p. 5).

Participants argued heatedly on the validity of the representation of the events presented in media accounts, but all of their understandings were in relationship to these same stories. Most interviews began with statements like; "it wasn't at all like the media said," or "it was just like they showed on the news." A few participants even explained that the

media coverage of the events at Heritage both described and shaped their significance in local memory. This Literature proved most helpful in lending structure to the arguments of my participants regarding the media coverage of the Heritage High brawl, and how it contributed to and shaped their own understandings of the events.

Literature on Memory and the Social Construction of Reality

To examine the vastly differing accounts and understandings that I received about the brawl, I briefly investigated the area of social psychology, particularly memory and reality construction. This vast arena of research offered a great number of relevant studies, but I chose to focus my review on five seminal works and one project that dealt more directly with rioting and violence in the memory.

I began my review with Shutz's (1961) foundational collection of papers, concentrating primarily on *Symbol, Reality and Society*. Schutz laid out a detailed argument that the meanings that people drew from their experience of events was a retroactive interpretation of past events occurring in the present time.

> Meaning... is not a quality inherent in certain experiences emerging within our stream of consciousness, but the result of an interpretation of a past experience looked at from the present NOW with a reflective attitude (p. 210).

Schutz's work clarified how my participants could understand and describe the events at Heritage so differently.

Next I looked to Berger and Luckman's (1966), The Social Construction of Reality. They divided human understanding of the world into three primary parts: externalization – our perception of things and actions happening in our environment; objectivation – the processing of these perceptions that results in our separating the existence of things and actions from the persons with whom they originated; and internalization – bestowing things and actions with meanings thought to have originated with someone else (p. 57-58). Berger and Luckman also showed that the understanding of reality and the memory of events is enhanced and altered through processing and conversing with others:

> Generally speaking, the conversational apparatus maintains reality by "talking through" various elements of experience and allocating them a definite place in the real world (p. 141).

Thus people set down conversational interpretations, not simply their own impressions into their memories of reality.

In Holzner's (1968) work, he defined knowledge as:

> the communicable mapping of some aspect of experience by an observer in terms of a symbolic system and frame of reference deemed relevant and appropriate (p. 14).

The frames of reference mentioned in this definition, Holzner explained, were significant in that they "influence our perception, but even more they influence our interpretation of what we see, and the formulation of plans of action" (14). Holzner provided explanations for the conflicting ways that participants remembered the events of the Heritage High brawl:

> The encompassing power structures of a society, and the scope of regulated authority play a central role in the processes of coordinating epistemic communities with relation to specific situational problems (p. 83-84).

Thus my participants understood the brawl in various ways, which were influenced by their position in relation to the power structures and authorities of both the school and Winfield community.

In Frame Analysis, Goffman (1974) expanded the idea of frames of reference. He explained that people adopted frameworks, or familiar experiential references, and applied these to current happenings. These frameworks generated the sense that they understood what was happening around them, and what will most likely happen next. Breaks in framing occur when a frame is mistakenly applied, or something happens that does not concur with the reference. Such breaks force people to either adjust the chosen frame, or to adjust their memory or understanding of the occurrence. Frames emerged from peoples' perspectives and experiences, which explained how multiple viewers with differing backgrounds might not have the same experience of one particular event.

Coulter (1989) followed later by analyzing the function that beliefs fulfill in the individual's personal construction of reality. "Beliefs, then are certainly invoked in accounting for discrepant perceptual claims of various kinds (p. 42). Also relevant in this study was Coulter's distinction between direct and vicarious experience:

> "Seeing" and "hearing" are quite different modalities in respect of their relationship to 'knowledge and 'belief.' Certainly, it is generally

> true to say that how we may hear various things which are said to us, or read various things which are written for us, is a function of the beliefs we have and the knowledge we possess... It is worth noting here, however, that whereas 'hear (ing) that X' does not presuppose that X is known, 'see (ing) that X' does presuppose X (p. 40-41).

Finally Teski's (1995) investigation into violent outbreaks all over the world in reference to the ways in which memories were recorded and preserved gave insight to my research by defining memory:

> Memory is not recall. Rather, it is a continuous process based on rumination by individuals and groups on the content and meaning of the recent and more distant past (p. 2).

He also addressed the matter of societal memory:

> What a society remembers and how it structures it's memories, however, depend on what individual and social groups see as their own heritage (p. 159).

Finally he explained the way that memories might be prone to change:

> Forgetting or changing memories is done to serve the present; it makes the present meaningful and also supports the present with a past that logically leads to a future that the individual or group now finds acceptable (p. 3).

Teski's book provided a depth of understanding to the differing accounts of the violence at Heritage.

Although there were no studies that directly addressed race riots in schools, these five strains of research provided insight and perspective into the events at Heritage and their causes and meanings. They helped me address and make sense of the specific issues that emerged in my interviews and grounded my research in previous studies.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

To make sense of the events of the Heritage High brawl I employed the methodology of an historical, qualitative case study. This methodology provided for the greatest depth of understanding relative to the situation of the event:

> Anchored in real-life situations, the case study results in a rich and holistic account of a phenomenon. It offers insights and illuminates meanings that expand its readers' experiences. These insights can be construed as tentative hypotheses that help structure future research: hence, case study plays an important role in advancing a field's knowledge base (Merriam, 1998).

In this section I have elaborated on the qualitative method I followed to structure my research and described the theoretical framework from which I approached this study. I centered my study on four core questions, which attempted to examine the deeper meanings of the Heritage High brawl. I have laid out the difficulties raised by my own identity and the biases and perspectives that I brought to my research. In this section I outlined the processes that I used in my research to investigate the brawl and develop my analysis. I also discussed the ways that my study and findings may have proved valuable to my participants.

Qualitative Method

I framed my investigation of the Heritage High brawl as a case study, meaning I considered data relevant only if it imparted insight, meaning or understanding to the event and the context surrounding it.

> A case study design is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and the meaning for those involved. The interest is in process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation (Merriam, 1998, p. 19).

To attain understanding of the multiple layers and meanings involved in the events of the brawl at Heritage High School, I based my study primarily on the accounts of those involved in the school at the time of the fight. Through analysis of the deep and personal accounts and perspectives of the individuals involved, I developed some insight into the events at Heritage and their meaning:

> To understand the nature of constructed realities, qualitative researchers interact and talk with participants about their perceptions. The researchers seek out the variety of perspectives; they do not try to reduce the multiple interpretations to a norm (Glesne, 1999, p. 5).

My data includes topical interviews with different people involved in the brawl. Research participants were identified through networking in the school and research from yearbooks and other records. They were then contacted by phone or in person and asked to participate in an interview. Interviews consisted of semi-structured, taped conversations with individuals who had been a part of the school at the time of the brawl.

Interviews lasted anywhere from thirty minutes to two hours. Fifteen of the interviews were conducted in person, most of them were conducted in offices or classrooms at Heritage High School, but two were conducted at another area high school, one was conducted at a teacher's new place of business, and one was conducted at a local fast-food restaurant.

I interviewed five teachers, five members of the administration, and eight students, all of whom were involved in HHS in 1993. Although I made every effort possible to insure the diversity of participants in my study, I was only able to speak to one African-American teacher and two African-American students, all female. The rest of my participants considered themselves Caucasian.

I have identified several reasons for the lack of diversity of my participants. First, there were fewer African-Americans in the school at the time of the fight than Caucasians, both in the faculty and student populations. Second, networking in the school turned up a large number of white potential subjects, but very few of the people still involved in the school knew or were involved with African-American students. This was evidenced by comments made by teachers, such as: "Gee, I wish I knew more of the black kids, they just weren't in my classes..." (Caucasian, female teacher). This goal of diversity of participants also proved impossible due to a lack of diversity in the faculty at Heritage at the time of the fight. Finally, I found that many African-American participants that I was able to contact were unwilling to talk to me about the fight. They

either minimized or denied their knowledge of the event, neglected to return phone calls, or directly refused to speak with me. A few Caucasian participants had similar reactions when I contacted them, but it was a far more common reaction by the African-American participants. This was evidenced from the fact that while I pursued interviews with over thirty African-American participants, I only attained three; I pursued eighteen interviews with Caucasian participants and attained fifteen.

My data also included analyses of print and video media from various sources, including the Heritage High School newspaper, the Winfield World, and local news broadcasts. Other documents I hoped to attain, such as school reports on the brawl and actions taken by teachers and administrators in an effort to punish and prevent future violence, were inaccessible due to confidentiality and the fact that no official I spoke with knew what might have happened to them. A part of the social stratification at Heritage involved a certain anonymity of African-American, low Socioeconomic Status, lower track students.

Theoretical Framework

In studying the Heritage High brawl I employed the theories and strategies of critical and case study research. I believed that the explanations and understandings of the brawl offered by journalists and school officials following the event were inadequate to truly explain it. Participants disputed much of the reported information, as the reports

were limited to the simplest of understandings and surface descriptions. As I looked at the Heritage High brawl through the memories and perspectives of various people involved, some multiple layers of the event emerged.

> The difference between critical and conventional... topic choice begins with a passion to investigate an injustice (e.g., racism); social control (language, norms, or cultural rules); power; stratification; or allocation of cultural rewards and resources to illustrate how cultural meanings constrain existence (Thomas, 1993, p. 36).

I approached the Heritage High brawl as an event that had the potential to incorporate all of the above issues. Utilizing critical theory in the course of my research resulted in a focus on topics of power and resistance, processes of repression and its sources, the questioning of accepted truths, facts and norms, and the understanding that "revelation is not merely announcing, but is instead a juxtaposition of and dialogue about alternative images" (Thomas, 1993, p. 18). In the situation at Heritage critical analysis provided reflection on four social stratification and power struggles within the school, and I asked questions that reflected these interests.

> Critical theory assumes that schools are sites where power struggles between dominant and subordinate groups take place. A major theme of this work is analysis of how schools are used to help dominant groups maintain their position of power as well as how subordinate groups resist this domination (Bennett demarrius & LeCompte, 1995, p. 29).

Using critical theory and case study methodology, I sought to recognize the forces of dominance at Heritage and why they apparently

broke down in 1993. I looked at the brawl as a possible cultural symbol and the effects it could have had as such. By discovering the meanings of the incident of the brawl, in which the social structure of power seems to have completely broken down, I attempted to see more clearly the ways that these power relationships came together to shape the social hierarchy of the school.

> Critical researchers begin from the premise that all cultural life is in constant tension between control and resistance. The tension is reflected in behavior, interaction rituals, normative systems, and social structure, all of which are visible in the rules, communication systems, and artifacts that constitute a given culture (Thomas, 1993, p. 9).

Research Questions

Sharan Merriam (1998) defined three main components beyond knowledge of the happening itself that one must assimilate to truly grasp any event:

> To understand an event and apply that knowledge to present practice means knowing the context of the event, the assumptions behind it, and perhaps even the event's impact on the institution on participants (p. 35).

Based on these divisions I centered my research on the following questions:

1st. How did various students, teachers and administrators understand the brawl?

2nd. What was the context of the brawl?

3rd. What factors are considered to have contributed to bringing about the brawl?

4th. What changed in the school and in those involved as a result of the brawl?

In addressing the first question I found it difficult to provide one unified account of the event, as the accounts of the fight were as different as the participants themselves. I was unable to find consistency across all accounts, but I did find that inconsistencies differed similarly in participants with various levels of proximity to the actual altercation. I analyzed the stories that I was told, what was emphasized and what was not, to try to get a true understanding of the way that people saw and remembered the event. "Sometimes the gap between the accounts and what the accounts describe is sufficiently interesting that the accounts themselves can become the focus of analysis" (Thomas, 1993, p. 38).

In addressing the question of the context of the brawl, I looked to both participants' comments and documented accounts of the time to attain an understanding of the more general climate surrounding the brawl. This investigation allowed me to relate to the perspectives of participants at the time of the brawl, and how external events might have affected and even promoted situations leading up to the brawl.

The third question, regarding contributory factors, helped me to understand what the people involved saw as the "rational basis" for the brawl in '93. Habermas (1988) expands on this term:

> Historical explanations relate an observable event, not directly to another observable event, but to a context of intentional action. They name not a cause but rather a rational basis for the event. The explanation does not say why, in factual terms, an event occurred, but rather how it was possible for a subject to act this way and not otherwise (p. 33).

I asked how people understood the violence that exploded at Heritage. Was there something about the atmosphere and culture of the school that year that precipitated this event?

Finally, I asked what people understood to have changed as a result of this event, in the school, in the community, in the outlooks and understandings of the people involved. Drawing from these four questions, I attempted to grasp how people conceptualized the brawl, and how this understanding helped them to make sense of the confusion that surrounded the event.

> It is part of our nature as human beings -- whether as individuals, groups, or societies -- that we create "pasts" with which we can live. If the reality of our history poses questions about our lives of today which are too painful or ominous to ponder, then we will mold our past into a less threatening chronicle, or repress it entirely. If anything, our "historic memory" is as malleable as our personal one (Ellsworth, 1982, p. 71).

The concept of the historic memory helped to point out particular issues about the brawl that were the most meaningful or difficult to think about and discuss. Historic memory also helped me to understand the sources and meanings of differences in the accounts and understandings of the events that I encountered.

Throughout my discussion of the incident at Heritage I have employed several different terms for the incident. I did my best to use the terms of the particular speakers whose views I was relating when describing their perspectives. In other sections I used words which I considered to be most appropriate to the particular discussion, frequently 'fight' or 'brawl.' I have carefully considered this wording because of the controversial and inflammatory nature of the event and the importance of naming such an incident. Informal discussions with some of the Heritage faculty led me initially to question what the incident should be called. Many took issue with the term "riot" while others argued in favor of it. Some wanted to refer to the incident as just another fight or violent incident. One of the ideas that I discovered in my research was that those involved did not have a consistent understanding of what the incident was, and therefore what it should have been called.

I asked seven to eight questions in each interview (interview questions listed in appendix 1). I tailored these questions to the specific role that the participant played in the school at the time of the fight. First, I began every interview by asking the participant to describe for me their memories of the day of the fight. Answers to this question always included the participants' perspective of the fight's reputation as a race riot, and a description of each person's own location and experience of the fight. Second, I asked my participants to share with me their thoughts and

memories about what might have led up to the fight. Then I asked about how they had understood the media treatment of the incident at Heritage.

I initially asked participants to describe to me the social groups and their interaction at the school, particularly interaction between people of different races, but this question elicited limited responses so I began asking participants to describe the social groups at the school. By not soliciting responses regarding racial separation at the school, I found that participants more willingly volunteered information about these separations in the context of a separate social group or system. Responses to the second question were much more descriptive.

Next, I asked participants to explain what, if anything, they saw as having changed in the school as a result of the fight. Finally, I asked students to describe how the fight had effected their image and memories of Heritage, and I asked faculty to tell me about how the event may have changed their personal/professional lives, and how the history of the school was affected by the incident.

My interview questions evolved as I spoke to people and discovered which questions encouraged participants to open up and provided for thoughtful discussion on the deeper meanings of the brawl.

Subjectivity

Because Qualitative Research is an inherently personal attempt to understand some process, event, or phenomenon, it is necessary to

elaborate on the background and experiences of the researcher for perspective on the way that data was approached and understood. Van Maanen (1988) described the hermeneutic relationship between the researcher and the study:

> The explicit examination of one's own preconceptions, biases, and motives, moving forward in a dialectical fashion toward understanding by way of continuous dialogue between the interpreter and the interpreted (p. 93).

In this section I have attempted to expound on the relevant events and experiences that led me to this study and contributed to my approach and understandings.

I became aware of issues of societal dominance in a simplistic way when I was very young. I grew up in a middle class family, went to suburban schools, and avoided lower Socioeconomic and perceived higher crime areas of town in the interest of safety and obedience. On Sundays, however, my family attended church in downtown Winfield, where I saw homelessness, poverty, and the incredible difference between my life and the lives of the people in this area. I understood that by our lifestyle, and without necessarily conscious intent, my family and friends avoided people who were different from us by color, class or culture.

In college, I was exposed to students from Africa, South America, and the former Soviet Union, who were concerned, involved and working to change the situations of the underclasses in their own countries. I began to look for ways to get involved in U.S. urban centers. I volunteered for

Young Life, an outreach organization, and eventually had an opportunity to work with students in Seattle high schools. I then returned to school myself to become qualified to teach high school in urban settings, and am completing my Master of Science degree in Curriculum and Instruction.

My undergraduate training was in the biological and physical sciences, but since entering graduate school I have found a strong affiliation with the study of sociology, particularly post-positivism. My natural sciences background still affects me, however, in my approach to research and its questions, and the way that I go about finding answers. In choosing to study the brawl, for example, I approached systems involving race, class and gender by examining an event where this structure failed, as a biologist might learn about an organ system or metabolic process.

I found that in this study the thing about me that proved the most pivotal was that I was a White person; therefore, I approached problems with a White perspective, and was seen by potential participants as a white person with all of the assumptions that come with that identity. This identity hindered my research, particularly in contacting participants and obtaining interviews. Because issues of race were central in the topic of this study, my whiteness became even more pronounced. As I pointed out earlier, I only attained interviews from about ten percent of the African-American participants that I contacted. One story in particular pointed to the guardedness about the Heritage High brawl that I encountered in my contact with potential African-American participants:

> When I went in to schedule an interview with Ms. Grayson, she stated that the event "was a race riot, what else do you call it when black people are fighting white people?" She also pointed out that her car had been damaged, the top smashed in by a student jumping on it during the riot. When I went to her classroom at the appointed time to conduct the interview, she acted very short and guarded, and shouted across the room; "no, no, no I don't wanna do it, I just, I don't wanna do it. Get out, go away" (Notes, April 21, 2000).

Analysis and Rigor

Like Wolcott (1990), I adopted strategies for my research which sought to "'strengthen the validity' of my work" (p. 121). My study incorporated triangulation of data sources through interviewing administrators, teachers and a variety of students of the time. By comparing interview data to media coverage I attempted to hear all sides of the story of the brawl. I built my analysis throughout my research process, allowing my explanation to evolve with my understanding of the event. My analysis went much the way that Merriam (1998) described:

> The process of data collection and analysis is recursive and dynamic. But this is not to say that the analysis is finished when all the data have been collected. Quite the opposite. Analysis becomes more intensive as the study progresses, and once all the data are in (p. 155).

As I completed interviews and transcribed them, I printed two copies of each transcript. The first, I placed in a notebook so that I could read through my data in its entirety and quickly reference the exact words of individuals. The second copy I coded and cut into chunks of conversation on the same topic, and pasted these chunks to five by seven cards. The

cards were then coded, allowing me to sort and shuffle the data in various ways to establish themes for my analysis. I began with about thirty codes that I compiled into eight related groups, and further compiled into four primary categories. These four categories were sorted and resorted, but they resemble the main sections of the analysis division of the findings section.

Reciprocity

> By participating in critical research, new ways of thinking should emerge, and these new insights are valuable to the participant as well as the researcher. As a tool, new ways of thinking become implements by which we can act upon our world instead of being acted upon" (Thomas, 1993, p. 61).

In studying the Heritage High brawl, I attempted to gain insight into the meanings, significance, and contributing factors involved in peoples' memories of this event. I hoped that as my research participants evaluated, considered and discussed these issues with me, they found different and deeper understandings of the event within themselves. My findings pointed out that memories and understandings of any event were influenced and solidified through processes of conversation. Some participants with whom I spoke commented that the interview process itself required them to reconsider some of their assumptions. This new awareness, while inherently valuable to participants, may also have been useful to them in their personal interactions with others, and their professional relations, particularly for those who were educators. Thomas

(1993) discussed three possible changes that could result from interview discussions:

> First, and most modest, changes in cognition resulting from new ways of thinking are an important step toward recognizing alternatives. Second, we should never underestimate the power of interaction with others as a form of action, because new ways of thinking can be contagious... Those who teach have the opportunity to integrate critical thinking into their curriculum – not to impose a "correct" line of thinking, but to help students examine the conditions of their existence from their own perspective, whatever it might be. Finally, critical thinking can contribute to community organizing, legislative reform, or policy formation (p. 32).

To contribute to further advances in understanding of the incident at Heritage, I made my findings available to interested research participants. In this way they were exposed to understandings of people with different perspectives from their own, while each individual's anonymity was protected by the use of pseudonyms. They also had the opportunity to reflect on what we discussed and further elaborate on their own assertions in later interviews.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

In this chapter I present several different facets of my analysis of the data. First, I situate the Heritage High brawl in national, local, political, economic and social contexts. Second, although accounts of the brawl varied widely, I identify several first-hand observations of the fight that were the most consistent. I combine these to create a "realist tale", a term used to describe the researcher's understanding of the actual events under review. Lather (1992) described the realist tale:

> The realist tale describes the research design and process, which amassed a pool of qualitative and quantitative data. It presents a small portion of first level analysis of data... and it deconstructs that data analysis in terms of the construction of textual authority via use of quotes, self-reflexivity, and researcher engagement (p. 95).

Finally, my data analysis is divided into four main sections. The first analyzes the words that people preferred to use to describe the brawl and the meanings that these terms intimated. Second, I look at the relationship between participants' understandings and the media account of the event. Third, I examine the factors that participants believed to have caused and contributed to the brawl, and the implications of these factors. Finally, I discuss how the accounts that I was told differed, and I

explored how these differing understandings of the same event came to be, and what they indicated about the participants who told them.

Context

To make sense of the violent incident of the Heritage High brawl, the historical, political, and social contexts in which it was situated must first be understood.

Historical Context: The Winfield Race Riot of 1921

The city of Winfield had a turbulent history in the arena of racial relations. The now famous 1921 Winfield race riot, which originated in the St. Claire district, gave insight into both the volatile race relations in the city and some structural conditions, which may have contributed to the Heritage High brawl. The St. Claire riot originated in North Winfield and began, like the Heritage High brawl, with a much-debated interaction between a male and a female of different ethnicity. It then exploded into the final and most violent event in a series of violent racial altercations that occurred between 1919 and 1921.

The 1921 riot in Winfield, has rarely been mentioned in Winfield schools or local society. In an interview on Nightline, February 7, 2000, some victims of the riot discussed the lack of acknowledgement of the massacre in Winfield society:

> 1st Man -- The worst civil disturbance since the Civil War was erased from history, as if it didn't happen.

> Chris Bury --(VO) But it did happen. In Winfield, [Middle US], in 1921, when a white mob attacked a black neighborhood. George Douglas Monroe, Survivor -- Winfield's little, dirtiest secret ("Dirty Little Secret, 2000).

Scott Ellsworth, an important historian on the subject of the St. Claire Riot, explained the apparent cover-up this way:

> If the story has been suppressed, one reason would have to do with the very history of the city itself. Socially and politically prominent white Winfield [residents] have always been especially sensitive about the city's image... Today, as Winfield's claim to being the "Oil Capitol of the World" grows pretentious, some neo-boosters still bill Winfield as "America's Most Beautiful City," an appellation given by Reader's Digest in the 1950's. The race riot is, for some, a blot on the city's history and something not to be discussed, much less proclaimed (Ellsworth, 1982, p. 106).

The anonymity of the St. Claire riot dissipated recently as the issue of compensation for damages incurred in 1921 came before the State Legislature and attracted a great deal of media attention. The much-publicized debate over the topic of reparations was covered on Nightline in February 2000:

> What moral obligation if any do today's taxpayers have to compensate the victims of an earlier generation? For more than two years, a state commission... has been wrestling with that dilemma as it investigated an appalling act of racial violence. ("Dirty Little Secret", 2000)

The St. Claire Riot has been partially attributed to the formal separation of Winfield along racial lines in the 1920's.

> While black [residents] were 'welcomed' to work at common labor, domestic, and service jobs in any part of the city, they were 'not welcome' to patronize white businesses south of the tracks and in other sections of the city... Thus in the early years of the 20th century, Winfield became not one city, but two. Confined by law and by white racism, black Winfield was a separate city, serving the

> needs of the black community. And as Winfield boomed, black Winfield did too (Ellsworth, 1982, p. 13).

The significance of the St. Claire riot was evident; the people of Black Winfield, also known as "Little Africa" and "Black" or "Negro Wall Street" (Ellsworth, 1982), lost unbelievable sums in money and property. "Twenty-three churches and more than a thousand homes burned, in what had been one of the most prosperous black communities in America" (Wolf, 2000). This loss of what was reputably the most independent and influential black community existing at that time and arguably since, may have been the most disastrous of all.

Following the riot, many African-American citizens fled the city to surrounding smaller towns. "The dislocation of black Winfield that the riot caused was immense" (Ellsworth, 1982, 89). Others attempted to rebuild the St. Claire area, and to reestablish black Winfield. Over the following decades, African-Americans continued to be concentrated in the Northern area of the city, as deindustrialization and "white flight" caused the mostly Caucasian, middle and working classes to move south, out of the urban center, and further away from the Frisco tracks that have historically divided Winfield into two separate cities (Jones-Parrish, 1998, p. 19).

Phenomena similar to the racial separation in Winfield have been described in many studies of urban centers. Wells & Crain (1997) discussed the emergence of a "color line" in St. Louis: "Although the color

line was established at a time when blatant discrimination was ignored, if not condoned, the structure has remained." (p. 8).

The National Context: Rodney King

The Heritage High brawl was situated in the context of a year of chaos and hostile racial confrontations on both the national and local levels. Almost a year before, in April of '92, the initial verdicts of the Rodney King trials were released, and a historical and much publicized riot in South Central Los Angeles ensued. "Those verdicts and long-simmering resentment in the black community over discrimination and police brutality provided fertile ground for the disorder. The bloody riot began within hours of the verdict" (McNamara, J., 1993, A-11). Although this "three-day civil disturbance" lasted for only a short time, the resulting, exhaustive media reports and analyses of the event infused public awareness for much longer (Baldassare, 1994, p. 20). Much of the notoriety of the Los Angeles disturbance was attributed to the vast media coverage of the event:

> The [Los Angeles] rebellion was conveyed to the rest of the nation and the world with unparalleled speed and often in shockingly graphic detail. As a consequence of the highly sophisticated and dense media market in Los Angeles, and of the globalization of news events made possible by the Cable News Network (CNN), literally hundreds of millions of people could share the same events virtually as they unfolded on the streets of Los Angeles (Baldassare, 1994, p. 104).

When the Heritage High brawl occurred, the public had recently received the verdicts on the appeals of the Rodney King cases in Federal court. The local newspaper covered the news of the verdicts:

> A federal jury convicted two police officers Saturday of violating the civil rights of black motorist Rodney King in his videotaped beating, bringing peace to a city where an earlier trial led to the nation's worst rioting in decades ("2 Convicted," 1993).

The much anticipated appeal verdicts aroused great concern over the possibility of further rioting in cities across the country. Winfield officials were particularly anxious due to concurrent investigations into allegations of police brutality aimed at African-American teens in the area. "Winfield City leaders called for calm, understanding and healing following Saturday's verdict in the Rodney King beating trial..." (Brown & Kurt, 1993, A-17).

Another chaotic, national tragedy climaxed the day of the brawl at Heritage. April 20th marked the tragic end of the "51 day standoff" in the compound of "doomsday cult leader David Koresh" (Cult Standoff Ends, 1993, p. A-1, A-3). The violent end to the long standoff in Waco, Texas shocked the nation and stunned nearby Winfield. While seemingly unrelated to my study, several participants pointed out that the events happened within a week of one another.

Local Context: Police Brutality

A local police brutality investigation at the time of the Heritage High brawl was instigated by an African-American police officer, who approached

the media with allegations of mistreatment of black teens by some area officers in February of 1993. His actions initially resulted in his temporary suspension, but this sentence was later reduced to a written reprimand. Local leaders of the Black community called for a grand jury investigation into the allegations, and the Mayor made a statement regarding her belief about the extent of the problems in the department:

> ... she doesn't believe brutality is widespread, but said "there is the perception... that certain members of the community are treated without respect and dignity." She also said she's concerned the situation could escalate into confrontations with police (Black Leaders Allege Brutality, 1993, p. A-1).

District Chaos

The year surrounding the Heritage High brawl was a chaotic one for the City of Winfield and its public school district as well. Two developments in Winfield at the time, an outbreak of violence in the area, especially involving local teen-agers, and disorder in the hierarchy of the school district, were a part of the context in which the brawl occurred. In one extreme example of the escalation in local violence later that year, "two Heritage High School students were shot Saturday night in connection with a feud with Parvney High School students" (Teens' Feud Turns Violent, 1993). Heightened gang activity also developed during the time of the riot culminating with a high profile murder case.

> Police allege... members of the Red Mob Gangsters ambushed members of the 107 Hoover Crips at a service station... Red Mob Gangsters were apparently upset over a derogatory song sung by the Crips at a dance hall police said (Slaying Suspect Arrested, 1993).

An editorial in the Winfield World summarized widely held impressions of growing violence in Winfield.

> No one knows how to change a climate for violence in which teenagers, bickering over a song playing on a stereo go for their guns. No one knows how to change a climate in which the casual response to the smallest slight is to pop off random gunshots into a car or crowd. One thing is for certain: there is a growing culture of violence right here in Winfield... Most of these violent, gang related crimes are committed by blacks against black victims. And the violence won't end until the community demands that it end. The solution may lie, as social scientists theorize, in improving the lot and prospects of young blacks (Culture of Violence, 1993).

During this time a chaotic situation was found in the Winfield Public School system and included a long search for a new superintendent, the dismissal of a School Board member under accusations of racism, and an investigation into inequitable practices in the suspension of African-American students. Over the course of the 1992-1993 school year the Winfield Public School Board was governed by an interim superintendent, while a person to fill that position permanently was sought. The position was considered a difficult hire due to a great deal of controversy, political pressure, and bureaucracy in the district.

> School patrons worrying that the Winfield school board might hire a superintendent with a controversial background need not worry. Given the state of the Winfield district, controversy is guaranteed ("A Controversial Job," 1993).

An opinion expressed by Winfield World Associate Editor, Ken Neal, described the extent of disruption in the district:

> In the past few years, Winfield Public Schools – the largest district in the state – has been paralyzed by miserable politicking and petty infighting on the board of education, friction between the teaching

> force and administrators, and bureaucrats in the administration shamelessly fighting for advantage. Worse yet, race has become the rallying point in many of the board's actions. A white board member was forced off the board by claims of racism by a few black administrators and board members, and criticism of administrative operations is branded as racism (Neal, 1993).

Early in the Spring semester of 1993 an investigation was launched by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights into the suspension habits of Winfield area schools. This investigation targeted two high schools and a handful of middle and elementary schools, representative of both the Northern, prominently black, community and the Southern, prominently white community. Heritage served as the South-side high school in this investigation:

> Well those people came up here and asked for information and they had picked out three or four schools to look at. Heritage High School was one of those, and I had to give the department of civil rights every single referral that we had done that year. I mean that's hundreds, because if you take a school the size that that was, 15-16 hundred kids and if you deal with say twenty-five or thirty kids a day, which is not unusual, for everything from tardys to what have you, then that accumulates in a hurry (White, male Vice Principal).

The investigation showed that discrepancies in suspension practices in the schools significantly favored whites over blacks.

> Black students received 18 percent more suspension time out of school for the same offense as a white counterpart... In the same period at the south Winfield schools, black students were suspended an average of six days, compared with whites, who were suspended an average of 4.4 days. Blacks received 16 percent more suspension time for the same offense as a white at the south Winfield schools, the agency found (Hoberock, 1993).

The investigation posed a problem at Heritage because officials were strongly discouraged from suspending African-American students. The

tumultuous period in which the Heritage fracas took place was reflected in the climate and events at the school. District-wide factors, the search for a new superintendent, and the investigation into racist discipline practices, were involved in the occurrence of the Heritage High brawl, and how it was handled by school personnel.

The Heritage High School Context

Heritage High School itself experienced some upheaval surrounding the events of the L.A. riot. One particularly troubling aspect of the school culture surrounding the brawl was evidence of racial attitudes in the Heritage population. In Lois Weis's (1990) study of a working-class high school she concluded, "Racial tension does exist within the school, and it reflects tension within the community and the society as a whole." (p. 48). This conclusion proved very similar to Principal Connery's comment that "we do have racial tensions at this school, I'm not gonna sugar coat it" (Hoberock, 1993, p. A4).

Heritage High School was similar to the school featured in Weis's study. It was situated in a Working/Middle-class neighborhood. At the time of the brawl, Heritage accommodated approximately 1,400 students, 18% of whom were African-American according to the Winfield World (Swindell, 1993, p. A1, A3). Caucasian Heritage High School Principal, Mr. Connery, described the minority population as having gone from "from 4% minority to close to 40% minority there in those four years [1989-1993]." The changes in the school population were more modest than he

suggested, but also more significant than the World reported. The State Department of Education records showed the African-American population at Heritage in 1989 as 18.2%, and the total minority population as 23.6%. In 1993 these numbers had increased to 23% black and 32% minority.

Although the days and weeks leading up to the Heritage High brawl were laden with racial conflict and violent undertones, Connery, the Caucasian Principal, initially reported, "It was hard to tell if the fight was started by racial tensions or 'students who flat don't like each other'" (Swindell & Gilroy, 1993, p. A1, A3). However, other newsworthy items indicated that racial tension was very present in the school.

Several incidents at Heritage made headlines in the weeks before the brawl. On March 2, 1993, the following headline appeared in the Winfield World describing other events at Heritage similar to the one in question, "Student Brawls Erupt at Heritage." Excerpts from the article follow:

> At least 35 students were involved in three brawls at Heritage High School on Monday [March 1]. In a separate incident, two students were detained after one of them pointed a plastic gun at plain-clothed FBI agents.
> Maj. Bob Chance said the fights were a result of a longstanding feud between two students...
> [a female] freshman, said the three fights took place at the cafeteria, inside the gymnasium and outside the gym. They occurred at different times during the afternoon, she said...
> Chance said the number of students involved ranged from five to 60. "It depends on who you asked," he said (Swindell, B., 1993, A-6)

Coach Duval (Caucasian male) recalled these foregoing fights:

> It was brewing probably for several months; they [two groups of athletes] had gotten in a fight at lunchtime in the smaller gymnasium. And if I remember correctly some of the freshmen

> football players got in a fight with the basketball players and they just swept it under the rug. So things had been brewing and brewing.

On March 30 and 31, Heritage again made World headlines regarding a former "LA gang member," who spoke to "about 200 students Monday at Heritage High School" (Kovar, 1993, Z-2). Again on April 10, Heritage's name appeared in a very short article titled "Racist Graffiti Found at Heritage High." The entire contents of this article are included:

> Heritage High School students arrived at school Friday morning and found the letters "KKK" spray-painted on a doorway in white, 2-foot-tall letters, Principal Connery said. Police were called, and the district removed the letters within a couple of hours, Connery said. He said some black students were upset over the incident, but there were no fights or suspensions (Racist Graffiti Found, 1993, D16).

Almost one week later, the title; "3 Arrested in Heritage Ruckus," appeared over another very small article which discussed the arrest of three young African-American men, who were not Heritage students, for attacking Principal Connery, Thursday, April 15 on school grounds. Five days later, on Tuesday, April 20th the Heritage High brawl erupted. Newspapers estimated that between fifty and three hundred and fifty people were in the parking lot during the fighting, but school officials reported that only between nine and fifteen actually participated in the fighting.

After the brawl Connery stated that "We do have racial tensions at this school... Children are saying horrible things to one another. I'm not going to have that in this school. We'll be treating racial slurs as physical abuse" (Hoberock, 1993, p. A4). A local representative of the NAACP was

reported to have been in contact with the Winfield superintendent about his concern over the racial situation at Heritage a week before the brawl broke out. He argued that "the fight could have been avoided" (Swindell & Gilroy, 1993, p. A1, A3). Principal Connery (Caucasian) had arranged for several prominent men in the school and community to intervene and "help troubled youth at the school," with counseling sessions beginning in early April, in an effort to quell racial tensions and prevent altercation (Swindell & Gilroy, 1993, p. A1, A3). Ms. Pope, African-American English teacher, remembered her role in organizing this mentoring system:

> That's when we started having the mentoring program. I was in charge of that. We would get blacks from the community, from the North Winfield, and then they would come and talk to different groups. Because the blacks really had no role models on the South side so we would get them from the North side. We would get ministers, several ministers came, former educators, business people, they would take the students out to eat...

The Heritage High brawl accompanied two other episodes of violence in Winfield area schools. On Wednesday, April twenty-forth, three days before the fighting erupted, two pop bottle explosions occurred at Bell, the public high school nearest to Heritage. Whitmore Hall, a private school in extreme south Winfield, canceled classes the Wednesday following the Heritage incident due to a bomb threat received on Tuesday (Hoberock, 1993, p. A15).

The above discussion provides contextual information in which to situate the Heritage High brawl. Its purpose is to set the stage for the following realist tale, or descriptive account of the event.

Realist Tale

The following realist tale recounts the Heritage High brawl in the most reliable form from all of the data that I collected. Van Maanen (1988) described common characteristics of realist tales:

> "extensive, closely edited quotations characterize realist tales, conveying to readers that the views put forward are not those of the fieldworker but are rather authentic and representative remarks transcribed straight from the horse's mouth" (p. 49).

This narrative reflects the perspectives of the various speakers, who were describing their own experiences of the brawl. The compilation follows the progression of events from the initial argument that instigated the violent outbreak through the resolution of the fighting.

Ben Taylor, a Caucasian student provided the most comprehensive first-hand account about the altercation that provoked the brawl. He painted a highly descriptive picture of the argument that triggered the fighting.

> He [Nathan Ford] was asleep... in art class... and James Benson said "shut up ya black bitch" er something like that. And this black girl, came up and said, 'who called me a black bitch' and Ben- Benson pointed to [Nathan] Ford and said 'he did' and Ford is asleep, with his head on the desk. And she like kinda tapped him and said 'hey you blah blah blah, did you call me a black bitch?' And Ford's response was something along the lines of you know 'f__ you, you old {pause} hag, leave me alone, I was sleeping didn't say a damn thing to you.' He said more of the words, because... he'd really made her mad... She ended up slapping him. Well so he jumped up and Ford threw her in a headlock and, he threw her into, oh one of those air conditioning units by the window in the art class... I think the art class teacher and somebody else broke it up and they went to lunch. So what happened there was this huge black guy that was in in-house at the time... And he was dating this girl that Nate had got into it

with. So, when Ford went to lunch, she went and told the boyfriend in in-house... And he tells everybody that's in there too... So what happens, when I got back early from lunch, that guy's out there and he's throwin' a fit. And Ford gets back and I go up and warn Nate, I said 'man Nate you know this guy, that's his girlfriend that you you know put into the thang at lunch and he's after you...
And then they're fighting and all the kids string out..., everybody's getting back from lunch and all the in-house kids come out. And all of us are there and we just all start fighting, you know everybody was...

Shawna Reynolds, an African-American female picked up the story in the parking lot, where upon returning from lunch she witnessed a group of African-American males confronting the male agitator;

I had driven out to lunch with my friends... I pulled up in the parking lot and we were just talking for a little bit before we got ready to go back inside... So usually when people came back from lunch it usually was a lot of white people that came back. So when we pulled in I was like what are all these black people doing outside? {laughs} I was like; 'look at them all, they didn't go out to lunch today.'

But then, but then um this guy, um I think his name was Nate... He came pullin up and he went on the aisle that I was on and he parked about like four cars down from me. All the sudden I looked up in the rearview mirror and here come all these black guys that are outside... And so and he [Nate] gets out of his car and I look and the next thing I see is them hit him, and I see him fall to the ground... So it was like all these people were on him, just hittin him and hittin him and hittin him. Nobody can stop them. So then Coach Tinsley comes out with a baseball bat {laughs} and breaks them up. I mean he didn't hit any of them but I guess he was using that to protect himself or whatever... And they're walkin back towards the building... They had worked construction on it so it was like um cindar blocks and pipes and stuff layin right there. So when they got up there... I don't know who grabbed what, but next thing I know everyone just started fightin all over again. And so people were pickin up cinder blocks, pickin up pipes and hittin-... So some of the innocent people like our president of the student body, he had gotten hurt, he had to get sent to the hospital. And a lot of cars got messed up that were parked right there in front cause of people throwin stuff. People were just all runnin out from the school, everyone was comin out. And at first I was around there too lookin,

> but then when everyone started backin up, that's when I was like, 'OK, I need to go ahead and go to class.'

The Caucasian president of the Student Council mentioned in Shannon's account, Bryan Thomas, went to the emergency room following the brawl for treatment of a minor concussion. His actions and injuries were somewhat symbolic for people connected with the brawl; many saw him as a hero, some as an innocent victim, and others as a major contributor to the brawl. Bryan's description of his experiences follows;

> I was coming back from lunch and parked my car and kind of saw a group of people over by the school... in the pool entrance. And I got out and a bunch of folks yelled, 'hey there's a fire' or something like that. And I ran over there and there was a group of folks and... A whole lot of people were fighting, and just swinging and punchin each other... One of the freshmen guys, got hit and fell on the ground, and I kinda picked him and was helping him out of the main pack, because more and more people began fighting then. At that point there was a pole that one of the guys picked up and hit another kid and knocked him out and I was helpin him out. When I was helpin him out and reached down to pick him and drag him out I got hit with the pole. And I got punched and I fell down. When I was down I was just covering my head, just thinking, 'stay conscious, stay conscious.' And while I was covering my head some other folks I think started fightin the people who were hitting me. And allowed me to get up, and I kinda stumbled around, and then I passed out dead, about ten seconds, just kinda went out cold.

Bryan's involvement was blamed by some participants for the escalation of the riot, because he was well liked and when he went down, students were reported to have joined the fighting to protect him. Math teacher, Ms. Thurman (Caucasian) described her understanding of Bryan's role in the escalation of the brawl; "A lot of kids got involved because, they were beatin' on Bryan now."

Mr. Duval, a Caucasian Driver's Ed. teacher and coach who described the incident from the perspective of a staff member, remembers the chaos of the day of the brawl, and how a baseball bat became a part of the record of the events;

> And he [another coach] was running up the foyer, his shirt tail was out and his hair was messed up and he yelled, 'call the fucking cops, it's a riot.' And I had no idea what was going on or anything... So anyway I went in and called 911 and uh to my knowledge I might have been the first one to do that... And after that I headed to the parking lot and as I went out the door Mr. Whidbey had a kid in a headlock, and they were goin around in circles... This kid was a gang banger and he was wantin to get out there and get in the middle of it. So I never had actually made it out to the main melee but I helped him subdue this kid and we took him in the office... The kid was just, you know he was I don't know if incoherent is the right word, he was just in a rage... But they [students] were runnin through the halls, and I mean packs of 'em like maybe ten or twelve. Most the teachers and the principles were you know goin in their rooms and locking the doors and the only ones out there was the coaches and and a few of the principles and math teachers. When I finally did get out there it was incredible... They had the horse police out there. They were probably hundreds of kids out runnin around but there were probably only about 15-25 actually you know fightin and stuff...

An administrator, Mr. Whidbey (Caucasian Vice Principal) picked up the story outside and discussed some specific memories and the resolution of the fight.

> It ended up being a situation that, we weren't aware of cause all this happened in a matter of minutes. And the next thing we know they're running through the halls, especially the black kids, there's a group of probably eight or nine of those kids running through the halls, and they meet out on the parking lot. They start getting into it, well by this time we are alerted that this is happening, of course still there's all of these kids coming in from lunch and they're seeing these kinds of things. And in-house room... They could see through there, and some of those [in-house] kids saw that and they just ran out... We had in total, once we got through with everybody, of

> course there were probably a hundred kids out there, maybe a hundred and fifty. But they were mostly all watching. And once we got through, there were some fights and we were out there trying to handle some of 'em. One of them threw a brick, a black youngster threw a brick, another black youngster picked up a piece of PCV pipe and was swinging it, hit one of our custodians. We were trying to corral these kids, I know I got one of 'em, one of the most vocal of the group, and he's a young man that's now deceased that was shot in the drive by. But I got him and took him and left him with some coaches, told 'em, to keep him I'm goin out back out to get some others. And of course he got away, as I was trying to get another one I saw him run by with a big coach right behind him, that got him. And we had the types of fights that were one kid, he may swing at one or two kids and then he'd run over and swing at another one or what have you. But to be a spectator and see the way this was going on, it it looked a lot worse than it actually was.

Tuchman (1978) pointed out that general perceptions of race riots may have been effected by the selective way that they have been covered by news media:

> The news reports also shape notions of the general characteristics of *all* riots... News reports commonly ignore such phases [action lulls], collapsing the course of riots into continuous intensive activity. Through their reports of specific riots, news reports help to shape the public definition of what a riot is, and that public definition exists without reference to the processes that shaped the riot-as-occurrence into riots-as-news-events (p. 191).

The influence of the media on the general definition of race riots likely effected the stories and interpretations related by my participants.

Analysis

This segment is divided into four sections and details the final set of products of my data analysis. In the first section I describe the different terms that my participants preferred to describe the Heritage High brawl.

fight, which, because of the open lunch system, attracted a large audience of students who did not participate in the violence.

> There were, as I remember, between seven and eleven kids that were actually involved, fighting... There were approximately three hundred kids out in the parking lot, but those for the most part were standing around watching in curiosity. There was a report of a big fight uh and the more kids showed up the more numbers were reported that there was in the fight (Mr. Reed, Caucasian male teacher).

Participants who held this opinion argued fervently that the fighting was misrepresented in the media and surrounding community, and that the misportrayal had effected the school's identity and reputation.

Of the remaining eleven participants, two teachers, three administrators, and three students described the event as a "riot." Most of these had clear parameters that they used to define the Heritage incident as a "riot." Shannon Richards based her perceptions on the apparent motivation for the fighting, and the number of students that she considered to have been involved.

> *Jill Did you consider it to be a riot?*
> Shannon Yeah, because it was between black and whites as usual and... I don't see why something [that] involved two people could end up so big like that, involving other students that [were] innocent (Shannon Richards, African American, female student).

Secretaries, Ms. Curry and Ms. Simmes, based their analysis of the event as a "riot" more on the effort that went into controlling it:

> Ms. Curry It was uncontrollable, I mean they had to get all the help they could out there, it escalated fast.
> Ms. Simmes Our people couldn't contain it.

However they defined the exact limits of a riot, these participants were confident that the event at Heritage fit into the category of riot.

The remaining four participants struggled to characterize the event as either a fight or a riot. They described how it could be seen in different ways depending of the perspective of the individual, and they employed the main arguments on participants in other groups.

> Well, you might call it a riot because nobody could control anything. None of the teachers could, and it was kinda like chaos. A lot of [teachers] locked themselves in their rooms and were scared. It was mainly, I think, just a big fight (Ben Taylor, Caucasian, male student).

Another student discussed her thinking on the definition of the event:

> You can view it as any other fight, but you could view it as a race riot, cause it kinda looked like it was blacks against whites. When it really was against that one particular person (Shawna Reynolds, African American, female student).

Participants in this group transposed the words riot and fight when referring to the event in conversation. They seemed to consider the event to have been more significant than a "fight," but it did not quite fit their definition of "riot," or if it did, they could not reconcile the reality of a riot with their image of Heritage High.

The term "brawl," while widely used by the media to describe the events at Heritage, was never used by participants in my study. Two administrators took issue with my use of this term in interview consent forms. One argued, "I wouldn't have called it a brawl. [A brawl] to me is

something that's just totally uncontrolled and what have you. We got that thing under control pretty quick" (Mr. Whidbey, Caucasian male vice principal). Another found the term "brawl" contentious on the basis that, although she termed the event a race riot, participants would either consider "brawl" an over or an understatement of the reality of the event.

Whether my participants considered the events at Heritage High a "riot" or not, they all based this definition on their idea of some basic factors that constitute "riots", or in comparison to a familiar "riot" image. One of my participants, Mr. Bryant, a Caucasian Foreign Language and Social Studies Teacher, characterized what he would expect a riot to be comprised of:

> And that goes back to the whole thing again, a riot? And I know I have to set aside the whole idea, well riot, you know they'll be extensive damage to the physical property or many people injured, or or whatever. No, that didn't really happen.

Another participant, African-American English teacher, Ms. Bishop, defined the Heritage fight in light of her own definition of riots; "It was racial. Licks were exchanged. A lot of violence went on. So, it was a riot." These definitions clearly differed in their qualifying factors for a riot and their classifications of the Heritage event.

Several examples or comparisons were brought up in my interviews as more apt examples of riots, or as a basis of comparison to qualify the Heritage event. These were highly publicized events, commonly understood to be "riots", or of riot proportions. First, and most frequently,

the Rodney King or LA riots were mentioned. Because of the historical context of the fight, this comparison seemed likely. One participant enumerated the conditions surrounding the LA riots, and therefore requisite for the Heritage event to be considered a "riot":

> I think it's primarily the perception of "Riot". You know if you, if you go back in history or like Los Angeles riots or riots from the sixties or something like that you know you see this footage and it's just like all this carnage. No it didn't happen that way, so... (Mike Bryant, Caucasian male Foreign Language teacher)

Other riots that were referenced in my research were European football games and other incidents in Winfield public schools within the few years surrounding the Heritage event. One participant even used the Oklahoma City bombing and the recent barrage of school shootings to argue for the relative insignificance of the Heritage fight.

Using the example of the news coverage of a riot, Tuchman (1978), discussed how media could shape people's understanding of the nature of riots, as well as of one event in particular:

> Take the case of a riot. In disseminating such particulars as the number of participants, the number wounded or killed, the amount of property damaged, and the sequence of activities (that is, a man was arrested and then a mob of citizens congregated at the police station) news reports transform *a* riot (as an amorphous happening) into *the* riot (this particular as a public event and public concern) (p. 191).

My participants assigned language to the event at Heritage in relation to their position on the accuracy of the way that it was reported in the media. They either agreed with the media's interpretation that the event was of a large scale, and significant enough to be considered a riot, or they took

exception to media accounts and thought that this description was not an accurate representation of the event based on other, familiar occurrences that were categorized as riots. In this way they concluded that the event was either a riot, as it was portrayed, or that it was a fight that was blown out of proportion.

The Media and School Reputation

The media played a complex role in the brawl at Heritage. It simultaneously gave participants a standard of comparison to help them to frame and communicate their own understandings of the fight at Heritage, and it played another, more reciprocal role in the way the fight, and all such happenings are understood and processed. Research has shown that the way that we understand and perceive our world and experiences is affected by the wider frame of reference to the whole of society as experienced through the media.

> As an important way of experiencing the world we live in, the news is not isolated from society and culture. To the contrary, it is a leading indicator of changes in how we relate to each other in groups (the social sphere) and how we value and define the world around us (the cultural sphere). Our reality is mediated in ways that make it hard to decide whether life imitates the media or the media imitate life (Bennett, 1996, p. 5).

My participants pointed to the media influence on the public's perception of the event at Heritage.

> It's one of those things where if the media didn't say anything about it it probably wouldn't have been as big of a deal. But any time you know something, it happens and if it was on the front page of the paper that makes it a bigger deal. If the media didn't do that then I don't think it would have been a big deal but at the same time, I

> don't think they misportrayed what happened. Does that make sense? (Caucasian, male student)

Tuchman (1978) elaborated further on this the interpretive aspect of news media:

> ...news does not mirror society. It helps to constitute it as a shared social phenomenon, for in the process of describing an event, news defines and shapes that event... By imposing such meanings, news is perpetually defining and redefining, constituting and reconstituting social phenomena (p. 184).

Because of the prominent role of the Los Angeles riots and subsequent trials and appeals in the media over the course of 1992 and 1993, the reality of those riots became personal to people all over the country. History teacher, Mr. Bryant (Caucasian Foreign Language and Social Studies teacher) considered the role that knowledge of the LA riots might have played in both the fight at Heritage, and how it was understood:

> *Jill Um that was the same year that the LA riots came down. Do you think that might have had an effect on...*
> To tell you the truth, the dates, that's what I'm pausing on to remember when the LA riots were and when the big fight was here because if they happened, and I think it was, the LA was first and then here. Perhaps it could have. I would not rule it out but that kind of gets into the whole theory of, well that's what people see on television and in the media is that suggestive of future actions, or does it just happen?

By shaping our understandings and perceptions of what constituted an event, what was significant in the world, and how society reacted and faced different situations, the media helped to shape both responses to and perceptions of different happenings in individuals' lives.

> News stories not only lend occurrences their existence as public events, but also impart character to them, for news reports help to

> shape the public definition of happenings by selectively attributing to them specific details or "particulars." They make these selected details accessible to news consumers. (Tuchman, 1978, p. 190-191).

People based their understandings of the media coverage of the fight at Heritage on the agreement of two variables. If their definition of the word "riot" agreed with their perception of what happened at Heritage, then they generally considered the coverage fair, or accurate. If these two factors did not agree, however, they argued that the media overplayed the event based on the historical context of the time, and the media's need to create drama to "make news".

In summary, the news reporters covered the fight at Heritage based on their perception of what happened in the context of the time, and their interests as marketers and interpreters of public events. Their reports were then delivered to the general public, including students and faculty involved in the school at the time. Participants considered the reports in light of their experiences and understandings, and incorporated the media's interpretation into their own frame as agreeable, or oppositional to their perception. As personal understandings were communicated throughout the school and surrounding community, different perspectives were incorporated with personal experiences and news coverage to form a strong individual stance on the event. These stances differed widely depending on the experiences and the reference frame of the individual.

Thus a single event, such as the fight at Heritage could be remembered in a multitude of ways.

Causation

In this section I have outlined the various causes that participants provided to explain the occurrence of the brawl. First, and most cogent, was the argument of a few participants that a change in the population of the school brought two previously separate groups into unprecedented contact. Research literature supports this finding, explaining that small changes in relative minority populations promotes heightened incidents of racial conflict. Second, the social groups that emerged from this context segregated themselves socially, dividing the Heritage population into two distinct groups. Third, a more formal or institutional stratification by tracking cemented the separation between the populations. Fourth, participants related a variety of examples of racism in the white Heritage population. Finally, the open lunch policy of the school provided the freedom and the necessary circumstances to allow for such a widely attended outbreak of group violence.

Change in School Population

Many of the participants who spoke with me attributed the fight at Heritage to a clash of cultures between two primary groups that existed in the school at the time. The first group they described consisted of

students, who belonged to the population traditionally served by Heritage, a middle/upper class group that lived in the neighborhoods surrounding the school. The second group was a smaller, but still quite substantial population of primarily minority students of lower economic status. The latter group's presence in the school was frequently attributed to the magnet school system in Winfield, which attempted to integrate Winfield Public Schools by creating an exclusive magnet school with an approximately fifty percent minority, fifty percent Caucasian population in Northern Winfield. It resulted in the bussing of black students, who didn't qualify to attend the exclusive magnet school, from the neighborhoods surrounding this more northern magnet school to more southern Winfield schools; "Students who lived in Marshall's attendance area but could not attend the... magnet program [established in 1973] were sent to [other district schools including Heritage] (Gilroy, 1993, A-14). It was this bussing system that whites at Heritage most frequently blamed for the brawl. Sarah Jeffers, a Caucasian senior, explained her take on the causes of the fight.

> I think it probably was years worth in coming. I think one of the worst decisions Winfield Public Schools ever made was bussing, and the reason that I think that is true is you are bringing groups, large groups of people who just you know as the chips fell did not have the finances at home and were brought into an area that it was a privileged lifestyle. They had to wake up an hour earlier to go to school. I'm not saying necessarily these people as a whole had a chip on their shoulder, of course there were many individuals who did not. As a group though they did, at least that's what I felt like had happened...

Participants' understanding of the brawl as resulting from antagonistic attitudes created in black student populations by their contact with the more affluent, white community corresponded to the classical deprivation theory of racial conflict. The deprivation model argued that "Collective violence by Blacks is driven by the persistence of racial disparities in income, education, housing, and other economic opportunities" (Olzak, Shanahan, McEneaney, 1996). Participants also cited the brawl an inevitable competition brought on by the close interaction of the two disparate populations. This observation reflected an adaptation of the deprivation model to account for heightened contact between formerly separated racial groups, the competition model. The competition model resolved that "hostility between members of two racial groups reflects an underlying [disparity] in material interests – mainly economic interests, but sometimes political interests as well" (Bobo, 1996, p. 953).

Also relevant to the research was the community's resentment of the implementation of the bussing system, which resembled Pride's (2000) finding that:

> A substantial and growing majority of Americans have favored desegregated schools, but a majority, especially among whites, has also objected strongly to bussing, the policy that was meant to insure meaningful school desegregation (p. 221).

Both white and black members of the Heritage population resisted and objected to the bussing system. Two examples cited by my participants demonstrated African-American resistance. A story told by Mr. Bryant

(Caucasian Foreign Language and Social Studies teacher), demonstrated some identification difficulties faced at Heritage by North Winfield students:

> I remember an incident that happened very clearly startled me... It was just what some students were saying. They were students, who were bussed from the North side, and they referred to this school by its name, Heritage, but they referred to John Marshall as "our high school." And they had never been a day at Marshall, but that was 'their high school...' And I just I remember hearing that and thinking, this is very interesting. 'What are we doing to these students? Is it really right what we're doing to pull them out of wherever they are and bring them down to this side of town." I mean I'm not going to get into a long discussion of was it right, was it wrong. It was just startling to me at the point, that wow, this was Heritage, but that was 'our school.'

Mr. Bryant's sudden realization of the effects of the bussing system on North Winfield students shows his lack of consideration of the perspectives of African-American students. His consideration in this situation was thoughtful, but he was unwilling to form an opinion of the system, or to take any action to promote identification of minority students into the school culture. The second example reported responses of African-American parents to discipline at Heritage:

> [It was] still within their memories that they still went to their schools. And very definitely in the minds of their parents, because when we had conferences... one of the main things that would usually come out would be prejudice. The parents felt that we were harder on those [minority] kids because of prejudice. They also felt that their children were disadvantaged to have to drive so far and be so far from the school (Mr. Whidbey, Caucasian Vice Principal).

Further, school officials noted that diverse populations came together at the school in a way that was unprecedented in Winfield schools.

Ms. Simmes, a long-serving Caucasian school secretary at Heritage explicated the unique diversity in the school:

> Heritage is the one school I think in Winfield that's different. We have all social economical grades here. We have very very rich and the very very poor and everybody in between...

In addition to bussing, the late 1980's brought a large number of minority and low SES residents into one area of the Heritage district. The new population was attracted south by way of the assignment of newly subsidized housing units in the area. An article in the Winfield World, which discussed the many problems of the area, District 18, including unprecedented and rising crime rates, lack of successful businesses and high rates of joblessness, described the history of subsidized housing units in the area:

> Winfield Housing Authority owns and operates the 150-unit Holt-Plaza low-income apartments, which are limited to senior citizens who are disabled or handicapped. The Bright Square Apartments, with 127 units, and the 47-unit James River apartments became privately owned subsidized complexes in 1987 and 1989 respectively, [the housing director] said. Roundtree Hills apartments, with 337 units are privately owned subsidized apartments under the Department of Housing and Urban Development... WHA also administers low-income housing vouchers and certificates which can be used at any apartment complex, single-family home or mobile home that will accept them. District 18 has 514 certificates and 127 vouchers approximately, [the housing director] said (Kovar, 1993, COM-1).

Principal Connery (Caucasian, male) explained the effects that these changes in the district population had on the school:

> If you remember Heritage had been 90 to 95% white for years and years. And the economic changes in those apartment complexes had changed dramatically and they had gone to basically to Title I

> housing, which is low economics. And Winfield as a community had never addressed lower income housing anywhere. [Later] So we were kind of goin through that process of tryin to figure out how we were goin to deal with [the population change]. I think it went from 4% minority to close to 40% minority there in those four years. Which is a huge thing for no one to recognize.

As stated earlier the change in the minority population at Heritage, during this time period although significant, constituted a change of only 8.4% from 1989 to 1993. This jump was preceded by a another one of 4.9% from 1987-1989, reflecting a general and significant growth in the minority population at Heritage over the decade proceeding the riot. Principal Connery's overestimation of the minority population at Heritage is consistent with the tendency of Americans to exaggerate figures related to the population sizes of "others."

> Americans vastly overestimate the sizes of their minority populations... misperceptions are related to the attitudes people have toward minorities, specifically to perceived threats from those minorities (Nadeau, Niemi, & Levine, 1993, p. 343).

The significance of the minority population growth at Heritage was examined by Olzak, Shanahan and McEneaney's (1996) finding that; "as interracial contact between Whites and Blacks increases just one standard deviation, the rate of race riots increases by sixty percent" (602). Heritage experienced increases greater than one standard deviation from normal (data includes years 1987-1993) in the black population in each of the following school years: 1987-88, 1991-92, and 1992-93.

On a more personal note, one African-American Heritage student explained the school as the motivation for her family to move south to the

Heritage district, "Cause my mother, we moved on this side [South] of town because she wanted me and my sister to go to better schools." Several administrators explained that when Title I housing opened up a large number of African-American students moved to South Winfield with the expressed purpose of sending their children to South Side schools. A Caucasian student depicted the reactions of some white students to the change in the school population:

> What the deal was is they, we had our black friends at Heritage. That we had grown up with all of our lives and we, we knew 'em. And they started bussing in these new kids that we didn't know... It's not that I was prejudice, it's just that these guys, were just out to... it's almost like they were jealous, they didn't understand us or I don't know what it was.
> [Later] I mean it got bad I guess my Junior and senior year... But it did· It didn't racially get bad until I guess maybe the, maybe it did a little bit my junior year, but my senior year for sure.

The change in school population provided the most salient explanation I found for the "why" question of the riot. Olzak and Shanahan (1996) proposed an updated model for the prediction of race riots. They showed that disparate neighborhood populations provide fertile ground for racial conflict:

> Initial levels of residential dissimilarity and isolation have consistent, potent, and positive effects on the rate of race riots, suggesting that residential segregation does indeed have detrimental effects on race relations over this period... These findings suggest that race riots are more sensitive to processes of residential segregation and desegregation than to Black poverty rates... In contrast, the pattern of results shown here suggest that the dynamics of residential segregation and it's decline spark race riots (Olzak, Shanahan, McEaney; 1996, 607-608).

Because the two divergent populations came into contact in the school, not in the neighborhoods surrounding it, the effects of this contact also took place in the school.

The population change in south Winfield did not effect the entire Heritage district because the movement of lower Socioeconomic Status, primarily minority citizenry from North into South Winfield was far from homogeneous. The subsidized housing units were concentrated in a single, small section of the Heritage district. The elementary and middle schools in this area, which fed into Heritage, became packed with the new, more diverse and less affluent population, while other feeder schools in the Heritage district were barely affected. Thus the two populations did not come into contact in the district neighborhoods or in the feeder schools, both of which were still fairly segregated, but they finally converged on Heritage High School. Principal Connery (Caucasian male) described the racial make-up of the different middle-schools in the area:

> At that time, Glenn was lily white, there wasn't a black kid there. And MacArthur was basically, those kids were [being brought] in and they had been together. [Of] course, if you look at Fisher and Rose, those schools were all black at the time and it was coming from that direction. A lot of the people at Glenn thought those kids were all bussed into there, and 'why are they still bussing them?' And they weren't, they were all kids that lived in the neighborhood and they [the white community] didn't wanna hear that.

The State Department of Education reported the African-American populations of the schools mentioned in 1991 as follows: Glenn, 10%; Macarthur, 32%; Fisher, 44%; and Rose, 49% black.

Social Stratification

The traditional, Caucasian middle class, and the new, minority, lower class populations converged in a significant way for the first time at Heritage. The meeting of the two populations had a vital impact on the important process of identity and group formation in the high school. "The adolescent world is a world of acceptance and rejection. Identities are formed in relationship to membership in peer groups" (Pinderhughes, 1997, p. 50). Vice Principal Jones described her thinking about social divisions at Heritage:

> Well, in any place where there are large groups of people, people tend to gravitate to people they have most in common with... The black kids did seem to hang together, but I point them out rather than saying the white kids seemed to hang together because there were so many fewer black kids that if they would hang together it was more evident. And you know you'd see a group of whites here and a group of whites here, and you wouldn't make the statement, 'well the white kids hanging together.' Like you would if they were in the minority (Ms. Jones, Caucasian Vice Principal).

Although I attempted to probe for deeper insight on this point, Ms. Jones was quick to end this particular line of conversation. Other participants described a variety of social groups at Heritage. The majority of these descriptions defined distinctions based on social, athletic, academic or activity involvement, but minority populations, African-Americans in particular, were always excluded from these groupings. Matt Thurman's description provided a typical example:

> You know the popular and the not popular. The popular were you know, the preps and the jocks and stuff... And then I guess the black

group, I guess was a group too cause at that time there weren't that many blacks here at Heritage, was maybe three or four hundred.

Participants in my study recognized strong ties between race and social class in the context of the school. Caucasian Student Council President, Bryan Thomas, explained the powerful relation of the two factors in the following explication of segregation according to cultural background:

> I mean separation in terms of you go to a cafeteria and the African-American folks sit in one area and the white folks sit on one area. As well it's divided up, terms [of] people in the band sit here, the people who play football sit here... It was divided I didn't think as much racially as it was culturally.
> *Jill Culturally, you mean...*
> Meaning I guess racially that'd be part of it but it wasn't, not because of necessarily [pause] but just that the cultures are different and that's why they divide themselves up [pause] I'm saying, yah in terms of money as being one element of the culture.
> *Jill OK, money, race, anything else you can...*
> Money, race, the way they talk with each other, the way folks interact with each other, just the whole culture.

Principal Connery discussed the ties between race and socioeconomic status more directly:

> I think it is always tied to that because when you have two cultures you're dealing with of a socioeconomic as well as one of race. Um the black kids that that wore the Polo shirts, fit in, were basically allowed to be part of the school. And those who didn't and had different attitudes and spoke differently or smelled or had funny hair, they weren't involved (Caucasian male).

Wilson (1996) described a similar phenomenon of primary social characteristics tied with the isolation of low-income, African-American urban populations.

> When residents of inner-city neighborhoods venture out to other areas of the city... they come into brief contact with citizens of markedly different racial or class backgrounds. Sharp differences in cultural style often lead to clashes.
> Some behavior on the part of residents from socially isolated ghetto neighborhoods... is considered offensive by other groups, particularly black and white members of the middle class (p. 29).

Another type of cultural difference, which emerges when two different groups come into regular contact was described by Ogbu as secondary cultural differences, and particularly cultural inversion:

> Cultural inversion is the tendency for members of one population, in this case involuntary minorities, to regard certain forms of behaviors, certain events, symbols, and meanings as not appropriate for them because they are characteristic of members of another population... Thus, what the minorities consider appropriate or even legitimate behaviors or attitudes for themselves are defined in opposition to the practices and preferences of white Americans (Ogbu, 1987, p. 323).

Thus, based on cultural behaviors and characteristics, minority students and students of lower economic status tended to be fundamentally denied authentic participation in the school. The conflict itself was also related to such characteristics, as white students found actions of minority and lower economic status students as offensive or threatening.

> And they started bussing in these new kids that we didn't know, and they didn't know us ... I remember a couple times some of 'em would come up to me and it's almost like they were jealous. They would come and they would say, 'yo man, I know you're rich, give me your lunch money...' I remember one little kid came up to me and started throwin' gang signs in my face one morning... I didn't say a word to him and a lot of his buddies didn't like me so he was gonna try to intimidate me by throwing gang signs in my face (Ben Taylor, Caucasian, male student).

Strong secondary social characteristics may also have been responsible for the identification of certain members of the lower status, minority population at Heritage as a "troubled group." This group was described as students who "were just causing so much trouble, and they're absent so much, and just trouble makers, you can't get them caught up in class... you know it's time for them to be some place else" (Caucasian, female teacher). This group, and the inability of the administration to "get rid" of them was credited by some Caucasian adults in the school with responsibility for the riot. Ogbu's description of involuntary minority students' attitudes and behaviors in the school setting gave an explanation to the description that I heard of this "troubled group":

> ...involuntary minority students do not develop or maintain good academic work habits and attitudes; they tend to have a norm of minimum effort, do not work hard, and spend limited time on academic tasks; they avoid taking "hard"/"difficult"/"White" courses;... they do not usually separate academic tasks from other activities; they seem to prefer peer solidarity to school work and easily submit to peer pressures that take them away from their schoolwork; they distrust school authorities with whom they are frequently in conflict; and they have a tendency to resist following school rules and standard practices (Ogbu, 1987, p. 333).

This description pointed out the hesitancy of faculty at Heritage to understand the experiences and backgrounds of minority student populations, particularly those who were struggling to adjust to the Heritage setting.

Separation by Tracking

The racially stratified culture at Heritage was reinforced by the system of tracking that theoretically placed more capable students in higher level, academic classes. At Heritage tracking was imposed by the placement of students with higher test scores and perceived abilities into more advanced classes from the time they entered the school as freshmen. While all students were advanced through the levels of the state's requirements for graduation, the lowest track students earned credits through basic skills courses, providing them with minimum competencies. Upper track students earned credits through advanced, AP, and college preparatory classes, providing them with advanced curriculum and even college credit. Students who's ability rested in the middle of these two groups earned credits through a selection of intermediate level courses. Because class assignments were based of the level of student preparation for academic success, much weight was placed on the students' academic background. Students arrived at the school with different levels of social and academic preparedness based on the Socioeconomic Status of their families, and the feeder schools they had attended, which were heavily segregated. Thus, the tracking system at Heritage resulted in sorting the school population primarily by social background:

> One unintended negative consequence of tracking is the way it segregates students by race or ethnicity and socioeconomic status. Since academic achievement is related to students' background, minority and low-income students are disproportionally assigned to lower tracks (Hallinan, 1994, p. 81).

One teacher I spoke with talked simply about inequalities in the classes taken by different types of students, and how such inequalities should be addressed.

> I think there is a segregation there in the honors system... Uh we need, I think we really seriously need to look at kids, I don't care what race they are, and see what their capabilities are and start placing them in those classes, rather than letting them make those choices based upon race or economic situation (Caucasian, female Social Studies / Language teacher).

And later, when we were looking through the yearbook for students that I should interview, she said, "Gee, I wish I knew more of the black kids, they just weren't in my classes. They are now, we've moved in the right direction." Other advanced classroom teachers addressed the academic stratification at Heritage more indirectly, through explaining the students served by their own classes.

> But I think, I think the caliber of students that I had were not the ones who would perhaps feel most injured or most hurt by things that may have been said, or may have happened... I think that I didn't have a lot of the students who would have gotten involved in a fight, or if they would have, it would have been so out of character for them (Caucasian, male social studies / language teacher).

I found it interesting that in this description it was the "caliber of students" that was credited with both grouping them in the more challenging classes, and with keeping them out of things like brawls. Lower track teachers did not describe students in similar terms.

Racism

Most of my participants acknowledged racism practiced by white students and faculty present at Heritage at the time of the fight. Some considered this racism particular to the school and the changes that were going on at that time, while others considered it a societal constant that played itself out in the school. Principal Connery (Caucasian) demonstrated the very specific racism of students, staff and community in several comments that he made.

> When I first walked in to Heritage High School there were several kids who had been graduated from there had walked up to me and said that that they wanted 'em [minority students] out of there. And there was there was a lot of racism in that school, white racism against black kids. And there was Klan, a group of Klan kids that were out there... I had people come up to me and said that it was OK if they [minority students] were here as long as all they did was sports, that kind of stuff. Just a typical you know racism from the white community. And they did not want those [minority] kids in that school. That was a white school.

Mr. Bryant (Caucasian Foreign Language and Social Studies teacher) discussed the race and social stratification tensions at Heritage, but unlike Connery, he attributed these issues to broader societal issues than to specific problems in the school.

> I think there is still a lot of social stratification and, there really is. And {pause} Truthfully I don't think the school is the cause of it. I think it's something that students bring to school with them. And I know many in society and many people say, 'oh well the school should be taking care of that problem.' But that's the problem. We're simply the influence because it's very hard for children to go back home and say things like, 'well my teacher says your attitudes about this group are wrong.'

Racist attitudes and occurrences were central to the riot when considered in light of Bobo & Hutchings's (1996) theory that; "it is the socially learned feelings of dislike and aversion, as well as the stereotypes that undergird such feelings, that occasion racial conflict" (p. 954).

Several incidents displayed the presence of racist attitudes in the school. The first occurrence was repeatedly mentioned as evidence of racism in the school; it was the defacement of an African-American society banner with a clearly derogatory comment. One African-American participant claimed that it said, 'Go back to Nigeria or something.' The other example, was only mentioned by two participants, although it did appear in the Winfield World: "Heritage High School students arrived at school Friday morning and found the letters "KKK" spray-painted on a doorway in white, 2-foot-tall letters" (Racist Graffiti Found, 1993, D16). Ben Taylor (Caucasian Senior) related how he understood the graffiti to have happened:

> He spray painted, and Dario's black, to just get a rise that just to be ornery and get a rise out of people, he wrote KKK on the side of the building, he spray painted it. And that got 'em... that didn't set too well with them, I remember that. It was kinda ironic that Dario did it just to just to get a rise to get shit started, and he was black but...

The only other person I interviewed that brought the graffiti up was Principal Connery (Caucasian). His memory of the content of the graffiti was mixed up with a related incident, and he justified Dario's actions because he was reacting to the behavior of the lower status minority students:

> ...they were still bussing children in there from the North side, from the old non-contiguous zones. There was a black football player, but [he] was actually very involved in the athletic program and was very embarrassed by the behavior of some of those little gang-bangers that were in there. And he wrote up on the wall, about a month prior to this for them all to go back to Africa. And we didn't find out who had done it until almost a year later. Then it came out that that... it was a black kid who had put that up there (Connery, Caucasian male Principal).

He also excused it due to the black student's responsibility, although he only learned that Dario had defaced the school later, through word of mouth, after this group of students had graduated. I found it significant that although the graffiti was in the newspaper, and probably viewed by most of the student body, the only participants that mentioned it both explained that it was painted by an African-American student. Apparently this fact excused the incident from being considered evidence of racism in the school.

Another frequently sited example of racism in the school was the word "Nigger," which appeared to have been frequently used by the white population. Ben (Caucasian male student) explicated his use of the word, and then excused the behavior:

> I'm not sure if I-, see I don't think I, I might have occasionally used the n word, I don't think that, yah I I bet I did. But not to my friends that were black [that I] had been friends with because I knew 'em and they were nice people and I liked 'em. But when they [minority students] went around and started actin... they were claiming a gang or whatever the reason... they had attitudes then I might say something to 'em. But by all means I'm not a racist, I think there's what I call whiggers, you know white trash white people, and then there's the N word you know for black people that are that are trashy or whatever.

This word also came up in African-American English teacher, Ms. Bishop's description of a fight in her classroom:

> A white student called this black student a nigger, and so he was wanting to fight then, so I went back and separated it. And I was trying to say that, "well he didn't call you that." And the little white boy said {mimicking in a high pitched voice} "yes I did". And so I sent him out... so the next day the black boy beat him up right after school.

Finally, one former Heritage teacher and coach made some comments of such strength and derogation that I was taken aback. First, about the riot he recounted:

> Some of those kids were just idiots, they were running around during the fight singing 'We Shall Overcome,' that's how ridiculous and idiotic it was. One of 'em even wore a big clock around his neck, like Run DMC.

The comment that I found particularly shocking was; "Some of these kids, you know I make reference to, like rats, they live in filth and they just multiply."

Research explained prejudicial attitudes as arising from the same conditions that other studies that accounted for race riots. First, racism was connected to "economic conditions and the size of the subordinate group relative to the dominant group" (Quillian, 1995, p. 586). Second, racist attitudes were tied to self-interest and the perception of financial competition from a marginalized group, primarily based on the subjects' understanding of society (Bobo and Hutchings, 1996).

Open Lunch

One structural aspect of the school that many of my participants agreed contributed to the fight was the fact that Heritage had a completely open lunch policy. Open lunch gave students freedom to divide themselves voluntarily, but it also encouraged and reinforced the already strong divisions in the school population. It divided the population by economic status:

> Unfortunately Heritage I always felt was sort of cut in half. They had kids that had cars, or had access to it... and they left campus for lunch. The other kids, who I you know unfortunately just didn't have the finances at home for a car in high school, stayed on campus and ate in the cafeteria (Caucasian, female student).

As I have shown, at Heritage, economic status was inextricably tied to race:

> ... actually there wasn't that many black people at school that drove cars. I think since a lot of 'em were bussed in from out North. So usually when people came back from lunch it was a lot of white people that came back. So when I got to, when we pulled in I was like what are all these black people doing outside? {laughs} I was like, 'look at them all, they didn't go out to lunch today' (African-American, female student).

The main school factors that participants attributed to provoking the brawl included: a rapid and significant change in the race makeup of the student population, a high level of social stratification, a strict system of tracking and ability grouping, the presence of intense prejudicial attitudes, and the structure of open lunch. These factors combined in complicated,

covert and overt ways to provide the stimulus and conditions for the occurrence of the brawl.

Memory: Descriptions of the fight

Throughout my interviews, I was amazed by how differently participants remembered and understood the events of the Heritage High brawl. Participants recognized that there would be differences in their accounts, and some worried about what others would think of their interpretations, "Yeah and I'm sure that they would laugh at us and think that I'm not right by saying it's not a race riot" (Ms. Simmes Caucasian school secretary). Such statements pointed to the dilemma of what contributed to shaping a person's experience of one event. Holzner (1968) proposed the following definition for knowledge; "the communicable mapping of some aspect of experience by an observer in terms of a symbolic system and frame of reference deemed relevant and appropriate" (p. 9).

I came to understand the differences in the accounts of the brawl in terms of the different ways that participants experienced it. Accounts of the melee varied from sensational depictions, to depreciative hearsay. I found this variation to be fairly consistent with the amount of direct experience the participant had had with the fight. Coulter (1989) demonstrated the more pliant reality that resulted from experiencing something vicariously through hearing from someone else:

> ... 'seeing' and 'hearing' are quite different modalities in respect of their relationship to 'knowledge' and 'belief.' Certainly, it is generally true to say that how we may hear various things which are said to us, or read various things which are written for us, is a function of the beliefs we have as well as the knowledge we possess... It is worth noting here, however, that whereas 'hear(ing) that X' does not presuppose that X is known, 'see(ing) that X' does presuppose X. In other words, seeing-that is 'factive' (i.e. presupposes the *truth* of it's object-complement), while hearing-that (such-and-such happened) is non factive (Coulter, p. 40-41).

I categorized the descriptions of my participants into four groups based on the level of direct contact that each had with the events of the brawl:

1. Faculty with no direct experience or involvement in the fighting, most of whose accounts differed widely from all others.
2. Students with little or no direct experience of the fighting, who tended to have an accurate account of the fight, although they differed in the amount of detail they provided.
3. Faculty involved indirectly in the resolution of the fighting.
4. Faculty and students who participated in the fighting and containing it.

The first group of people that I identified included teachers who served at Heritage both currently and at the time of the fight. These teachers had little to no direct contact with the fight itself, and had learned the details of the fight from students in their classes, rumors, and the news broadcasts. The most conservative of these accounts explained it as a fight between two people.

> But basically the situation was, the kids were all coming back from lunch at the time these two kids, decided to fight and it was right out here at that little place where the gym and the annex meet. So everybody has to come through there that's coming to the annex to come to class, the school, we were very big at that time, and so it appeared that there were huge numbers involved. It was two kids fighting (Caucasian, female math teacher).

Others in this group thought it was slightly bigger; "Uh There were, as I remember, and I was thinking about this last night, between seven and eleven kids that were actually involved, fighting" (Mr. Reed, a Caucasian, male Social Studies teacher). Another agreed that only a few students were really involved in the fighting, while many jumped in to protect others, or try to contain it. Ms. Bishop (African-American English teacher) explained that although she was aware of the tension in the students, and was present during some violence that day, she did not witness the riot itself.

> *You could feel the tension*, the violence in the air. Because right in the hall one student was a white student was being kicked by a black student. I didn't see it but a student told me that it was going on in front of me, but I just didn't see it. So it was just tension everywhere.

Mr. Bryant, a Caucasian social studies and Foreign Language teacher was also rather oblivious to what went on that day. He remembered his initial impression and how he learned about the fight:

> And it was an AP history class right after lunch, and the students came in, they said, 'hey Mr. Bryant there was a fight in the parking lot at lunch.' I said 'Oh, OK uh sit down, we've got a test'... And that was it, truthfully.

Of this group most took exception to the word riot; they preferred to call it a fight. Some also took exception to the assumed factor of race in

the fight on the basis of their perception of its size and how it began. This group only experienced the fight through the comments and stories of others in the school who may or may not have had more direct experience.

The second group that I identified were students who knew something of the fight, some of whom had witnessed bits and pieces of it, but who had a limited discernment regarding its extent or ramifications. Edward Morelli (Caucasian, Male Freshman at the time), who had no direct experience of the fight, described to me the stories and rumors that circulated about what it actually was:

> Rumors were obviously rampant. The most common one, the one that made CNN was that it was a race riot due to Rodney King. But rumors around school were not the same. It was more, a couple groups were getting into a fight, someone [Bryan Thomas] stepped in to try and break up the original fight and he got jumped so some other people jumped in and helped him... and it just exploded from there.

Shannon Richards (African-American Senior) observed the fight from the upstairs window of her fifth hour classroom:

> A lot of people out – outside, and at the time I was upstairs at the, [my class] room and um you could see down the sidewalk into the, the parking lot. And you just seen a lot of people, you just see you know just see it's just all over the place.

This group agreed that the fight involved a large number of students, and they knew a great deal about the events although they did not get involved themselves. All of these students, with one exception did not take exception with the words riot or brawl to describe the fight. Although none of these students had participated in the fight, some had viewed parts of it

from a distance, and all had known someone involved and discussed the events with them. The exception in this group, Matt Thurman (Caucasian student), disagreed with their terms on the basis that he, like his mother (Caucasian math teacher, Susan Thurman), portrayed the incident as an unremarkable fight between a small group of people. A few students in this group did argue that the fight hadn't been about race at all, but rather about competition between students with differing economic backgrounds, if anything.

The third group consisted of faculty members who were indirectly involved in the resolution of the fight. Ms. Simmes and Ms. Currey, both Caucasian secretaries at the school gave similar accounts of their indirect participation by contacting emergency services. Ms. Currey's account follows:

> OK, actually the first thing that I remember about it was seeing the students run. My desk was about where it is now and hearing and seeing the students stampeeding, running down the hallway. And about that time the principal came running in and said 'call 911 and call the superintendant's office, there's a big fight in the parking lot.' And so we did and it was it was quite scary, in fact we locked the doors of the main office. We didn't know what was going on, we locked the doors... (Ms. Currey, Caucasian).

Principal Connery (Caucasian) described how he heard about the fight and what he found when he went out to help:

> And a little girl came up to me and said that there was a fight or some boys fighting out in the thing and it was really a mess. So I went outside and walked around and by the time I got there it was, it was pretty well stopped. We were sorting through who had done what to who, basically.

This group either arrived too late to witness much of the actual events of the fight, or they stayed inside in safe areas and witnessed nothing at all. They emphasized the immense crowd involved but many of them also objected to the framing of the incident as a race riot. They considered it to be of riotous proportions, but viewed it as involving some troubled problem students rather than a racial conflict based on tension in the school.

The final group that I spoke to was involved directly in the fighting, or containing it; this group included both students and faculty and their accounts were included in the introduction as first-hand accounts. Because of their direct experience, this group agreed with the terms "riot" or "brawl" for the fight, but some administrators objected that these terms suggested that they did not have the situation under control, which they saw as erroneous. Ben Taylor presented the most dramatic and involved description of the fighting:

> They're fighting and next thing you know... well everybody's getting back from lunch and all the inhouse kids come out. And so it just, you know... are there and we just all start you know fighting, everybody was. And then somebody came and broke it up, I remember that, and then it moved closer to the school. And then it all started happening again, and I just remember getting kicked and lookin over and seein Ford getting punched, and seein Carpenter getting laid out and...

The second notable inconsistency that I discovered was that everyone's understanding of the fight that set off the disruption differed. Most of the variance in understandings of this fight reflected participants'

beliefs about students that were a part of the 'action.' Coulter (1989) explained the effect of a person's beliefs in accounting for the different ways that people experience the same event; "beliefs, then are certainly invoked in accounting for discrepant perceptual claims of various kinds" (p. 42).

Students' stories were rather consistent, varying only in the level of detail they presented and their own levels of involvement in the event. Their versions were also the most consistent with media accounts. First, Ben Taylor, a Caucasian male student and good friend of the Native-American male student involved in the initial fight, gave a first hand account of what he witnessed as the inducement of the fight. He rendered a first-hand account of a violent confrontation between a Native-American male and an African-American female student. In his account, neither student appeared to be more at fault, and both acted disrespectfully. Other students' accounts read similarly to Ben's, in that the fight occurred in a classroom, the identities of the instigators matched, and most of the logistics were the same. They did differ, however in the way that they accounted for fault in the incident.

Shannon Richards, an African-American student blamed the African-American female more than the Native-American male. She also described the instigating male as well-liked, and intelligent, where Ben and others described him as wild, rebellious and disrespectful. Her account follows:

> She gave her {thoughts?} to him and then he like... He was a Indian guy. And he was really cool with everybody, real cool, real smart and... she just started hitting on him and he didn't want to hit her back cause he don't hit girls. So she just went off and I guess around lunchtime she had told one of her friends and that's how it all started.

Teachers' and administrators' perspectives differed in varying degrees from student accounts. Particularly telling was the way that the faculty characterized the two instigators and how they assigned blame. Ms. Stephens, a Caucasian Latin and Social Studies teacher, characterized the male instigator as the victim of the African-American female instigator, and her friends who were considered the "in-house group". Also notable here was the ambiguity that emerged among faculty about the racial background of the male student. A male administrator and a male social studies teacher rendered two particularly unique accounts. Mr. Whidbey, Caucasian Vice Principal, placed the confrontation in the hall, not the classroom, and reversed the race and gender identities of the two instigators, placing the brunt of the blame on an African-American male student. Conversely, he described Caucasian males getting involved to defend a Native-American female student from abuse by this African-American male. A contradictory element in his story occurred when he began by describing the Caucasian female student's friends confronting the African-American instigator, then he paused and continued with the African-American students getting their friends and making threats and Caucasian students reacting.

> The first incident was a confrontation between a black male and an Indian, American-Indian female. And they'd had some words in the hall there, during lunchtime... He was pretty abusive toward her. So what she does is go to some of her friends, and these are basically white males and tells them what these kids did and they approach him and course there's a reaction between the two. And so he goes to get some of his friends... The black kid going around picking out some, some of his friends, which were black. And of course the threats are being made and the white kids got theirs and the next thing we know they're running through the halls, especially the black kids, there's a group of probably eight or nine of those kids running through the halls, and they meet out on the parking lot.

I found the following account by Caucasian, Social Studies teacher, Mr. Reed unique in the inclusion of a detailed account of a financial dispute between two students. I did not hear a similar account throughout my research. Also interesting was the description of the two students as African-American and Asian-American, both males, and the placement of the argument in the hall rather than the classroom.

> The cause seemed to be... two individuals on the first floor, during their lunch period, in the southeast... And there was a discussion over moneys that were owed to an individual, some money that had been borrowed uh not being paid back. And then those two got into um a yelling match at each other... And it was between a Asian American student, and a black student.

These variant accounts attested to the variability of memories that people can have about a single event. Some were as telling about the beliefs and identity of the speaker as they were about the events themselves.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS

Incidents of collective violence are frightening and disruptive to the school population. These violent explosions reflect and reinforce racial separation and tension in schools. Aside from the intrinsic significance of increased understanding of a single event of collective violence, the Heritage High brawl may lend insight into violence and potential violence in other schools. By analyzing power structures common to schools, we might recognize forces of control and oppression, as well as lack of identification to school community by various populations of students. By understanding the indicators and precursors of group violence, we might use our knowledge to address problems early and prevent further outbreaks. Finally, by broadening our understandings of racial violence and the forces and conflicts that frequently bring it about, perhaps we might recognize and broaden our understanding of racism and oppression affecting various school populations.

My findings led me to conclude that two main changes should be made as a result of studying the Heritage High brawl. The first change involved the ideology and approach of educators. My findings pointed out

that teachers and administrators generally accepted and interpreted meanings of the events at Heritage based on the understandings of certain members of the dominant group in the school. Based on my data, I concluded that educators should strive to grasp the multiciplity of perspectives of their students in their interpreting of events. Second, the primary causes enumerated by my participants as explanations for the occurrence of the riot at Heritage encouraged a potential reconstruction of the way that schools should approach desegregation. By promoting community and understanding across race and economic class barriers and encouraging universal participation in the school culture, schools could promote unity and tolerance in their populations.

I found that Heritage reflected the tense situation that continues to exist between populations of differing race and economic classes in broader society. The event of the riot permitted a less obstructed look into the reality of social relations in recent society. As I looked at the brawl, I found that the problems at Heritage exposed similar problems in broader society. This was the first study addressing an incident of large-scale collective violence in a school. As such this study provides important implications for further study.

Riot/Brawl/Fight

Throughout my investigation of the Heritage High event I analyzed the terms of "riot," "brawl," and "fight," which were applied to it. Although

I considered all of these terms carefully, in how accurately they described this particular incident, I settled on the contentious term "riot" to describe the event. Because of the scale and divisions inherent in the event, I found the term "fight" to be over simplistic. While "brawl" connotes a chaotic and violent event, it fails to imply the sort of strict group divisions that were present at the Heritage High event. Because "riot" both intimates the scale of this event relative to the population of the school, and the clear lines that divided those involved, and because this event lined up clearly with the causal and descriptive attributes of other events which have been assigned this term, I concluded that it was the most accurate and effective description of the event at Heritage.

Research Questions Addressed

In discussing my research questions with participants I found that there were no simple or uniform answers to my questions. Answers to questions of situation and meaning of the Heritage High riot provided insight into the riot itself as well as broader issues of race and social class relations in Winfield society.

1. How did various students, teachers, and administrators understand the brawl?

In answer to the first question, I found that each participant formulated personal understanding of the event according to their own perspective and position. Those who had less contact with the actual

fighting and resolution in the riot had a greater tendency to minimize it in their understanding, while those with greater direct contact with the riot had a more difficult time discounting the significance of the event. Most did consider the fight to have been divided between Black and White members of the student population, but were also hesitant to consider the riot a racial conflict.

2. What was the historical, social, economic, and political context that surrounded and contributed to the incident?

The second question, regarding the contexts surrounding the Heritage High riot revealed a chaotic time on all levels. Events like the Rodney King verdicts and local investigations into racism in the school system and police force, school events like racist graffiti and a series of large-scale fights preceding the riot, contributed to the chaotic context of the event. Other important, historical aspects of the context included the 1921 Winfield race riot, and the effect that that event had on the Winfield community, and the school system's effort to desegregate local public schools through a magnet school and complicated bussing system.

3. What factors did participants see as having contributed to the brawl?

Participants attributed the occurrence of the riot to a variety of factors. First, they described a conflict between a rapidly growing, lower economic class, minority population, and a large, higher economic status, Caucasian population. They also described a deeply stratified social system, reinforced by tracking and other school structures like open lunch.

4. What changed in the school and those involved as a result of the brawl?

I found that participants acknowledged almost no changes in the school as a result of the riot. They did blame this event for damaging the reputation of the school in the community. Participants also suspected that following the riot many students changed schools, either enrolling in local private schools, or moving or transferring to suburban districts surrounding Winfield.

Implications for Teaching

The variety of understandings that I heard regarding the events of the Heritage High riot encouraged changes in the ways that teachers approach their students and classes. Contributing factors to the Heritage High riot, such as social separation and racism, demonstrated a need for teachers to consciously work to foster understanding of differences in race and culture, in themselves and among students. These findings also intimate the need to foster unity and loyalty within schools in order to build functional and successful communities.

Throughout my interviews I heard a variety of stories recounting the events of the riot. These stories represented the different ways in which people personalized and recorded the events in their memories. The different ways that people attached meanings to the riot have implications for the way that white educators interact with diverse populations of students. Adults in schools must pursue conversations with all groups of

students to attain understanding of the multiple perspectives that they possess. Drawing understanding of events only from the interpretations and meanings assigned by the adult population, or the majority student population, as many participants seem to have done, serves to further marginalize minority populations in schools. Events like school violence that are experienced by the entire school community require educators to reach beyond their own understandings and definitions to realize and embrace the various meanings that those events have taken on in the mind of each student.

Beyond understanding the multiplicity of perspectives that students hold of different events in school, lies the obvious need for educators to strive to attain understanding of the cultures and backgrounds of their students. By being open, and actively researching diverse forms and sources of knowledge and experience, teachers can approach students in more sensitive ways, and also foster this type of understanding in students.

There has been a recent movement toward building an atmosphere of community in schools.

> By allowing children to play a part in creating their own environment, establishing their academic agenda, asking the important questions, each of these schools, each classroom, each teacher and his or her students, maintain a sense of connection and compassion for children who often have too little of either... Compassion and connection, while often overlooked in calls for school reform, form the backbone of schools that work (Wood, 1992, p. 18-19).

This movement has advocated openness and understanding among students and educators similar to that discussed above. The school community movement has primarily been aimed at elementary and middle schools however; emphasis on building connections between students, faculty, and the school as an organized democratic community would benefit high school students profoundly.

> The real issue confronted by the American high school is how to change the day-to-day experience of students so that they are connected to the academic and social agenda of the school. This means creating, nurturing and sustaining a school community where every young person feels valued (Wood, 1999, p. 11).

The Heritage High riot, and the problems that this study revealed indicate that school reforms of this type would benefit high schools, and perhaps even help prevent school violence, particularly riots.

Implications for Policy on School Desegregation

The main result of school desegregation efforts has been to place populations of students, which are separate within the community, into the same school, with the assumption that increased contact between the groups would promote heightened acceptance and recognition of the variant cultural backgrounds of students. However, in schools as in neighborhoods, an increase in contact alone not only failed at promoting cultural harmony and tolerance, but also proved dangerous in that it set up a volatile dynamic in the school.

The goal of desegregation will never be accomplished simply by establishing populations of non-dominant populations in previously segregated schools. School infrastructures like tracking and the bussing systems (i.e. exclude non-native students from participation in any activity taking place outside of the regular school day) limit contact between different populations by preventing them from interacting in classes and school activities. These structures also prevent non-dominant groups from involving themselves in the school community, promoting the formation of a separate and an often oppositional minority community. Non-structural factors, like system-wide prejudice and social stratification, also endorsed continued separation of different populations. Segregation within the school community generated conditions ripe for group resentment and violence.

The true integration of a school would require additional programs aimed at both ending structural modes of segregation and combating prevalent cultural attitudes, which promote social stratification and separation. To do this the school would first have to put an end to tracking and ability grouping, to increase cross-cultural contact in classrooms.

> A school may become calmer around racial issues with human relations efforts, but it cannot embody egalitarianism or social justice without deeper changes in tracking structures and the norms and political relations these structures enact (Oaks, p. 87).

Second, schools would have to find a way to provide minority and lower Socioeconomic Status students with the means and the initiative to

participate in the school community through athletics and activities. Informal school structures, which encourage separation of students along race and economic class parameters (i.e. open lunch), would have to end. Finally, an educational initiative on cultural diversity, promoting empathy and understanding across race and economic status barriers, and providing for diverse discussions on social and cultural issues would need to be instituted. The need for this type of educational effort was demonstrated by one of my participants, Ben (Caucasian male student), who pointed out that perhaps education regarding race relations and cooperation might have helped the situation at Heritage:

> ..they really didn't sit us all down and say, "look, we all gotta get along, despite of our color... and this is why we gotta get along." They didn't really do that, they didn't really give us any education on that.

These initiatives, if implemented in combination with a strong desire for change on the part of all faculty and staff, could improve current desegregation strategies in schools and prevent further occurrences of violence motivated by differences in racial and economic status.

Implications for Further Study

The study of the Heritage High riot pointed to a few issues that have not been previously addressed. First, other incidents of group violence in schools need to be studied because these sorts of events are unique and varied in their occurrences. More case studies of this type would further

extend our understanding of these complex events. Second, studies to address whether theories used to explain large-scale urban riots apply to similar occurrences in schools would be helpful. One particular aspect of this arena of study would explain whether schools that experience sudden and significant increases in minority populations relative to the majority frequently experience racially motivated violence. Another related investigation would look at how theories that explain racial unrest based on economic competition for jobs and resources apply in school settings where resources are presumably equalized. The final aspect of comparison between urban riots and school events would entail a historical comparison between a large-scale riot and a related event in school, i.e. the St. Claire riot and the Heritage High riot, which are related by their mutual occurrence in Winfield.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

2 Convicted in Beating Trial. (1993, April 18). Winfield World, pp. A1,3.

3 Arrested in Heritage Ruckus. (1993, April 17). Winfield World, pp. A-14.

Abrahamson, M. (1996). Urban enclaves: Identity and place in America. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Anderson, D. C. (1998). Curriculum, culture, and the community: The challenge of school violence. Crime and Justice, 24, 317-363.

Astor, R.A. (1998). Moral reasoning about school violence: Informational assumptions about harm within school subcontexts. Educational Psychologist, 33(4), 207-221.

Astor, R.A., Meyer, H.A. & Behre, W.J. (Spring 1999). Unowned Places and Times: Maps and interviews about Violence in High Schools. American Educational Research Journal. 36(1), p. 3-42.

Baker, J. A. (1998). Are we missing the forest for the trees? Considering the social context of school violence. Journal of School Psychology, 36(1), 29-44.

Baldassare, M. (1994). The Los Angeles Riots: Lessons for the urban future. Boulder, CO; Westview Press, Inc.

Bennett, W. L. (1996). News: The politics of Illusion (3rd ed.). New York: Longman Publishers USA.

Bennett; deMarrias, K., & LeCompte, M. D. (1995). The way schools work: A sociological analysis of education; 2nd ed. White Plains, N. Y.; Longman Publishers.

Berger, P. L. & Luckmann, T. (1966). The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc.

Bergesen, A.; Herman, M. (February, 1998). Immigration, race & riot: The 1992 Los Angeles uprising. American Sociological Review, 63, 39-54.

Bettis, P. J. (1996). Urban abstraction in a central city high school. The Urban Review, 28(4), 309-335.

Black Leaders Allege Brutality, Racism in Winfield Department. (1993, March 12). Winfield World, pp. A-1.

Bobo, L.; Hutchings, V. L. (December, 1996). Perceptions of Racial Group Competetion: Extending Blumer's Theory of Group position to a Multiracial Social Context. American Sociological Review, 61; 951-972

Brown, W. & Kurt, K. (1993, April 18). Calm, Disappointment Follow Verdict. Winfield World, p. A-17.

Containing Violence. (1993, April 23). Winfield World, p. 12.

A Controversial Job. (1993, April 16). Winfield World, p. A-14.

Coulter, J. (1989). Mind In Action. Atlantic Highlands, NJ; Humanities Press International Inc.

Cousins, L.H. (June, 1997). Toward a sociocultural context for understanding violence and disruption in black urban schools and communities. Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare, 24(2), 41-63.

Cult Standoff Ends in Inferno. (1993, April 20) Winfield World, p. A-1, A-3.

Culture of Violence [Editorial] (1993, November 26). Winfield World, pp. N22.

Dirty Little Secret. (2000, Feb. 7). Nightline. ABCNEWS.

Ellsworth, S. (1982). Death in a Promised Land: The Winfield race riot of 1921. Baton Rouge; Louisana State University Press.

Fatum, W. R., & Hoyle, J. C. (1996). Is it violence? School violence from the student perspective: Trends and interventions. The School Councilor, 44(1) 28-34.

Fine, M. (1991). Framing Dropouts: Notes on the politics of an urban public high school.

Furlong, M.J., Chung, A., Bates, M. & Morrison, R. L. (1995). Who are the victims of school violence? A comparison of student non-victims and multi-victims. Education and Treatment of Children, 18(3) 282-298.

Gilroy, L. G. (1993, April 18). Foundation to help [Marshall] mark 20 years as magnet school. Winfield World, pp. A-14.

Glesne, C. (1999). Becoming qualitative researchers: *An introduction*. New York: Addison Wesley Longman, Inc.

Goffman, E. (1974). Frame Analysis: An essay on the organization of experience. New York: Harper & Row Publishers.

Gold, V.E. & Chamberlin, L.J. (1996). School/Student violence: A primer. American Secondary Education, 24(3), 27-32.

Habermas, J. (reprinted, 1988). On the logic of the social sciences (S. W. Nicholsen & J. A. Stark, trans.). Cambridge, MS: The MIT Press. (Origional work published 1970).

Hallinan, M. T. (April, 1994). Tracking: From theory to practice. Sociology of Education 67(2) p. 79-91.

Hoberock, B. (1993, April 23). Week's Incidents Signs of Society, School Leaders Say. Winfield World, p. 15.

Hoberock, B. (1993, April 27). Security Tightened in Wake of Brawl. Winfield World, pp. 4.

Hoberock, B. (1993, July 22). Racial Disparity Found in School Punishment. Winfield World, pp. A-1.

Holzner, B. (1968). Reality Construction in Society. Cambridge, MA; Schenkman Publishing Company, Inc.

Hyman, I.A., & Perone, D.C. (1998). The other side of school violence: Educator policies and practices that may contribute to student misbehavior. Journal of School Psychology, 36(1), 7-27.

Jennings, J. (Ed.). (1994). Blacks, Latinos, and Asians in Urban America: Status and prospects for politics and activism. Westport, CT; Praeger Publishers.

Johnson, H. B. (1998). Black Wall Street: From riot to renaissance in Winfield's historic St. Claire district. Austin, TX; Eakin Press.

Jones-Parrish, M. E. (1998). Race Riot 1921: Events of the Winfield Disaster. Winfield, OK; Out on a Limb Publishing.

Kovar, C. (1993, March 31). Former LA Gang Member Addresses Winfield Students. Winfield World, pp. Z-2.

Kovar, C. (1993, August 11). Heritage Seeks Alternative Discipline Methods. Winfield World, pp. COM-6.

Kovar, C. (1993, May 26). Group Seeks Answers to South Peoria Problems. Winfield World, pp. COM-1.

Kozol, J. (1991). Savage Inequalities: Children in America's schools. New York; Crown Publishers, Inc.

Lather, P. (1992). Critical frames in educational research: Feminist and post-structural perspectives. Theory Into Practice 31(2): (87-99).

McNamara, J. (1993, April 17). If Los Angeles Flares, Rest of Country Will Pay. Winfield World, A-11.

Merriam, S. B. (1998). Qualitative research and case study applications in education (Rev. ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Inc.

Moustakas, C. (1994). Phenomenological Research Methods. Thousand Oaks, CA; Sage Publications, Inc.

Murphy, J. & Choi, J. (1997). Postmodernism, Unraveling racism and democratic institutions. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers.

Nadeau, R., Niemi, R. & Levine, J. (1993). Innumeracy about Minority Populations. Public Opinion Quarterly, 57: 332-49.

Neal, K. (1993, Feb. 14). A Warning for Educators. Winfield World, pp. D-1.

Noguera, P.A. (1995). Preventing and producing violence: A critical analysis of responses to school violence. Harvard Educational Review, 65(2).

Oaks, J. (1994). More than misapplied technology: A normative and political response to Hallinan on tracking. Sociology of Education 67(2) p. 84-89.

Ogbu, J.U. (1987). Variability in minority school performance: A problem in search of an explanation. Anthropology & Education Quarterly, 18, p. 312-382.

Oklahoma Department of Commerce, Research Division (June, 1999).Winfield Community Profile. In Community Profiles [On-line]. Available: http://www.odoc.state.ok.us/oknet/commprof.nsf

Olzak, S.; Shanahan, S. (March, 1996). Deprivation and Race Riots: An Extension of Spilerman's Analysis. Social Forces, 74(3)931-961.

Olzak, S.; Shanahan, S.; McEneaney, E. H. (August, 1996). Poverty, Segregation, and Race Riots: 1960 to 1993. American Sociological Review, 61 (August: 590-613).

Peshkin, A. (1991). The color of strangers the color of friends: The play of ethnicity in school and community. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Peterson, G.J., Pietrzak, D., & Speaker, K.M. (1998). The enemy within: A national study of school violence and prevention. Urban Education, 33(3), 331-359.

Pinderhughes, H. (1997). Race in the hood: Conflict & violence among urban youth. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Price, J.H., & Everett, S.A. (1997). Teachers' perceptions of violence in the public schools: The Met Life survey. American Journal of Health and Behavior, 21(3), 178-186.

Pride, R. A. (2000). Public opinion and the end of bussing: (Mis)perceptions of policy failure. The Sociological Quarterly, 41(2) 207-225.

Protecting Schools (1993, April 26). Winfield World, pp. 6.

Quillian, L. (1995). Prejudice as a response to perceived group threat: Population composition and anti-immigrant and racial prejudice in Europe. American Sociological Review, 60 (August) 586-611.

Racist Graffiti Found At Heritage High. (1993, April 10). Winfield World, pp. D-16.

Schutz, A (1962). Collected papers: The problem of social reality. The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff.

Slaying Suspect Arrested (1993, April 17). Winfield World, pp. A-11.

Soriano, M., Soriano, F.I., & Jimenez, E. (1994). School violence among culturally diverse populations: Sociocultural and institutional considerations. School Psychology Review, 23(2), 216-235.

Spilerman, S. (August, 1970). The Causes or Racial Disturbances: A comparison of alternative explanations. American Sociological Review, 35(4) 627-649.

Spilerman, S. (June, 1971). The Causes of Racial Disturbances: Tests of an explanation. American Sociological Review, 36, 427-442.

Swindell, B. (1993, March 2). Student Brawls Erupt at Heritage. Winfield World, pp. A-6.

Swindell, B. (1993, March 30). Son the Target of Gang Memoir Author Warns Gang Influence Powerful. Winfield World, pp. A-7.

Swindell, B., & Gilroy, L. G. (1993, April 21). Massive Brawl Erupts at Heritage High. Winfield World, pp. A-1,3.

Teens' Feud Turns Violent 2 Students Shot, Wounded (1993, August 16). Winfield World, pp. A-17.

Teski, M.C., & Climo, J.J. (Eds.). (1995). The Labrinth of Memory: Ethnographic Journeys. Westport, CT; Bergin & Garvey.

Thomas, J. (1993). Doing Critical Ethnography. Newbury Park, CA; Sage Publications, Inc.

Toby, J. (1994). The politics of school violence. The Public Interest, (116), 34-56.

Towns, D.P. (1998). "Rewind the world:" An ethnographic study of inner-city African American children's perceptions of violence. Journal of Negro Education, 65(3), 375-389.

Tuchman, G. (1978). Making News: A study in the construction of reality. New York: The Free Press.

Van Maanen, J. (1988). Tales of the field: On writing ethnography. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Weis, L. (1990). Working Class Without Work: High School Students in a De-Industrializing Economy. Routledge.

Welch, O. M. & Hodges, C. R. (1997). Standing outside on the inside: Black adolescents and the construction of academic identity. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Wells, A. & Crain, R. (1997). Stepping Over the Color Line: African-American students in white suburban schools. New Havens; Yale University Press.

Wilson, W. J. (1978). The Declining Significance of Race: Blacks and changing American institutions. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Wilson, W. J. (1987). The Truly Disadvantaged: The inner city, the underclass, and public policy. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Wilson, W. J. (1996). When Work Disappears. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.

Wolcott, H. F. (1990). On seeking – and rejecting – validity in qualitative research. In E. Eisner, & A. Peshkin, (Eds.), Qualitative Inquiry in Education (p. 121). New York, NY: Teachers College Press, Columbia University.

Wolf, Buck (7, February 2000). Unearthing Ugly History: Graves may reveal long-hidden secrets of Winfield Race Riot. Nightline. ABCNEWS.

Wood, G. (1992). Schools that Work. New York, NY: Dutton.

Wood, G. (1999). A Time to Learn. New York, NY: Plume.

Yin, R. K. (1994). Case Study Research: Design and Methods. (2nd ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Appendix A

Teacher / Administrator Protocol

1st. Tell me what happened on the day of the brawl.

2nd. Do you think the brawl was about race, like people said?

3rd. Do you think the media treated Memorial unfairly?

4th. Can you describe to me the different social groups that were in the school then?

5th. How did these groups interact?

6th. What changed in the school as a result of the brawl?

7th. What did you change personally/professionally as a result of the brawl?

8th. What do you think the brawl means as a part of the history of HHS?

Former Student Protocol

1st. Tell me what happened the day of the brawl?

2nd. How were you involved? What about people that you knew?

3rd. Describe how students of different races interacted at Heritage.

4th. Explain what you see as the causes of the brawl.

5th. What changes did you see in the school and the students after the brawl?

6th. In what ways did the brawl influence or change the way you thought about school?

7th. How does the experience of the brawl effect the image and memories that you have of your time at Heritage?

OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Date:	March 9, 2000	IRB #: ED-00-212
Proposal Title:	"A CRITICAL INVESTIGATION INTO THE MULTIPLE MEANINGS OF A HIGH SCHOOL BRAWL"	
Principal Investigator(s):	Christ Moseley Pamela Bettis Jeff Weld	Jill McNew
Reviewed and Processed as:	Expedited	

Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved

Signature: Carol Olson

Carol Olson, Director of University Research Compliance

March 9, 2000
Date

Approvals are valid for one calendar year, after which time a request for continuation must be submitted. Any modification to the research project approved by the IRB must be submitted for approval with the advisor's signature. The IRB office MUST be notified in writing when a project is complete. Approved projects are subject to monitoring by the IRB. Expedited and exempt projects may be reviewed by the full Institutional Review Board.

VITA

Jill Christine McNew

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Science

Thesis: A CRITICAL INVESTIGATION INTO THE MEANING(S) OF A HIGH SCHOOL BRAWL

Major Field: Curriculum and Instruction

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Tulsa, Oklahoma, on January 6, 1975, the daughter of Russell and Carol McNew.

Education: Graduated from Jenks High School, Jenks, Oklahoma in May 1993; received Bachelor of Science degree in Biochemistry from John Brown University, Siloam Springs, Arkansas in May 1998. Completed the requirements for the Master of Science degree with a major in Curriculum and Instruction at Oklahoma State University in December, 2000.

Experience: Employed as a technician in the Data Management department of Pathogenesis Corp., Seattle, Washington; employed by Oklahoma State University department of Arts and Sciences as a graduate teaching assistant in Biology and Chemistry courses, and as a graduate research assistant; Oklahoma State University, Department of Education, 1998 to 1999. Currently employed as a science teacher at Memorial High School, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Professional Memberships: National Science Teachers Association, Oklahoma Science Teachers Association, Phi Kappa Phi, Kappa Delta Pi.